

The Premier Magazine For Food Entrepreneurs

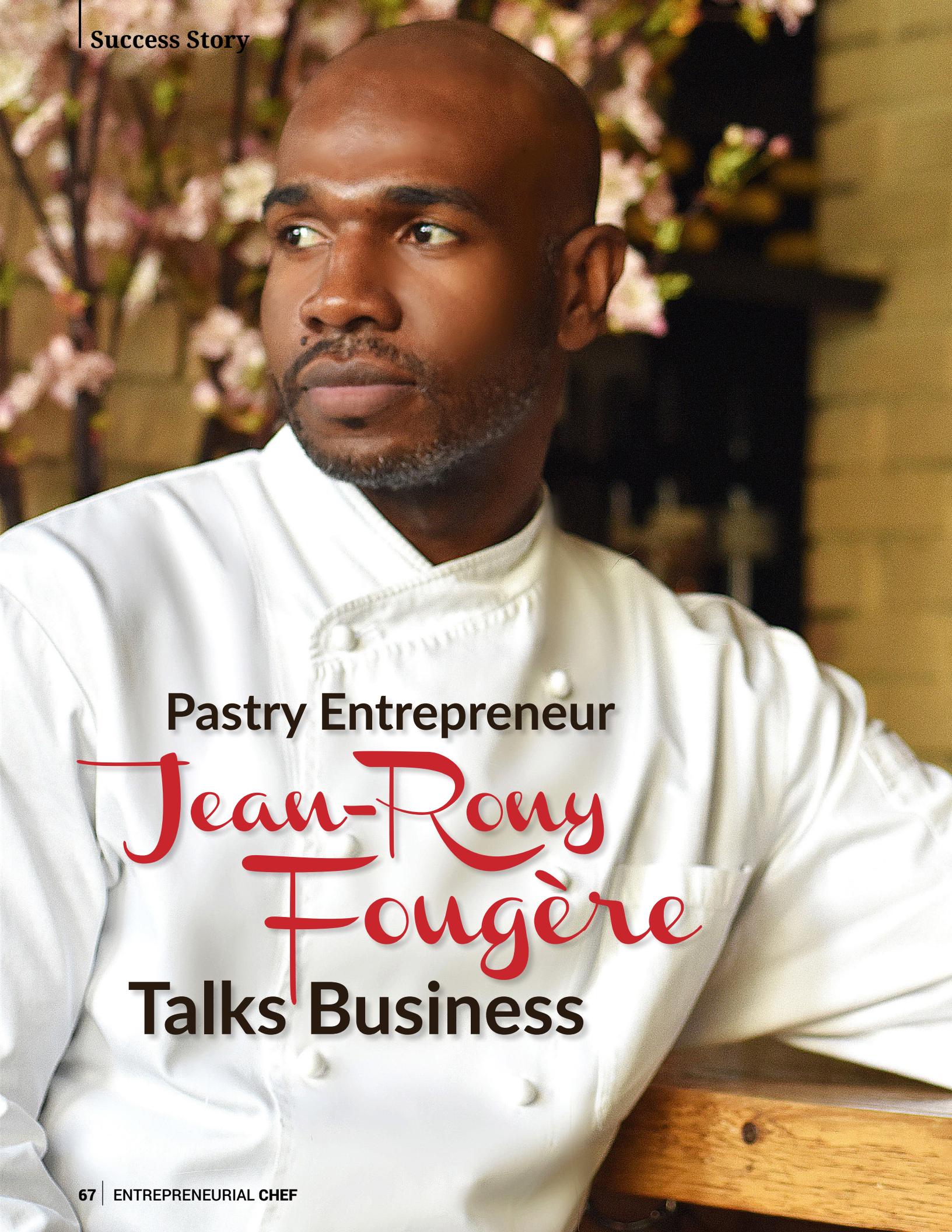
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Maneet
CHAUHAN
THE MANTRA OF SUCCESS



Pastry Entrepreneur

Jean-Rony
Fougère

Talks Business

Pastry Chef **Jean-Rony Fougère** was just five years old when his cousin Jesse in Haiti first introduced him to the world of pastry in 1983. Three years later, he left his birthplace and moved with his family to Brooklyn, New York. By age thirteen, Fougère had already completed his first cake decorating class. While attending Park West High School, he enrolled in the Culinary Arts Program and honed his craft while catering various fundraisers and events for organizations like Sotheby's and the Office of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Fougère received an honorable mention at the 1996 national Salon Food Show. His innovative cheesecake tart caught the attention of renowned Chef/Educator Richard Grausman, the founder of Careers through Culinary Arts Program (C-CAP). Grausman arranged for Jean's internship at the famed Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, under Pastry Chefs Michael Hu, Jean-Claude Perennou, and Gnanasampthan Sabaratnam.

