

**B**aking is a science,” states Jacqueline Lanigan Ryan, the pastry-pro who has taken on the – let’s face it – daunting task of turning me into a “domestic goddess” overnight.

Which, if achieved, could possibly qualify as a miracle under Vatican guidelines. OK, so I did sample a little sweet success during the *Irish Country Living* Oven Gloves challenge, but that blip aside, I can’t say I was born to bake. Unlike Jacqueline, who runs the successful bakery at the Horse & Jockey hotel in Tipperary, where her luscious lemon cake, fragrant frangipane and scrummy scones have made the hotel as much a destination as a stopping point off the M8.

An only girl raised on a dairy farm with six brothers, she started cooking seriously when her mother – a former domestic science teacher – died after a six-year battle with multiple sclerosis when Jacqueline was just 17. And while she initially worked in an accounts office after school, at 26 she followed her heart by opening a cafe in Thurles, despite having no formal food experience.

“At 26, you’re fearless,” she reasons, as she hands me an apron. “But I had come away from looking after small kids, trying to go to school, feed people, wash nappies – it wasn’t any more difficult.”

Pastry, however, was her passion, and after “begging” Cathal Brugha St for a place on their training course (they normally only accepted qualified chefs), she finished second in the class, just pipped by the pastry chef from the K Club.

Six years ago she was approached by Tom Egan of the Horse & Jockey to open a dedicated bakery at the hotel. Due to demand, they’ve now launched hands-on domestic goddess baking classes, with packages at the hotel including one night’s B&B, lunch and afternoon tea from €179, so you can thoroughly enjoy the fruits of your labour.

Which brings us back to the science bit. According to Jacqueline, precision while following a recipe is often the difference between a *fait accompli* and a flop.

“For every recipe, my eggs are weighed,” says Jacqueline, as we prepare to tackle the two treats on our mini-itinerary: strawberry and lemon curd flan, and choux pastry for éclairs or profiteroles.

“A medium egg should weigh approximately 50gms,” she continues (and that’s without the shell).

“So if an egg is 60gms and you have four eggs in your recipe, that’s 40gms more egg than you needed – nearly another egg in a recipe.”



# Domestic goddess

Become a “domestic goddess” overnight? Now that’s an invitation I just couldn’t refuse, writes **Maria Moynihan**



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Which, when you think about it, makes perfect sense – and that’s what’s nice about Jacqueline’s tips.

For example, if a recipe calls for soft butter, she recommends placing it low down in the hot press the night before (though without melting it), while she advises rolling pastry between two sheets of parchment paper or cling film, rather than tipping the flour to butter proportion by over-

dusting the surface, which many people do.

With the strawberry and lemon flan, she shows me how to whip up a simple lemon curd over a makeshift bain marie. She recommends using ground almonds in the base to lock in moisture and make it coeliac-friendly, and demonstrates how to glaze the strawberries on top with redcurrant jelly. Similarly, one of the secrets to choux pastry is a very hot oven,

as, without a raising agent, you’re depending on steam to inflate it.

Of course, Jacqueline makes it look very easy, but she is a patient instructor and I quickly have visions – or perhaps hallucinations – of wowing my friends with my new-found French *pâtisserie* flair.

“I think people get a fabulous sense of satisfaction out of completing something, particularly something they thought they couldn’t do,” acknowledges

## RECIPE

### STRAWBERRY & LEMON CURD FLAN

#### Ingredients

*For the flan*  
200g/7oz soft butter  
200g/7oz caster sugar  
4 medium eggs  
225g/8oz ground almonds

*For the lemon curd*  
Grated zest and juice of 5-6 lemons (250 ml)  
225g/8oz unsalted butter, diced  
275g/10oz caster sugar  
10 eggs, lightly beaten

#### Additional ingredients

Strawberries  
100g redcurrant jelly  
Fresh cream to decorate



## METHOD

- 1 Preheat the oven to 160°C/320°F/Gas 3. Line and grease a 10” loose bottom tin.
- 2 For the flan base, cream butter and sugar until pale, add one egg at a time and beat well. Fold in ground almonds, spread mixture in tin and bake for 20 minutes.
- 3 For the lemon curd, put the lemon zest and juice, butter and caster sugar in a bowl over a saucepan of simmering water, making sure the mixture does not touch the water. Stir occasionally until the butter has melted and the sugar has dissolved.
- 4 Stir in the eggs and leave for about 30 to 40 minutes, stirring on and off. The curd is ready when it coats the back of the wooden spoon. Remove from the heat, leave to cool completely and then refrigerate.
- 5 To assemble the flan, spread a generous layer of lemon curd over the flan. Arrange strawberries neatly on top. Heat the redcurrant jelly and brush over the strawberries with a pastry brush. Pipe fresh cream around the edge to decorate.

Jacqueline. “They realise it’s far easier than they expected it to be – and they get to eat it as well.”

Which I needed no help with whatsoever.

- The next Domestic Goddess baking class takes place on Saturday, 21 September, with further dates scheduled on demand. Call 0504-44192 for further information or bookings. **CL**