

Sweet Success

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Article Summary: A phone call from a headhunter, asking Michelle Gayer- Nicholson for recommendations for a pastry chef for Wayne Kostroski and Mark Haugen's new venture, Franklin Street Bakery, would lead her to leave Charlie Trotter's after 10 years of making a name for herself in one of the country's top kitchens. During her tenure at Charlie Trotter's, Gayer-Nicholson opened Trotter's Las Vegas location, helped to launch his highly praised takeout operation, and wrote a cookbook with Trotter titled *Charlie Trotter's Desserts*. In 2003, *Bon Appetit* magazine named her Best Pastry Chef.

What convinced Gayer-Nicholson to recommend herself for the pastry chef position at Franklin Street Bakery? "Talk about an amazing opportunity," she says. "I always wanted to run my own bakery, and I thought Minneapolis would be a great city to raise my kids."

The match was perfect. "We knew she was the right person right away, during the ride from picking her up at the airport. She has such a passion for what she does, and it was nice to meet a pastry chef who is so down to earth. That's rare," commented Haugen.

Gayer-Nicholson turned Franklin Street Bakery into what Rick Nelson calls "a dessert-lover's dream" with products like chocolate meringues, burnt orange crème caramels, lavish cupcakes, tomato and goat cheese brioches, and a flaky tart filled with caramelized onions and brie cheese. She describes her creations as "natural, clean, simple", an aesthetic resulting from a year long apprenticeship with Nancy Silverton of La Brea Bakery in Los Angeles.

In contrast to being behind the scenes in a restaurant environment, Gayer-Nicholson gets to showcase not only her wonderful creations but also the dedication she puts into making them. The state-of-the-art facility built by Haugen and Kostroski draws plenty of spectators due to the large windows lining the building. "So many times we hide our workplaces, so we never see people making things. That's why we wanted our building to be transparent," says Haugen.

"It gets a little weird when people tap on the window," she laughs. "This is an amazing facility, and it's great to be able to show it. And putting it all out there for everyone to see really keeps you on your toes."

Full text of the article by Rick Nelson is available from the Paid Archives section of the StarTribune.com