



Ice cream maker David Wesmael is seen during his work

Reuters | Lille, France

He's the new wizard of French ice cream who is sending a chill down the spine of traditionalists.

David Wesmael has nothing against a scoop of well-made gelato or a cone of whipped ice cream.

But the restless innovator is taking a blowtorch to the "archaic" conventions which he claims has left ice cream frozen in the past.

His creations often skate daringly over the thin line between ice cream and the more sophisticated domain of French patisserie.

Biting through the thin chocolate shell of one of his ice cream bars, flavours and textures explode -- from crunchy praline to runny caramel and vanilla spiked with lemon confit.

"There are so many things you can do with ice cream -- more perhaps in terms of texture and taste than even with patisserie," he told AFP in the chill of his laboratory in the northern French city of Lille.

"There is infinite potential, and so many possibilities which have yet to be explored in ice

French chef gives traditional ice cream a whipping

This wizard of French ice cream comes up with new flavours every week from strawberry and red pepper to Spritz and even vanilla, celery and lemon



David Wesmael has been awarded "un des meilleurs ouvriers de France" (one of France's best craftsmen). He is seen wearing his white laboratory coat with its tricolore collar, which can only be worn by a tiny elite of the country's best craftsmen

cream making," said the former star pastry chef.

From his spherical "vacherins" of filled meringue to ice cream bonbons, bars and "tubes" which can be cut into slices, Wesmael is determined to give the summer treat a place at the top table of haute cuisine.

Putting on the Spritz

"I am trying to do something

different and show the public that ice cream is not something that just comes in a pot or a cornet," he said.

It's a chilly 11 degrees Celsius (53 Fahrenheit) in his lab, but his artisan "glaciers" are not feeling the cold in their white coats.

Every second out of the freezer counts when you are piping a chilled hazelnut and almond praline onto shortbread in a bar mould.

The same speed and precision is needed for the next step of floating the caramel and candied lemon in vanilla ice cream, so that the middle melts as soon as you bite through the crisp coating.

Vanilla, celery and lemon

Wesmael also loves making the standard ice creams that he himself calls "archaic".

But even with traditional ice creams and sorbets he adds his own touch, decorating every tub by hand and coming up with new flavours every week for his shops in Paris and Lille -- from strawberry and red pepper to



David Wesmael is seen during his work

Spritz and even vanilla, celery and lemon.

When it comes to miraculously transforming raw materials, "nothing beats ice cream and sorbet", Wesmael argued.

It was this alchemy and the untapped potential of ice cream that tempted him away from pure patisserie, which has undergone a huge renaissance in France in recent years.

Even his standard vanilla ice cream is the product of deep re-

search, mixing pods from Madagascar and New Caledonia to get a "stronger and longer-lasting flavour".

For his competition entry in 2004 to join the tiny elite of French artisans officially proclaimed the country's best, the young Wesmael created a frozen sculpture of "an angel pregnant with the world" that represented the Italian Renaissance.

Around it were frozen desserts based around basil, lemon, balsamic vinegar and Sicilian

pistachios.

As it happens, pistachio is the bestselling ice cream in both his shops.

But he is most proud of his "tubes", which are easy to cut and can survive out of the freezer for two hours thanks to the cylinder they come in.

"You can slice them into rounds, put different flavours together or add different elements from the garden like a coulis of fresh mint or strawberries in season, he said.



Ice cream maker David Wesmael poses with his tubes

Gli the cat can stay even as Istanbul's Hagia Sophia changes

Reuters | Istanbul

With thousands of Instagram followers and even a former US president as a fan, Gli the cat is almost as famous as her home, Istanbul's ancient Hagia Sophia.

But with the decision to turn the museum into a mosque, Turks have been wondering whether Gli will have to move out -- with the question crop-

ping up daily on local news outlets and social media.

The grey cat with shining green, crossed eyes, has become a favourite with visitors, including former US President Barack Obama, who was filmed stroking her during a trip in 2009.

Authorities have made clear Hagia Sophia can remain as her home.

Ibrahim Kalin, spokesman for President Tayyip Erdogan, told

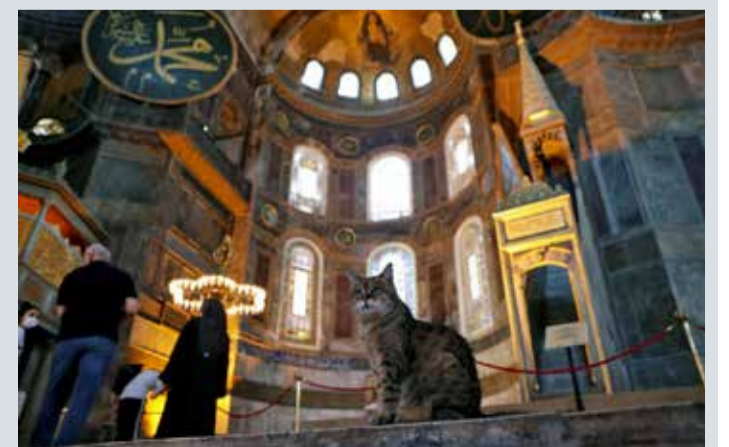
Reuters that Gli, as well as all other cats in the area, would stay where they were.

"That cat has become very famous, and there are others who haven't become that famous yet. That cat will be there, and all cats are welcome to our mosques," he said.

That's bound to be welcome news to Umut Bahceci, a tour guide who started an Instagram account for Gli four years ago

and now has more than 48,000 followers. The account is filled with photos of the cat, some tagged by the tourists who meet her.

"I started noticing Gli every time I went (to Hagia Sophia) because Gli was posing for people like a model," she told Reuters. "I get messages such as, 'Gli, we will come to Istanbul to see you.' This is truly a very nice feeling."



Gli the cat of Hagia Sophia is pictured in Istanbul