

# → My Sunday

By Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz | TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS



Mark Seaman, pastry chef and teacher

**Once upon a time,** Mark Seaman toiled in a bank's IT department, working on Web site development. It wasn't so fulfilling.

So, 10 years ago he did what many people dream of but few dare: He quit and became a pastry chef.

And not just any pastry chef.

Seaman, 39, is a master sugar artist and cake stylist. One of the best in the country. Next fall he and fellow cake big shot Nicholas Lodge will head up the French Pastry School's new 16-week professional cake decorating and baking program, *L'Art du Gâteau* (The Art of Cake), in downtown Chicago, the first of its kind in the country.

Seaman is also indulging his other passion: travel, to France in particular. His company, *Marked for Dessert*, last spring started taking small groups on international pastry tours to Paris, with plans to expand the tours to Rome, Tokyo and Morocco.

The goal, Seaman said, is to create educated palates that appreciate cake craftsmanship.

"In the U.S., no one pays attention to how things taste; they care about how much it costs," Seaman said. "I spend a lot of time educating people on why they should eat real butter and sugar. Most mass-produced and store-bought cakes are pure shortening, which coats your tongue so you can't taste the rest of it."

Earlier this year, Seaman shuttered the Rogers Park cake boutique he founded seven years ago and the Libertyville bakery he'd run for the past three, leaving behind the back-breaking bakery hours in favor of teaching and travel.

His Sundays, once spent tying up loose ends after a hectic week juggling his two shops, are now dedicated to getting his creative juices flowing at his Ravenswood studio, where he brainstorms new cake designs, sketches, writes and makes cake models for classes and conventions.



Pastry chef and teacher Mark Seaman meets with his publicist, Janie Sills, at his Ravenswood studio to review an article he's written for a dessert magazine. The topic? What people have to gain from international pastry tours — his in particular, which grants people behind-the-scenes access to some of the world's greatest pastry creators. **NANCY STONE/TRIBUNE PHOTOS**

First, though, comes a bit of relaxation. He begins each Sunday by watching "CBS News Sunday Morning" in his Rogers Park home, where he lives with his partner, Paul Detaege, whom he met 15 years ago at a square-dancing event.

After TV on a recent Sunday, Seaman met friends for brunch at Uncommon Ground on Devon Avenue, where, over pecan-crusted brioche French toast and coffee, he traced his taste for pastry to his grandfather, who owned bakeries in Pennsylvania.

"I can remember what they smelled like," Seaman said.

Back at Seaman's studio in an

industrial-chic building on the Ravenswood industrial corridor, a bookcase bulging with some 200 books reveals his dedication to his craft: "Cake Decorating and Sugar Craft," "The Art of the Cake," "The Cake Bible," "A Piece of Cake," "Basic and Beautiful Cakes," "Perfect Cakes." ... Across the room, dozens of cutters, molds, dyes and veiners — the molds used to make leaf veins for sugar flowers — are meticulously organized into plastic compartments.

Photos of favorite cakes Seaman has made for clients dot a bulletin board: a birthday cake bathed in pink hoops for a Cirque du Soleil theme; a cake



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for a traditional Indian wedding decorated in henna patterns.

Seaman points out his first-place trophy from the 2007 Oklahoma State Sugar Art Show, one of the most prestigious wedding cake competitions in the nation. Seaman's entry, based on a Hollywood glamour theme, was a trib-

ute to Lucille Ball, featuring 80 intricate yellow and purple orchids (always botanically correct), feathers, a monogram and a presentation board, all made entirely of sugar. He said it took him 300 hours.

To work: Seaman puts on his white chef's coat, turns on con-



Paul Detaege, right, Seaman's partner of 15 years, watches Seaman prepare fondant. Seaman enjoys helping others understand cakes and cake making: "I'm teaching people how to appreciate the process."



Seaman creates botanically correct flowers out of sugar to adorn his cakes. To see more of his creations, including foliage and handbags, visit [markedfordessert.com/gallery2](http://markedfordessert.com/gallery2).

bed skirt to drape over the bottom tier of the cake — which he demonstrated at the New York Cake Convention in early January, during a lecture about how to embellish cakes using common tools.

He then brings out fondant — a super-sweet icing made of sugar and shortening that is rolled into a very thin layer and put over the buttercream frosting on the cake like a skin, giving it its ultra-smooth, white look — and rolls it out with an embossing pin before sprinkling it with super pearl for extra sheen.

Seaman winds down his Sunday by going to movies with friends, then home to catch up on TV shows he and Detaege have saved on their DVR ("Criminal Minds" is a favorite). He might also do more work — but happily.

"Working at the bank, I was used to picking up the phone and talking to grumpy people," Seaman said. "Working in cake, you're used to picking up the phone and talking to very happy people."

temporary gospel music, and sits down with his publicist to edit an article he has written for a dessert magazine about what people can gain from his international pastry tours.

The tours give people behind-the-scenes access to some of the world's greatest pastry chefs. (The

next tour, May 10-20, is to Paris and Lyon; \$9,475 a person.)

"It's either overindulgence or withholding in this country," Seaman said. "I'm teaching people how to appreciate the process."

Seaman then experiments with making a flounce — like a sugar