

Issue September 2023

Online Edition

# TCAKE The GREAT

INTERVIEW  
JULIA M USHER

MAGAZINE

INTERVIEW  
SERDAR YENER

EXCLUSIVE BUTTERCREAM  
STEP BY STEP  
TUTORIALS

CAKE CONTEST  
PARTICIPATION  
TIPS FROM  
CERTIFIED JUDGE

CAKE COLLABORATIONS  
FEATURES  
GALLERY OF SUGAR ARTS



# CONTENTS



Cake Designer Lucia's  
Buttercream flowers  
decoration step by step



Iveta Košíková's  
Eagle tutorial  
Step by step



Marvellous  
mountain  
tutorial by  
Valeri &  
Christina

05

17



Exclusive interview with  
Famous cookie artist  
Julia M Ushar



Vera Chin's Cupcake  
bouquet tutorial

11

21

30

33

Exclusive  
interview  
with famous  
Sugar Artist  
Serdar Yenar

50%  
subscription  
Discount  
Included





# Interview With

## Famous Cookie Artist

# Julia M Usher

Q1. Tell us a little about yourself and your family?

I've been decorating cookies seriously since about 2009 when I published my first cookie book, *Cookie Swap: Creative Treats to Share Throughout the Year*, though I started baking at a very early age alongside my mom who worked magic with breads and pastries. I grew up in an old farmhouse (built in the 1790s!) in rural Connecticut, USA. After graduating from Yale College in 1984, I moved to California where I designed nuclear reactor heat suppression systems for General Electric. I stayed in that job to earn a master's degree in mechanical engineering at U.C. Berkeley and then went on to work for a management consulting firm for several years, during which time I earned an MBA from Stanford. But, I tossed all of that education aside – LOL – when I decided to quit consulting and follow my early childhood passion of baking. In 1994, I enrolled in a 10-month culinary program. From there, I worked in restaurants and ran my own custom cake shop until I started writing books and making YouTube videos, which brings me full circle to where I am today. I am married to my college sweetheart, and we split our time between St. Louis, Missouri and Stonington, Maine, though all of my cookie work and video production is done in my basement test kitchen in Missouri. When not decorating cookies for my next video tutorial or designing stencils and cutters for my JULIA line of tools, I love interior design and gardening, and spending time with my husband and mom who recently moved to St. Louis to be closer to us.





Q2. Can you share some memories from your childhood? Is there anything special from that time that relates to your current profession?

As I alluded to earlier, I spent a lot of time in the kitchen with my mom beginning as early as I can remember. While other kids were tinkering with Easy Bake Ovens, I was making yeast breads and pastries from scratch and going all-out with their decoration. I remember how, every Christmas, I would painstakingly cut out flowers and leaves from pastry dough and turn plain stollens into elaborate edible wreaths and garlands. Cookie decorating was also a competitive sport of sorts in the Usher household, with my two siblings and I always vying to see who would come up with the most spectacular Christmas cookie designs. Of course, as I look back at what I did then and even in my first cookie book, I am astonished by how rudimentary my cookie decorating once was. But with practice, we all evolve, right?

Q3. How did you end up in your current profession?

Long story short – by accident. When I closed my cake bakery in 2007, I had fully intended to write a series of cake books. (I wanted to maintain my creative outlet of making cakes without having the constant customer demands that come with a retail storefront.) Mind you, all of this was happening pretty much before the internet had taken off, so blogs and YouTube channels weren't viable options for creative expression at that time. In 2007, the US was also in the height of a low-carb craze, and no publisher wanted to produce a cake book. By some odd stroke of luck, I interested a publisher in







a cookie concept, and ended up publishing two cookie decorating books, an app, and several ebooks with them. But the book-writing process was cumbersome and long and drawn out, with too many editors sticking their fingers in the process. (I am a control freak, so I didn't much like their editing "help"! 😊) By the time my second book (Ultimate Cookies) was published and I had finished that book tour, it was 2012 and the internet was rallying! I decided I could explain some of my cookies and sweets much more efficiently and effectively in video form, and so I abandoned book

writing and launched a YouTube channel. Let's just say that YouTube really opened up a world of cookies for me. Soon after launching, I started to receive invitations from all over the globe to travel to teach – especially my 3-D cookie designs, which were rather unique back in the day. Ever since then, I've been nearly 100-percent dedicated to teaching in one way or another – be it online or in-person, or through tutorials about new projects or products. I truly love the energy of the classroom, and it's so gratifying to see people's eyes light up when they master a new technique!



