

“Your judges don’t know what they’re talking about and the credibility of the awards has been undermined by these comments.”

Yes, the Great Taste Awards results are out and it’s that time when my email overflows with vitriol from unhappy producers who’ve just read the judges’ comments on their entries. Right now, I’m the most reviled man in Britain! I understand producers’ disappointment but I really don’t need any more suggestions as to what I should do with what remains of my career.

According to the judges, this producer’s 84-day dry-aged beef delivered great flavour but was spoilt by a hint of rancidity on the fat and a tight, fibrous texture. I was told by the producer I needed to sharpen up my act because one judge commented it perhaps needed more ageing.

What the producer perhaps forgot is that everything is blind-tasted, and a tight, fibrous texture in a beefsteak can be as characteristic of a stressed carcass in need of further ageing as it can be of meat that has been aged too long.

After reading in the feedback notes that he should use better chocolate, another producer wrote: “We use dark Valrhona – could you please tell me what better chocolate to use in a brownie?” The judges felt another of his entries had delivered ‘artificial’ flavours. The disappointed chocolatier listed all the natural ingredients he uses before asking: “Where are the artificial flavours coming from?”

He has a point, but he’s missing one too. If a panel of reasonably reputable foodies blind-taste food and agree the chocolate isn’t good or the flavours don’t shine through then clearly that’s what they taste. Perhaps he didn’t use enough chocolate or the other ingredients masked the cocoa flavours. Maybe whoever made it had an off day. Give two chefs identical ingredients and rarely are the results the same.

His tirade ended: “One American lady living in London comes down every few months for these brownies. She told me she’s lived in England for 30 years and these are the best brownies this side of New York. I’ll stick to customers’ comments on my ability in the kitchen.”

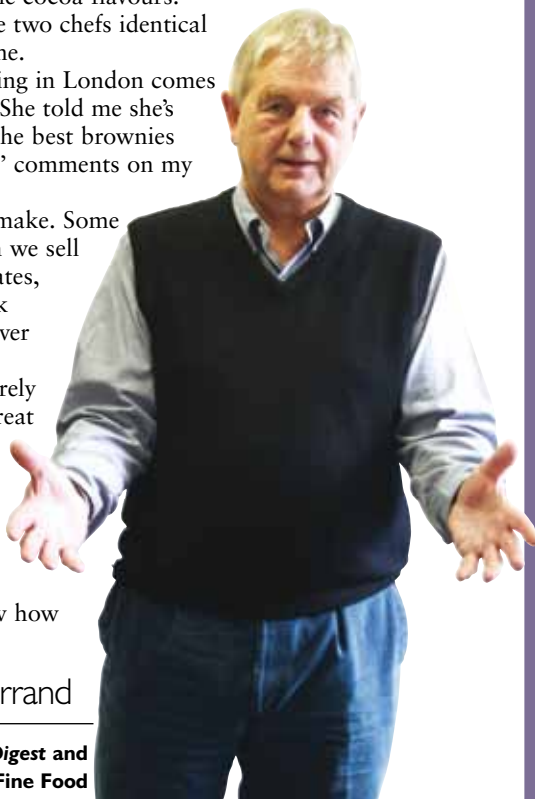
That really is the worst mistake he could make. Some years back, I wrote a book on cheese, which we sell during Guild training days. Out of 25 delegates, perhaps five buy a copy. The other 80% flick through the pages and leave quietly and I never know why they choose not to buy.

Customers who don’t like your products rarely tell you – they simply shop elsewhere. The Great Taste Awards acknowledges fabulous foods but at the same time, judges’ comments occasionally reveal why 80% prefer something different. Re-writing a book takes time whereas tweaking a recipe is easier.

Must dash, my email’s pinged again – another helping of vitriol. Don’t they know how sensitive I am?

Bob Farrand

Bob Farrand is publisher of *Fine Food Digest* and national director of the Guild of Fine Food



“Customers who don’t like your products rarely tell you – they simply shop elsewhere”

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What they’re saying

“There are some fabulous Stiltons, and there’s no way I could enter that market. So I took away that astringency and made something that was the opposite. That mild, creamy French style is a lot more pleasing to me.”

Celebrity cheesemaker Sean Wilson – p39

