

money

Saturday October 8 2005 ■ "Having a little inflation is like being a little bit pregnant" Leon Henderson, economist (1895-1986)

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WHO MADE ALL THE PIES?

Another Conran with the recipe for a successful business venture **14-15**

GO IT ALONE

Not so humble pie

Michelle Henery enjoys the culinary equivalent of a hug

SINCE Sophie Conran started her pie business last November, she has transformed what was a staple at football matches into haute cuisine.

Her product is a far cry from the traditional dish that evolved as a way for poorer families to prepare hearty meals with less expensive meats. In modern times, the parcels of puff pastry, encompassing savoury meat stews, are considered the preserve of pub lunches or an easy, ready-made meal — until now.

As her name suggests, the 39-year-old entrepreneur is another scion of the Conran clan, of which Sir Terence Conran, the designer, is at the helm.

She says: "Having a surname that is synonymous with food and design creates interest, but there are times when people don't take me seriously and I have to prove to them that I mean business."

It was while working with her brother, Jasper, the fashion designer, that Ms Conran decided to "do something for myself". She says: "I didn't trust what the pies available on the market contained. I wanted to have something on the table for my two children each night and I wanted to know what was in it.

"I started making pies because I could make them the night before and put them in

the fridge or freezer to be reheated the next day."

She invested £70,000, which she raised by remortgaging her home, to start her company, Sophie Conran Pies.

While still working with her brother, Ms Conran hired an assistant to help her to research the pie market and find a catering company to make the product. She also used her colleagues as guinea-pigs to try out her recipes.

She developed five savoury pies, which had fillings such as butternut squash, walnut and goat's cheese, and pheasant with parsnip mash. The chicken, olive and preserved lemon pie, with cumin puff

pastry, won gold in this year's Great Taste Awards, the Oscars of the food industry.

Another element that sets her product apart is the smart white ceramic dishes in which the pies are sold. But finding a dish at the right price proved problematic. "After testing numerous recipes to find the right selection and having to decide whether to offer the pies fresh or frozen and what would appear on the label, developing the dish turned into a considerable design undertaking," she recalls.

"We were getting prototypes of dishes that were more expensive than the pie itself. It took some trial and error,

ANDREW DUNSMORE/PICTURE PARTNERSHIP



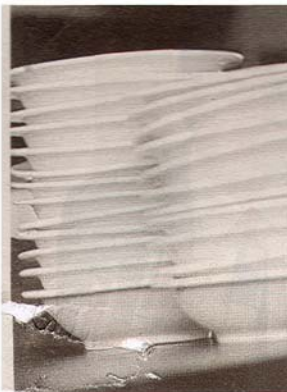
Upper crust: thanks to Sophie Conran's innovative, award-winning pie fillings, the former working-class staple now graces the shelves of Harrods and Harvey Nichols

but we found a great manufacturer in the company Wedgwood."

The pies were immediately stocked by Harrods and Harvey Nichols. Soon afterwards, she was approached by Gourmet Warehouse, a mail-

order luxury food company, which now offers her range online. Prices start at £9.95.

"Pies are the culinary version of a hug. It was not about reproducing pies but rethinking them for our time," says Ms Conran. Her modern take



on the classic pie and mash dish is one of the inspirations for the Harrods *Truly British* promotion, a celebration of traditions and heritage as well as new and adopted cultures, which ends on October 16.

■ **Sophie Conran Pies:**
020-7724 5318,
www.sophieconran.com

Survival tips

■ Your idea does not necessarily have to be new. A totally new product can be very difficult because you have to educate a market and convince people that they need your product.

■ Do not be afraid to involve your family. They are often your greatest source of support, particularly in the early stages. They can be a useful sounding board, help with the odd task or even provide finance.

■ Not all advertising is equal. Decide what form of product marketing suits you and your product best.

■ The old saying "you have to spend a little money to make a little money" is never more apt than when starting a business. So save as much as you can before starting.