

INFLUENCE | FILM CLUB

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"FORGET MASTERCHEF. THIS IS
THE CULINARY HURT LOCKER."
-HERALD SCOTLAND

"LEAVES VIEWERS ON THE
EDGE OF THEIR SEATS."
-LOS ANGELES TIMES

"QUITE POSSIBLY ONE OF THE MOST DELICIOUS FILMS
EVER COMMITTED TO CELLULOID."
-POP JOURNALISM MAGAZINE (CANADA)



Kings of Pastry

A FILM BY
CHRIS HEGEDUS
AND D.A. PENNEBAKER



Kings of Pastry Discussion Guide

Directors: Chris Hegedus, D.A. Pennebaker

Year: 2009

Time: 87 min

You might know this director from:

The War Room (1993)

Down From the Mountain (2000)

Startup.com (2001)

Dont Look Back (1967)

Monterey Pop (1968)

FILM SUMMARY

In **KINGS OF PASTRY**, sixteen of the leading French pastry chefs compete for the Meilleurs Ouvriers de France ("Best Craftsman in France"), which is the country's Nobel Prize for pastry. Similar to the Olympics, the 3-day competition takes place every four years and requires that the chefs not only have extraordinary skill and nerves of steel, but also passion, perseverance and exceptional artistry. To even participate in this competition is to be recognized throughout France as one of the most accomplished artisans.

We meet chef Jacques Pfeiffer who sacrifices everything - work, family, finances - to prepare for the Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (M.O.F.). But Pfeiffer says that the M.O.F. is not really a competition, but rather the French government's master exam for craftsmen. More than one candidate can obtain the first prize, and there is no cash prize for winners. Therefore, a level of comraderie forms between the candidates, who compete not against each other, but ultimately against themselves. We meet some of the other pastry chefs, some who are competing for the second or third time, determined to finally take home the M.O.F. distinction of excellence. For many, becoming an M.O.F. is a lifelong dream that can only be achieved with unrelenting hard work, passion and total dedication. The inevitable disasters and successes prove both poignant and dramatic.

FILM THEMES

The Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (M.O.F.) is a competition where a small handful of dedicated chefs test themselves under the most grueling and stressful conditions. They seek a degree of perfection in the pastry profession, similar to an Olympic medal. Success is only achieved by a combination of passion, sacrifice, individuality and extraordinary skill.

COMMITMENT

Throughout the film, we see contestants go beyond their limits emotionally, physically and financially in search of the Holy Grail of French Pastry Chefs, the M.O.F. Success in almost any endeavor requires enormous perseverance even in the face of trials. The ability to suspend immediate gratification and the willingness to persist through the inevitable low points are as essential to achievement as is talent. This is true of cooking, writing, playing an instrument, running a marathon, learning to love another person, or creating a 6-ft sugar sculpture.

PURSUIT OF DREAMS

Under enormous strain, M.O.F. contestants remain focused and sometimes obsessed in their pursuit of perfection over an extended period, often for years. But often such extreme focus comes with a price. Work, family, interpersonal relationships, financial stability, and even health frequently take a back seat to the ultimate goal of perfection. Is greatness possible without obsession? Chef Jacquy is so consumed with the M.O.F., he has nightmares. His girlfriend has to assume him that the event has been called off before he can go back to sleep.

SACRIFICE MADE BY FAMILIES

Sacrifices are made not only by the chefs, but by everyone in their lives. Family, friends, and colleagues sacrifice their needs, offer their support and love, and truly make it possible for the chefs to compete. While all relationships require sacrifice, the demands of those closely tied to athletes, artists, CEOs, doctors, politicians, etc. are often higher. Perhaps the film, in some way, reveals that success requires more than the determination of a lone individual, but the commitment of a strong social network.

RESILIENCE AND FLEXIBILITY

With the finish line in sight, chef Philippe Rigolot's sugar sculpture collapses in the kitchen, a small accident with a devastating effect. Despite the catastrophe, Philippe somehow finds the inner strength to carry on. His ability to improvise demonstrates the importance of flexibility when facing life's unexpected challenges. Resilience empowers us to be more adaptable and better equipped to respond to crisis. Seeing chef Philippe confront his worst nightmare, but still find the ability to make the best of a disastrous situation reminds us of our innate capacity for resilience, and our potential to recover.

“The M.O.F is not about doing the ‘best that you can do’ but the ‘best that can be done.’”

Jacquy Pfeiffer

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.”

Maya Angelou

FILM FACTS:

- One part of the M.O.F. competition requires chefs to create sculptures from sugar. Sugar-sculpting traditions exist outside of Europe including the creation of traditional Wagashi confections in Japan and Day of the Dead figures and skulls in Mexico. Both traditions date back more than five centuries.
- Pastry chef Philippe Rigolot works at Maison Pic, France's only three-star restaurant owned by a woman.
- Anne-Sophie Pic, owner of Maison Pic, runs this celebrated restaurant started by her great-grandmother in 1889. Andre Pic, Anne-Sophie's grandfather, obtained the highly coveted Michelin Guide's 3-star rating in 1934. In 1973, Jacques, her father, won back the 3 stars which had been lost after the war. Anne-Sophie is self-taught. She has never attended cooking school or had professional training in culinary arts.
- The Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (M.O.F.) is organized and recognized as a third-level degree by the French Ministry of Labour, which is equivalent to a Doctoral degree or PhD.
- The President of the French Republic is granted honorary membership with the title M.O.F. honoris causa for the outstanding services offered to the committee and M.O.F. craftsmen.
- Created in 1924, the Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (M.O.F.) celebrates exceptional abilities and is unique in the world. The awarding of medals occurs at the Sorbonne in Paris, during a large reunion followed by a ceremony at the Élysée in the presence of the President of the French Republic.
- The Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (M.O.F.) recognizes exceptional abilities in a wide array of fields that require a high degree of craftsmanship including clockmaking and weaving.
- 'Pastry' is the name given to various kinds of baked products made from ingredients: flour, sugar, milk, butter, shortening, baking powder, and eggs. Pastry may also refer to the dough from which such baked products are made.
- D. A. Pennebaker, who co-directed *KINGS OF PASTRY*, is one of the pioneers of Direct Cinema, along with Al and David Maysles, Robert Drew, and Ricky Leacock.
- Pennebaker's most famous film, *Dont Look Back*, covers Bob Dylan's 1965 U.K. concert tour.
- In 2012, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences recognized Pennebaker's body of work with an Academy Honorary Award or "lifetime Oscar."

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Take an online course to learn classical skills while incorporating contemporary baking and pastry trends from around the globe.
2. Donate to the For Love of Chocolate Foundation, started by Chef Jacquy Pfeiffer who was featured in *KINGS OF PASTRY*. The foundation provides scholarships for students who otherwise would not be able to afford to attend The French Pastry School in Chicago.
3. Host a documentary and dessert party where everyone brings a dessert to share. Enjoy the array of treats while watching *KINGS OF PASTRY*.
4. Share this film with others who appreciate craftsmanship. It also makes a great gift for foodies!

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.