

NO TOMATO SAUCE NEEDED: TIPS FROM AN INDUSTRY PIE JUDGE

We recently had the pleasure of sitting down with John Maurici to pick his brain on the nitty gritty details of Pie judging, the dos, the don'ts and the must haves.

Mauri: As an industry pie judge, what are the top 3 things you look for in a winning pie?

JOHN: It's really about the general appearance of the pie but if I had to pick 3 things I would say (1) it must look good enough that I'd want to buy it. (2) There must not be any dirty marks, shrinkage, boil out, egg wash runs or raw pastry (we also check the underside of the product for all of these things). A nice colour with no burnt edges is important as well as a good size. (3) Then the tasting stage; smell, taste, texture and aftertaste. The pie is also checked for stability, that the filling doesn't run out and that the pastry is cooked right through.

Mauri: How does the judging take place, what does the process look like?

JOHN: Entrants send in four samples of each pie to be judged. At each competition there is a crew out the back who picks out the best three pies for judging. One is cut in half, one is placed in a pie warmer for tasting and the last one stays cold. The half pie is judged for pastry thickness and texture, as well as the amount of meat filling it contains. The judges dig into the half pie with a paddle pop stick to check for gristle and tubing, which indicates offal. Although three pieces of gristle are allowed the pie will lose points as a result of this. Plain meat pies must achieve a mark of 16 or more out of 30 to progress to the tasting stage. If the pie makes it to the testing stage the judges call for the hot pie to be cut into quarters and the pie is tasted by a team of two or three judges. All judging is conducted blind so there is no way to identify the entrant who baked the pie. If a judge thinks that they recognise an entrant's work they stand down from the team for the judging process.

Mauri: What is your number 1 tip for a baker entering their pie in for judgment?

JOHN: If I only can give 1 tip it would be to always use fresh quality ingredients.

Mauri: Some bakers might be nervous to enter a competition, what advice would you have for these people?

JOHN: There is nothing to be nervous about, don't hesitate to call your bakery supplier and to ask them for advice or call the pie competition directly. Each pie is professionally judged by 2 - 3 judges who will provide you with comments, so if you're unsuccessful in winning a medal for your pie you can get feedback on how to improve for next year.

Mauri: You must have tasted hundreds of pies over the years, which flavour is your favourite?

JOHN: That is a really tough question as I have tasted many flavours of pies, but I would have to say a fresh chunky beef pie with a flaky crispy pastry, a firm but soft eating bottom and chunks of beef that melts in your mouth!