After graduation, Fougère joined the staff at Aquavit Restaurant in New York City as Pastry Assistant under the guidance of Pastry Chef Deborah Racicot and Chef Marcus Samuelsson in 1998. The next year, he traveled to Lyon, France, as a member of the U.S. Pastry Team. As a young pastry cook with little experience he would never have had the opportunity to participate without the support from C-CAP, Chef Michael Hu, team sponsors Rick and Rena Pocrass of Chocolates a la Carte and Donald Wressell. The team placed third in the Coupe du Monde de la Patisserie. After two years of intense training with Pastry Chef Remy Fünfrock at Café Boulud, Fougère spearheaded the Pastry Departments for Restaurateur Ken Aretsky at 92, and Restaurateur Brian McNally at Smith Restaurant, where he catered the first Tribeca Film Festival in 2002. Fougère was the founding Executive Pastry Chef at the exclusive SoHo House in New York City from 2003

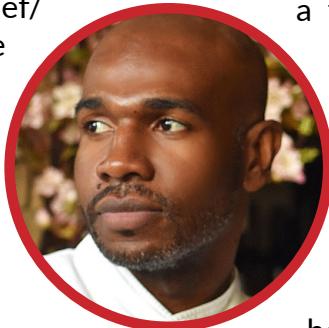
to 2005. He then moved to Washington, D.C., where he established the Pastry Department at the OYA Restaurant & Lounge. By 2006, Fougère was back in New York City consulting for numerous local restaurants.

While Fougère's desserts range in style from Classic French to American Comfort, their flavor profiles are uniquely balanced. Resting on a flourless biscuit, his chocolate mousse is infused with a cardamom twist. His original take on Baby Pineapple Baked Alaska features a pineapple sorbet and a rum-infused sponge cake topped with a Swiss meringue. For his popular Banana Bread Pudding, Fougère uses fresh-baked croissants served with a caramel-whiskey sauce. Fougère's signature dessert, a favorite of actor Robert De Niro, is a fresh berry sauté in balsamic syrup served with a fromage-blanc sorbet.

From complex oven-baked mini petit fours to specialty wedding cakes, Fougère continues to create some of the finest desserts in the world.

Currently, Fougère operates the Fern Pastry Studio in Brooklyn. Here he shares his vast culinary skills and knowledge, conducting both individual and group classes on cake decorating and pastry. Meanwhile, he still provides his refined, high-end desserts and extraordinary cake decorating artistry for some of New York City's exclusive clients.

In addition, Fougère is the Pastry Chef at Jack the Horse Tavern, where he works with the Chef/Owner Tim Oltmans, a veteran of some of New York City's great restaurants, Oltmans perfected his craft with such outstanding chefs as Tom Colicchio at Gramercy Tavern, Laurent Tourondel at C.T., and Floyd Cardoz at Tabla. Jack the Horse Tavern sits in the heart of Brooklyn Heights off of Brooklyn Promenade, offering the friendliness of a London pub, the intimacy and sophistication of a French bistro, and the food of a first-rate New York City restaurant. In 2016, Jean was named a Top Ten Cake Artist by *Dessert Professional* magazine.



The Q&A

with JEAN-RONY FOUGÈRE

1

Where did the idea of Fern Pastry Studio come from and what gave you the confidence that the business was worth pursuing?

I founded Fern Pastry Studio (FPS) in 2008. Before that, I worked in the restaurant industry for almost two decades. I also spent most of my spare time doing computer graphic design as a hobby.

In 2005, I was offered a job to be the pastry chef at a restaurant called OYA in Washington, D.C. After working at OYA for eight months, I returned to New York and took some time off to determine my next step. In 2006, I focused on computer graphic design and joined Sudler & Hennessey, an ad agency, as a web and graphic designer. I worked there until the 2008 financial crisis hit. I had to make a big decision at that point - either continue working as a web designer with a new agency or return to the restaurant industry as a pastry chef.

I have always loved teaching. In late 2008, I started working on a private teaching program for adults seeking a hobby or a second career in the culinary industry, with a focus on cake decorating and pastry. I invested my own time and money into the program. *Fougère* is the French word for *fern*. That's why I named the program, Fern Pastry Studio.

2

Can you share some of the steps you took to bring the idea to life, i.e., business plan, market research, securing capital, etc.?

When starting your own business, you have to be ready to make big sacrifices. I knew starting Fern Pastry Studio (FPS) would be a challenge. I chose not to seek outside help for money. I wanted to start FPS small and, in time, create a business plan to seek investors.

