

Leyre Pedraza Iela





RENNED FOR ITS CAPTIVATING VIEWS OVER LONDON, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL AT THE SHARD MAKES AN ATTRACTIVE DINING DESTINATION WITH OPTIONS INCLUDING TING RESTAURANT, WHERE THE AFTERNOON TEA IS FAMOUS FOR ITS DELICATE CAKES, FRESHLY BAKED SCONES AND DAINTY SANDWICHES. RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE GOURMET DELIGHTS, IS EXECUTIVE PASTRY CHEF LEYRE PEDRAZUELA, WHO HEADS UP THE PASTRY KITCHEN AND BOASTS AN ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER BACKGROUND OF 13 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY, DURING WHICH SHE HAS ESTABLISHED A NAME FOR VISUALLY STRIKING CAKES.

Her success so far is hardly surprising, when you consider that she has worked at some of the most notable patisseries and hotels in the world, with names such as Mandarin Oriental, Pennyhill Park Hotel and Ladurée in her background. She has a friendly and chatty personality, which immediately puts me at ease when we begin our conversation and straight away the enthusiasm for her work shines through.

We start off with where her love of pastry began - 'For me, the love of food started when

I was very young, I was always cooking or baking with my Mum and the rest of my family and I took to it immediately. I loved being in the kitchen and enjoying the process of cooking and I always knew even then, that I wouldn't ever want to do anything else.'

Those lucky enough to sample her desserts can look forward to offerings such as smoked caramel and coffee baba, infused with 12-year aged whiskey. Leyre also likes to make plant-based desserts – having a





keen interest in keeping flavours as natural as possible.

Leyre appears to be inventive; she puts together interesting flavours and plates her desserts to look like works of art, I am curious as to where she finds her inspiration – ‘There is not really just one place where I find inspiration, even when I was a kid I always liked to look at recipe books and I enjoyed seeing the photographs of food within them. I particularly always liked making cakes even back then.

When I started working professionally, it developed my understanding of ingredients even further and I enjoyed experimenting with flavours, to gain as much knowledge possible. Simply being in the kitchen is inspiring and you never know when a great idea will occur.’

It is this dedication to making her desserts taste and look perfect, which has seen Leyre work with many impressive names and she has taken to her role at the Shangri – La with ease despite the at-times intense nature of the job –



"I have only recently started at Shangri – La and of course it is quite a demanding role, because we have a very busy operation here, but at the same time it is so rewarding because I have the opportunity to develop the chefs within my team and we all have a lot of respect for each other.

The collaborative process of working together as a team is very inspiring, because we continuously seek to create new dishes and to refine our standards. Teamwork is always the best approach"

Originally from Spain, Leyre worked at Barcelona's prestigious Pastelería Escribà and Mamá Framboise in Madrid, before heading to the UK in 2015. An appearance on Great British Bake Off the Professionals followed, where she wowed the judges so much that she reached the final of the show.

Leyre is keen to highlight her belief in sourcing only the best produce for the dishes she creates - 'Working with fresh, natural and sustainable local ingredients is one of my main priorities as I strongly believe in



a more sustainable way of producing and consuming. For me, enriching my knowledge and studying, is equally important to working in the best companies, with the best professionals.

In order to understand the profession and to become the best version of myself every day, I always strive for perfection'

It is not only pastry where her talents lie and Leyre also has a love of chocolate and gained a

chocolate Master accreditation while still living in Spain -

'I love to work with chocolate and I did an incredible course at l'École Valrhona, where we undertook advanced professional training with Chef Derek Poirier. It was a great experience also when I took part in Chocolatier of the year in Belgium.'

Chocolate expertise certainly came in handy, when Leyre was recently asked to





work on the launch of Park Row last year. She was tasked with developing all the desserts for the opening of the restaurant. This gave her the opportunity to truly showcase her flair for creativity and she enjoyed the chance to show off her skills in a different way -

'The desserts were themed after DC Comic book characters, so for example I was able to make handmade bonbons inspired by The Joker (a cashew and miso caramel bonbon)

and Wonder Woman (salted caramel and hazelnut). My dessert 'kiss from a rose' was an instant hit too and within a short time after opening it went viral on social media – it is a very theatrical dessert inspired by Batman's mother and it is served with rose petals tumbling onto the plate'

Photographs of her work makes you want to rush to Shangri – La and it is very apparent during our chat, that Leyre is thriving in her current role and loving every moment of the



creativity she can enjoy there. We touch briefly on her future plans too -

'I would definitely aspire one day to open my own place, I also just enjoy learning from the best and working with excellent quality produce. Since I have worked in so many superb hotels over time, a dream of mine would be to have my own boutique hotel, but that is far away for now'

With an immense skillset and passion for the job, I am certain that Leyre can achieve whatever she sets out to. She has already published her first book 'Essenzia', a collection of her favourite cake recipes. The definition of Shangri-La is 'a remote, beautiful, imaginary place' - Leyre manages to take the dreamy visions of this utopia and deliver it on a plate. □