



Tina Bowden and the team at Lavender Bakehouse

## LAVENDER BAKEHOUSE & COFFEE SHOP

*Tina Bowden recently opened Lavender Bakehouse & Coffee Shop in Stroud. Here, she describes the background to the business, the process of launching it and her plans for its future.....*

There is more to Lavender Bakehouse & Coffee Shop than its name suggests. Launched earlier this year by Tina Bowden, there is also a deli counter plus an Arts and Crafts gallery upstairs.

Tina has always worked in the food industry, so this new business is the culmination of her career to date. She spent the last ten years working for a global organisation based in London which specialises in premium European and UK bakery lines. Her main role was heading up the product development and marketing team for the UK and Irish market, working with high profile customers in

the foodservice industry, in particular coffee shops. This involved a huge amount of time travelling across Europe looking at different types of food outlets. As Tina describes, "I was always impressed with the love and respect of food that is shown by small artisan shops and bakeries in Europe. And in this country, too, there is exactly the same love and passion for food. I see it in particular around the Cotswolds – but then I am probably biased as I was born in Gloucestershire and you never lose your love for this area."

She was spurred into launching her own



Homemade cakes are on the menu



A selection of the Bakehouse's cakes and pastisseries

business when the right opportunity arose. Tina says, "I had regularly driven past the shop on my way back from London. It was the long way home but much better than queuing on the A417 to Birdlip. It doesn't get much better than the Stroud area – the scenery is breathtaking and just gives you a different attitude to life."

By a chance conversation with her brother, it turned out that the lease on the shop was shortly to become vacant. For Tina, it was a turning point. As she puts it, "Like a lot of people, launching my own business was something I'd always wanted to do but I had kept coming up with a 101 reasons why I shouldn't." This time, she went for it. Tina spoke to a good friend from the Industry, Penny Manual, who started the Soho Coffee shop group. When Penny came and had a look, she just said that Tina had got to do it.

Tina explains, "I am a big believer in the fact that you can do most things if you put your mind to it. I left school at 16 without any exams and worked hard and ended up with several great jobs in the food industry, which is one of the reasons we are looking to take on a couple of apprentices to bring through the business as it grows."

The shop was originally the local co-op which



The entrance to Lavender Bakehouse

sold everything from flour to ribbons. Some of the Bakehouse's regular customers can still remember using the old shop and Tina is currently trying to find out more about its history and, if possible, locate some pictures. The interior still has many of the original features such as the retail shelves and cupboards which add so much character.

Once the location had been chosen, Tina set about refurbishing the shop and spent several months painting and decorating and blowing some life back into the place. The process sounds daunting, but she says with a smile, "It is a bit of a ▶



A comfortable place to sit and relax in the coffee shop

cliché but it really was a labour of love – I now know every nook and cranny in the place. My friend who is an artist spent three weeks in the winter painting the wonderful mural that you see at the end of the shop. We were freezing cold since we were still in the middle of the refurbishment and the electrics hadn't been completed, so it literally got painted in gloves. I'm sure the locals thought we were mad!"

Since Tina couldn't afford to go out and buy all new equipment and furniture, ebay became her 'best friend' and she set about recycling and refurbishing most things. She adds, "The shop's not perfect, but I think that's what makes it so special and different – our customers seem to love it as much as we do. We have a great following of regular customers especially from Chalford and the surrounding area. Some of them have become good friends and not just customers."

The coffee shop specialises in cakes and patisserie with a difference, such as Chocolate Beetroot cake or the Orange and Lavender cake which is also gluten free (and absolutely delicious). Everything is baked on the premises and all of the teas are served in vintage china cups and saucers, which Tina believes makes a difference. At lunchtime, there is an excellent selection of hot and cold sandwiches and platters with local produce. A specials board adds variety and offers dishes using fresh, seasonal produce.

Tina tries to support local food producers as much as possible. For example, the Bakehouse's bacon, ham and sausages come from a small, local supplier who breeds his own pigs and cures his own

meats. The eggs are fresh from a local farm and several of the cheeses have been produced in nearby villages. The salmon is from another local supplier, apple juice comes from Day's Cottage and even the flour is organic from Shipton Mill. There is also a range of preserves from Selsley Herb and Spice Company, with the Lavender marmalade being a best seller.

In the afternoon from 2.30 to 5pm, Lavender Bakehouse does an afternoon cream tea at a set price. This has proved so popular that Tina has just started selling gift vouchers for people to use as presents.

Upstairs, Tina has opened an Arts and Crafts Gallery which is there to showcase some of the great talent that the Stroud area has to offer. The exhibitions change every month so that there is always something new for customers to see.

Tina acknowledges that she was fortunate to be able to take on a great pastry chef from the village who shares her passion for local produce and quality. The chef is apparently well known for her homemade ice cream, which is now sold in the shop. To top it all, she makes great cakes and patisserie.

The homeliness of Lavender Bakehouse is one of its key attractions and the staff all help to create its very friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Tina is obviously proud of her team, stating, "We now have a small but great group of staff who make the place what it is – and we are just trying to get better at what we do every day." **12**

**Contact details:**

Lavender Bakehouse & Coffee Shop: 01453 889239 / GL6 8NW / [lavenderbakehouse.co.uk](http://lavenderbakehouse.co.uk)