Success Story

One of the steps I took to make FPS a reality was joining Wilton, the biggest cake decorating supplier in the United States. I signed up with Wilton as a cake decorating instructor. That helped pave the way to meet people who have a love for cake decoration. Wilton offers four cake decorating courses. I taught all four courses at a Wilton retail store, and I also sold Wilton products.

Wilton courses are very limited, and students often sought more advanced training. Once the students had completed all four courses, I offered them private advanced pastry and cake decorating classes at my studio here in Brooklyn.

3

What lessons did you learn from a business and/or entrepreneurial standpoint as you brought your idea to fruition?

I learned that work never ends. People should know that most small businesses take two to five years to show a profit and some take even longer. You have to work five times as hard as an employer than if you were an employee.



Jack the Horse Tavern

When starting your own business, you have to be ready to make big sacrifices.

— Jean-Rony Fougère

First and foremost, you have to know and believe in what you are selling.

— Jean-Rony Fougère



4

Can you share your marketing and/or advertising strategy in order to attract new customers?

Networking with people that are interested in what you are selling is essential for marketing your brand. If they like what you are selling, then they will share your information with others. That's word-of-mouth advertising. That's why it is important to attend events related to your product and to meet new people.

My work at Sudler & Hennessey played a key role in my advertising strategy. That is one of the main reasons I took the job. I learned a lot about branding and marketing. I took what I learned at Sudler & Hennessey and made it work for my business without spending hundreds or thousands of dollars for websites, brochures, logos, etc.

5

For those looking to create something similar – a business model teaching culinary or pastry arts – what's your advice for them?

First and foremost, you have to know and believe in what you are selling. If you are looking for investors, you must have a business plan ready. But also consider going it alone like I did. I was ready to invest my own money, but I made sure I had a backup plan; I was working at Jack the Horse Tavern, a restaurant in downtown Brooklyn as a part-time pastry chef. Once you have something well developed and ready to show you can always sell your idea to an investor. Lastly, treat everyone around you with the utmost respect and always have a positive attitude.

Jack the Horse Tavern



If you are looking
for investors,
you must have
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— Jean-Rony Fougère

Never be afraid to fail on your first step.

— Jean-Rony Fougère

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Many food entrepreneurs struggle between working *in* the business and working *on* the business. How do you manage to balance these and what advice do you have for others in this area?

This can be a big challenge, especially for a person who is an artist with no business background like me. As an artist at heart, I find it really hard to focus on both aspects. I would have preferred spending 75 percent of my time on my art and 25 percent on the business. I actually spend more time on the business and less time on the art; 40 percent of my time on my art and 60 percent on the business. Do remember that both are very important to keep your business afloat.

Most business owners I've met in the past had a hard time putting their trust in another person unless that person was a close business partner. Finding someone you can trust and who can handle the work *in* the business *or* on the business can help a great deal.

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Being a C-CAP alumni, what was your experience like with the organization and how did it impact your life and career?

I am forever grateful to Richard Grausman and C-CAP for giving me their guidance, encouragement, and opportunity. They changed my life beginning in high school and as a young professional training and working as a pastry chef. They introduced me to some of the most celebrated dessert professionals in the industry and ensured that I was able to be a member of the U.S. Pastry Team competing in Lyon, France at Coupe du Monde de la Patisserie in 1999.





You have to work five times as hard as an employer than if you were an employee.

— Jean-Rony Fougère

8

What's the best piece of business advice that you received, or lesson learned, that helped shape your entrepreneurial career?

There is one bit of advice that I have followed since I left college. I had a culinary professor, who, every morning in class, would say, "Plan your attack and attack your plan" (in the words of Chef Jimbo Crowley). Here's another one I got from a businessman at a bar many years ago. "When starting a business never use your own money." I hope these bits of advice can help you down the line. They sure helped me.

9

For the aspiring food entrepreneurs out there, do you have any advice for them?

Never be afraid to fail on your first step. Just pick yourself up and take a bigger step.



Top Ten Takeaways from Jean-Rony Fougère

- 1 When starting a business, you have to be prepared to make sacrifices.
- 2 Jean-Rony found a way to offer a higher level product (advanced classes) to customers he was serving while working for another company – brilliant!
- 3 Small businesses may take 2-5 years just to show a profit.
- 4 You have to work five times as hard as an employer than if you were an employee.
- 5 Above all, you have to know and believe in what you are selling.
- 6 Find and attend events where your target customers go so you can network and drum up business.
- 7 Treat everyone around you with the utmost respect, you never know who can help elevate your entrepreneurial game.
- 8 At some point, it's imperative you find people you can trust to help you work both on, and in, the business.
- 9 Plan your attack and attack your plan.
- 10 When starting a business never use your own money.



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