

There might be a recession, but these energetic young women show that entrepreneurship is alive and well in rural Ireland, writes Maria Moynihan.

# YOUNG WOMEN IN

## 'Asking the bank for a loan at 20 was scary!'

Iseult Janssens from Newcastle, Co Dublin is a farmer's daughter and Paris-trained pastry chef bringing French flair to Irish confectionary with The Cake Stand.

Iseult Janssens confesses that she hasn't much of a sweet tooth. Though how the 22-year-old behind The Cake Stand can resist her own creations – like her dreamy praline mousse chocolate feuilletine, French fruit tarts or crisp macaroons with a silky ganache filling – is a mystery.

Iseult grew up on a tillage farm in Newcastle that was established by her grandparents, who were originally from Belgium.

Childhood summers spent making jams and tarts with her mother plus a passion for Home Economics led Iseult to a career as a pastry chef, and after her Leaving Cert, she went to Paris to study at the École Grégoire Ferrandi. "When you think pastry and breads, you think France. What young girl doesn't want to live in Paris after

her Leaving Cert?" asks Iseult.

After an intensive induction in French confectionary, Iseult joined La Grand Épicerie (the Parisien equivalent of Harrods) and worked in Michelin-starred restaurant Hélène Darroze, but after hurting her back, returned home in 2008.

With few employment opportunities, Iseult decided to set up her own business, The Cake Stand. "It was in desperation, I suppose," she acknowledges. "I saw no other way of doing what I loved."

Approaching the bank for a loan was "scary". "I thought they'd throw it in my face, but I've got great support," she says.

The Cake Stand specialises in high-quality wedding and occasion cakes and French-style desserts and pastries made to

order. Her macaroons have been snapped up by Avoca stores in Dublin and stockists in Cork and Limerick, and recently nabbed the top spot in *Food & Wine* magazine's Hot 100 list.

Iseult keeps her own hens and ducks for eggs and, as she suffers from a dairy intolerance, is sensitive to catering for special dietary requirements, such as coeliacs. While she eventually wants her own shop, her immediate aims are more practical. "Like an extra bowl for my Kenwood," she laughs.

And while business will never be a piece of cake, there are opportunities out there. "I haven't met anyone who hasn't wanted a new business to succeed," says Iseult. "There will be sleepless nights and early mornings, but it's worth it." **CL**



The Cake Stand, Newcastle, Co Dublin | Tel: 086-040-7676 | Web: [www.thecakestand.ie](http://www.thecakestand.ie)



Aoife Smullen (28) owns Fifi Belle shoe boutique with clients including supermodel Jodie Kidd.

## 'I walked away from

Aoife Smullen (28) from Naas, Co Kildare owns Fifi Belle, a specialist shoe boutique catering for size 6-11 feet.

Years spent squeezing her size-nine feet into her sister's size-eight heels left Aoife Smullen with blisters – and a viable business idea.

The 28-year-old Naas woman left her Celtic-Tiger position as a property manager with Lisney to set up Fifi Belle, a specialist shoe label for women craving fashionable heels, pumps and boots in sizes 6-11.

"Most shoe factories don't manufacture shoes above size eight, and

what was available was so frumpy and horrible that I used to have to squash my feet into size eights," she explains. "I always wanted to have my own business, and I've always had this passion."

With a business loan and help from her parents – her father runs a transport company, while her mother is involved in a family interiors business – Aoife launched Fifi Belle in October 2008.

"Because my family is in busi-



## BUSINESS

Iseult Janssens, the 22-year-old behind The Cake Stand confectionery, which supplies Avoca stores.

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## property into shoes'

ness, their support and guidance was always there," she says of her entrepreneurial leap. "A dream's a dream, but you always need people behind you and, when times are hard, to drive you on."

Fifi Belle shoes, which are part-designed by Aoife and made to her specs, range from pretty ballet pumps to glam heels crafted with the softest satins or dazzled with Swarovski crystals, all bearing the signature shocking-pink sole.

"Christian Louboutin has his red sole, so the flick of the pink, remember Fifi Belle!" she laughs.

While Aoife has retail space in her family's store, SKI Interiors in Naas, and stockists in Lucan, Templemore and Adare, her online

boutique [www.fifibelle.com](http://www.fifibelle.com) has customers from the UK to New Zealand. Indeed, supermodel Jodie Kidd has been photographed at London Fashion Week in Fifi Belle's suede boots.

Such is the response that the Fifi Belle range will be available from size four this autumn, with Aoife hoping to secure more retailers in Ireland and the UK. She sees the brand going global.

"With the times that we're in, it isn't easy, but the way I look at it is if I can survive this, I can do anything," she says.

"It's my dream to make Fifi Belle a well-known brand world-wide. I want to make it happen. I'm going to make it happen." **CL**

## The coolest kitchen kit

Kitchen appliances need not be merely functional – they can be objects of beauty in their own right. Check out these super new sleek and *über*-cool appliances in the first of our new series, writes Alex Fitzgerald.

**1 HIDE-AWAY SLIDEAWAY**

Neff's new-generation SlideAway door single ovens (from €1,692) boast 30% more room for cooking by increasing the interior volume from 45 to 58 litres and the shelf levels from three to four. This unique award-winning door literally slides away under the oven to allow greater access to the food cooking inside. A self-retracting mechanism means the door glides gently away by itself, just like a soft-close furniture drawer.

**2 THE BIG CHILL**

Innovative features, the latest frost-free technology, exceptional capacity and thoughtful storage solutions make the Aga Premium Refrigerator (€9,495) one of the most expensive on the market. Boasting an A rating for energy efficiency, the appliance uses a zero-ozone-deplet-

ing system, which not only improves its

overall energy efficiency, but is kinder to the environment.

Additional features include an easy-to-use interactive digital menu, which shows the actual temperature of each compartment and lets you tailor the refrigerator to your way of living; and an energy-saving setting which can be used to put it in "holiday" mode to save you money while you're away, or in "shopping" mode to target food that's been sitting in the car.

**3 TOP TAP**

Exuding contemporary style, the Rolux Pull-Out Spray tap (€599) from Franke emits a bright LED light which adds atmosphere and genuine wow factor to your kitchen. This white light illuminates the water delivery, creating a stunning visual effect. Even when the tap is turned off, the appearance is equally striking, as the LED acts as ambient lighting in your kitchen.

**4 SEXY SINKS**

Sinks are not exactly renowned for setting the pace around the house. Although strictly functional, the latest models display a pleasing attention to form, making them objects of desire, rather than merely a receptacle for dirty dishes. The new Largo LAX 110 45 (€229), which is part of Franke's high-end Specialist range, boasts ultra-modern looks and generous proportions, yet the bowl squeezes perfectly within a slender 500mm-wide base unit. **CL**

Alex Fitzgerald is editor of *Irish Interiors* magazine