



# BEYOND PERFORMANCE

FINDING A SECOND  
CAREER: TEN DANCERS  
TELL THEIR STORIES



Performing  
*Afternoon of a  
Faun* in Tel  
Aviv with  
Maura Eden

## Ron Ben-Israel WEDDING CAKE DESIGNER

The elaborate, intricate beauty of a couture wedding cake designed by **Ron Ben-Israel** is not so different it seems from the grandeur and elegance of a ballet. When the dancer made his career transition from studio to bakery, he brought his training and eye for movement with him.

Born in Tel Aviv, Ben-Israel began dancing and touring with folk troupes as a teenager and started taking modern and ballet classes after he was released from the army at 21. In a performance career that lasted 15 years, Ben-Israel danced with Batsheva, the Israeli Ballet Company and the Bat Dor Dance Company. "I was 30 years old and my knees were shot," he says. "I began dance late and I approached everything in a muscular determined way." He came to the U.S., had knee surgery and worked in bakeries and catering while performing in small downtown dance companies. The side-gig led to apprenticeships with chefs in Toronto and Lyon, France.

"Like in dance, you start at the barre and then go forward. In my time off I'd just start practicing doing the sugar flowers and decorations," he says. "I started doing shop windows with a friend who was a visual designer. My cakes were presented in Mikimoto on Fifth Avenue," he says. Martha Stewart saw his cake designs in that window and called to see if he'd contribute to her wedding magazine.

"When I started working on wedding cakes I wasn't very interested because they're so static. But a lot of things I do think have an inherent sense of movement." His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Martha Stewart Living*,

*In Style*, *Modern Bride*, *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Vogue*. His designs have included a replica of The Plaza for their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and a wedding cake with Manolo Blahnik shoes adorned in 24 karat gold.

Despite the success, it's not where Ben-Israel thought he would wind up. He now works from a top floor loft space in Soho and his bakery specializes in custom cakes for special occasions. "I had the same syndrome as most dancers. We can't think about the possibility of anything else. I didn't have a business plan," he says. "But we learn as dancers to audition and there is a lot of rejection. You never know if what you did well yesterday you'll do well today because the body rebels. So I lost my fear of rejection. I was much more open to experiment."

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A former Bat Dor Dance colleague who had lost contact with Ben-Israel in the 80s recently found him in a book on the "best of Manhattan." "I love sweets so I looked up that section and nearly fell over when I saw Ron's name," she says. "I went to see him at his studio and was blown away. Ron was always a talented, devoted and disciplined artist but frankly his cakes are on another realm. It was clear he had found his true calling. He told me 'I now choreograph in sugar.'"

—Emily Macel