#### Q4. Did you receive any training to achieve your goals?

No formal training other than the 10-month culinary program I mentioned, but it was a broad-based program covering both savorys and sweets. I did virtually no decorating in culinary school. When I moved to St. Louis, while working in restaurants, I also did a brief stage with a local chocolatier by the name of Neika Soissons. She turned me onto piping intricate chocolate pieces, and gave me the confidence to ultimately open my own cake shop, where I learned almost entirely on the job. Though always by my side for guidance were the books of Colette Peters and Kerry Vincent! Those books were inspirational, and those icons of the industry taught me so

much, long before I ever met them. I am forever grateful to both women for urging me on through the stunning pages of their books, and, later in life, through their fellowship at shows and other events.

#### Q5. How would you describe your job or profession? How long have you been doing this? Can you explain it in a simpler way?

I would call myself a jack-of-all-trades with respect to cookie decorating. I create video tutorials and classes, teach online and in-person classes, design projects and products, run a cookie decorating community (Cookie Connection™), and host arguably the largest worldwide cookie art competition (Julia M. Usher's Cookie Art Competition™). But the true heart of all this action – the “glue”







that binds it all together, if you will – is my love of creating eye-opening projects (often 3-D ones!) that stretch the imagination and of sharing what I know to help others learn and grow. As for the timing of it all: I started making video tutorials in 2012; Cookie Connection and my competition were founded in 2013; my stencil line launched in 2016; and the rest is history!

Q6. Tell us about your achievements and success?

People can read about my various awards in my bio [<https://juliausher.com/about/biography/>] if that's what you're asking, but my greatest reward isn't any one professional accolade. It's the gratification I get when I see people turned onto cookie decorating after watching my videos, taking a class, or trying one of my products. It's knowing that people have acquired skills that will bring them and others joy for years to come. One of my crowning moments actually came years ago, when I was touring with my first book. I met a very young decorator by the name of Zoe at a

book signing. (I think she was five-years-old at the time.) For years we exchanged little gifts and cards through her mom. Her enthusiasm for baking and decorating fueled mine, and vice versa, I think. I still have her notes and drawings, and often take them out when I need a shot in the arm.

Q7. Did you face any difficulties or challenges to reach where you are now?

Sure, we all do, and we face challenges at every stage of business, no matter how long we've been at it. I'm facing a bunch right now, not the least of which is figuring out how to juggle all of the things that I do without burning out. As I said, I am a control freak – and also quite a perfectionist – so it's hard for me to delegate and ask for help. But this year, I've decided I need to do something about this issue, as the constant work is taking a toll on my enthusiasm for decorating.

### Q8. What has been your greatest challenge in your profession and how did you face that?

I think it's what I just mentioned above – that is, how to find the right life-work balance that will allow me to continue creating with passion and energy for years to come. I need to offload more admin tasks and jettison lines of business that take too much time and bring too little joy, all to free up more time for doing what I like most – which is conceptualizing new projects and techniques. I also need to allow myself more time off from cookies – for necessary sanity checks, and to get reenergized.

### Q9. What is your greatest fantasy in life?

To find that blissful life-work balance! LOL!

### Q10. Do you have a goal that has yet to come true?

I hate to sound like I'm on replay mode, but it's striking the right balance of work and pleasure that will keep me happy and healthy while still feeling like I am progressing

in my field and making a difference to others. I will be frank – I have a fear of letting go of some of the things that have brought me success in the past. What if I were to just stop doing one or more things? Will I let down my followers and viewers? Will my reputation in the industry suffer? These questions are what run through my head whenever I am contemplating change, and, too often, they immobilize me and lead to inertia. So I still have to find the courage and right time – if there is ever a right time – to put a plan for achieving better life-work balance into action.

### Q11. Any suggestions for the readers or beginner cake and cookie makers?

Be generous in sharing what you know and giving back to the community. At the end of the day, people won't remember your last spectacular cake or cookie; they will remember what you taught them and how you made them feel in the process. Also, be kind to yourself. Don't focus on what others are doing (I know, social media makes that

hard to do); focus instead on what brings you and others the most joy day to day.

Business site: [www.juliausher.com](http://www.juliausher.com)

My online cookie community, Cookie Connection: <https://cookieconnection.juliausher.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JuliaMUsherFanPage/>

My Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1960903937472796>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/JuliaMUsher>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/juliamusher/>

