

**G**ra vesend offers a diverse range of quality restaurants, from Korean and Japanese to African, Bengali, and Thai. Amidst this vibrant food scene, a growing market for artisanal, high-quality products is emerging.

Liam Handley, founder of Basement Bakehouse, a micro-bakery, and Ella Jackson from the Quality Food Awards (QFA), share a passion for small-scale, high-quality food production. They see increasing demand for handcrafted artisanal goods in Gravesend, along with a blending of styles.

### BASEMENT BAKEHOUSE AND QFA

The Basement Bakehouse and QFA may seem like very different ventures, but both are driven by the same values: food, community, and innovation.

Basement Bakehouse is a micro-bakery focused on delivering artisan baked goods. Liam created the business in his home kitchen to follow his love for baking and explore a lifelong dream of opening a bakery. The bakery is small and community-focused, offering high-quality, handmade products, including sourdough, enriched doughs and cakes.

The Quality Food Awards (QFA), where Ella works, is a prestigious awarding body for food and non-alcoholic beverages. With categories ranging from Christmas goods to food services for wholesalers, the QFA recognises quality across the industry.

### WHY GRAVESEND?

Both Liam and Ella moved to Gravesend because of personal connections. Liam, originally from Lancashire, relocated with his fiancé Ben, a children’s nurse who grew up in the town. With a background in plant physiology and global food and drink marketing, Liam’s passion for baking merged with his scientific and branding expertise, leading to the creation of Basement Bakehouse. “The community here is excited about discovering artisanal homemade goods,” says Liam. “Building a community around food has been magical.”

Ella moved to Gravesend 11 years ago from Whitstable. During the pandemic, she rediscovered her love for cooking and foraging, documenting her experiences on Instagram, which deepened her connection to food and nature.

### CHANGING EXPECTATIONS

Expectations around food are shifting. “Consumers are becoming more conscious of what they eat, with increasing demand for healthier, less processed options” Ella explains. Liam adds, “That’s why I want to make good-quality baked goods while resisting the trend towards artificial ingredients and excessive, sugary recipes.” Ella acknowledges that changes in eating habits will be gradual. “Supermarkets drive many trends,” she notes, “but more consumers are now searching for an artisan experience – something personal and crafted.”



Above: Ella’s seasonal Kentish squash recipe with Basement Bakehouse sourdough. Left: Basement Bakehouse cinnamon buns



### UNIQUE SELLING POINTS

For Basement Bakehouse, the USP is clear: filling a gap in Gravesend for high-quality, handmade baked goods. “You need to be innovative to reach your customers and understand what they need,” Liam explains. “We bring great products directly to the market, creating artisanal treats that sit next to your everyday items, like sourdough and tea cakes.” The bakery thrives on community connections. Liam even has food exchanges with nearby residents, swapping unsold scones for a curry from his neighbour.

The focus for Basement Bakehouse is staying local and true to offering affordable, high-quality products.

At QFA, the focus is on setting industry benchmarks for food quality. “QFA recognises excellence,” says Ella, “we work with producers to ensure consumers get the best quality products. The awards drive standards and support those aiming for high quality.” Innovation means recognising those pushing boundaries in food production. “We’re constantly exploring new trends, from plant-based foods to sustainability, and highlighting those leading the way.”

Both recognise the challenge of balancing large-scale industrial food production with the growing demand for small-scale, artisanal alternatives.

### INNOVATION AND CHALLENGES

For Liam, the main challenge is the cost of production in a saturated market. This means streamlining processes

and set-up to make artisanal baking more efficient and affordable. He sees innovative routes to market and sales channels as a way to increasingly make small-batch, high-quality products more accessible. “It’s about making something for everyone, regardless of budget” Liam explains, “you’ve got to be innovative, or you’ll become hampered by continuous rising costs.”

### THE FUTURE OF FOOD

Looking ahead, both Liam and Ella see exciting developments. Basement Bakehouse plans to move out of its home kitchen, though Liam isn’t aiming for rapid growth. “I want a space outside my home,” he says, “but I don’t need to turn it into a national chain. My goal is to stay local and keep serving this community.”

QFA introduced an *Innovation of the Year Award* this year. “The industry will evolve,” says Ella, “but the need for quality and innovation will remain constant.”

In 10 years, they envision more technology and automation entering the food industry – from production to marketing. However, both agree that the artisan touch will always have a place. “Technology might make things easier,” Liam reflects, “but when it comes to food, people still want something that feels personal and crafted.” ■

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