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15 MINUTES

BY MAXFIELD MORRIS

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## The baking life

Earlier this month, **Jeremiah Duarte Bills** was visiting family in Portugal and picking up some old family recipes as research for an upcoming book on the country's desserts. The Loomis-raised Pocket resident has always been an avid baker, but it had been largely sidelined for a musical career—Bills graduated Juilliard in 2008. In 2016, though, he auditioned for *The Great American Baking Show*, a spin-off of the British amateur baking television show. In it, hopefuls compete to wow judges and to avoid being voted off the show—and Bills made it to the semi-final round before getting cut. Since the appearance, Bills **hosts baking classes out of his home**, and he co-hosts a cooking podcast called *Flour Hour* with fellow contestant Amanda Faber. We chatted with Bills about his baking, his musical career and a whole lot more.

### Is your life different since being on the show?

Yeah, very, very different. So before the show, my life was mostly about music and then baking for fun. I mean, it's still all a ton of fun—but my life was definitely focused on music ... Now baking has become one of my careers. I still teach music, I'm still involved in music, but the balance has shifted to do more things with food.

### What do you attribute that shift to?

I think the bottom line for me is about being creative. Both of my grandmothers are visual artists, so the first thing I was up to was doing visual art with them, then I was interested in dance, then I was interested in music ... baking obviously can be very creative, and that desire to be creative leads me to different pursuits and different forms of expression.

### Are you still playing the flute?

Yeah, I'm teaching, and I still play; I play with some Sacramento groups from time to time, and I do a lot of compositions, writing my own music.

### What do you do with that, mostly?

At this point I'm just hoarding it—but some day I definitely plan to release it, have a presence showcasing my own musical creativity.

### How did you start hosting baking classes, and how has that been?

It's been amazing—how did I get into it? It just felt sort of natural, since I had a teaching background, then being on *The Great American Baking Show*, I had a little bit of a following built up. And because I specialize in Portuguese baking, which is pretty niche; however, there's a really big Portuguese population in Sacramento.

### Did you do anything to develop a persona for the show, to stand out?

I chose not to, other than that I chose to bake a lot of Portuguese things, because I wanted to

Want to learn to bake Portuguese delicacies? Jeremiah Duarte Bills has you covered.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NICOLETTE LOVELL

connect with that community. I knew that could be a way I could stand out. Other than that, I was just myself.

I mean, my experiences of performing for most of my life definitely kicked in, and I was definitely the guy who didn't show weakness; if things weren't going well, I wouldn't let on to it. That's what you do as a musician, right, you're not going to stop and tell the audience you made a mistake.

### Do you still stay in touch with any of the other contestants?

Yeah! So the winner—I made it to the quarter-finals with the winner, Amanda Faber—her and I have a baking podcast called *Flour Hour*. We're about to start our third season, and we interview bakers from all over the world. The rest of [the contestants], we're all in a group chat, we chat regularly. We're all really good buddies, really good friends.

### That seems like a pretty unique way to get a group of friends.

Yeah. Yeah, it's really special, because with that show, there's no prize beyond the cake plate. There's no cash prize, there is no motivation for us ever to try to be anything other than ourselves. The competition is against yourself, in the sense that you have to bake the best you can.

### Do you have, locally, any favorite food spots in Sacramento?

Let's see ... of course, Ginger Elizabeth, she's a huge inspiration. We interviewed her on our podcast. And restaurant-wise, I love going to Hawk's Public House and Provisions. There's so many new places, it's a great, amazing time to be in Sacramento.

Visit Jeremiah Duarte Bills' website to sign up for baking classes and learn more at [jeremiahbakes.com](http://jeremiahbakes.com).

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