

TV MAGAZINE

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Baking mad

Mary Berry and Paul Hollywood reveal how *The Great British Bake Off* has turned their lives upside down, for better and for worse



EXCLUSIVE PHOTO SHOOT

NEW! *The Great British Bake Off* Wednesday 8pm BBC1

THE BIG INTERVIEW

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY AND PAUL



Paul and Mary get on like a house on fire, both on and off screen



Paul Hollywood and Mary Berry masks for sale, poolside selfies and endless cake-judging invitations... As the new series of *Bake Off* begins, Paul and Mary mania is back

Just a short stroll from the famous *Great British Bake Off* tent, Mary Berry and Paul Hollywood are taking a momentary break from filming and soaking up a few welcome rays of sunshine. But don't be fooled by this picture of calm and serenity. When you're the stars of the biggest show on telly, with 15 million avid viewers and more devoted fans all over the globe, *Bake Off* mania can kick off at any time.

"Sometimes when you're on holiday and you try to go to the pool for a swim, it's like the place is 10 deep with lions and you're a gazelle going down to the water for a drink," laughs Paul, 50. "That's what it feels like when you're walking through and suddenly all the iPhones are out. It happens all the time."

As a result, he's had to lay down a few ground rules to fans when it comes to selfies.

"If you're on the television people say: 'You chose this path and this is the payment - you lose your privacy,'" explains Paul, who has a 14-year-old son Josh with Alexandra, his wife of 18 years. "I only started doing this about a year ago, but now if I have the family with me - especially if I'm with my son - I don't do photographs with people. I have to draw the line somewhere. I'm not horrible about it and if I'm on my own, I'm fair game. I just have to respect my family as well. Privacy has gone. I've always been a quiet, shy person, so *Bake Off* has changed that for me."

If anything, Mary, 81, appears to be having the better time with life in the spotlight.

"It has its advantages," she says, with a cheeky grin. "We went on holiday recently and when my husband and I arrived at Stansted Airport, everything was different - you have to register this and weigh that - so I walked up to the counter and someone immediately said: 'Mary, can I help you?' And they did."



Twelve new contestants are ready to have their baking prowess tested by the judges

"People do take photographs but they're always nice. My family are very supportive, particularly my daughter who will say: 'Mum's just done some, do you mind?' She's going to be terribly late otherwise." Always people are enchanting. Often they just say: 'Love the programme' or 'Has Paul really got such blue eyes?' And I say: 'Unfortunately he has!'"

The pair have become close friends since they started working together when *Bake Off* launched in 2010, and they're clearly tickled by the industry that's grown up around the success of the show.

"You can buy masks now of Mary and I," says Paul, incredulously. "Often when I get sent pictures I have to do a double take and realise it's not me, it's a mask."

"Many children are having *Bake Off* parties for their birthdays," reveals Mary, who has lost count of the number of times they've both been asked to judge at village fêtes. "But the BBC won't allow us to judge. My son and daughter have judged village shows, though, which is hilarious."

"My mum and my brother have both done it too!" chips in Paul.

"I went with my daughter Annabel to a village the other day and stood behind her," explains Mary. "She made all the decisions and tasted all the bakes. She was brilliant. Paul and I are allowed to give out the prizes, though. We're very happy to do that. Actually, it's very nice not to have to do the other!"

NERVES OF STEEL

It's the judging that has kept them busy of late, spending 10 weeks in the famous tent in Welford Park, Berkshire, filming series seven of *Bake Off*.

"The contestants know what's expected of them now, so they've been dead frightened and were shaking like leaves before they even started," admits Mary. "For the first few *Bake Offs*, people entered because somebody encouraged them to put their name down, but now they think they've got to do more. They know the format, they have timed everything at home, done their signature bakes, but they haven't allowed for the fact that the camera comes in and people talk to them. It's only at about the third episode that the bakers realise they've got to speed up."

"They come in with their eyes wide open," says Paul. "I think they are more nervous this year because the show's so big. We're getting a lot of inconsistencies across the board and

this is the first time that's happened."

There were only 200 entries for series one of *Bake Off*, whereas now the show's producer says the numbers are in "the high thousands". Does that add pressure for the judges?

"No, the pressure's not on us," says Paul. "It's on the bakers. Our job remains the same. At the end of the day we're eating bakes that people make for us in a tent. It's quite a mellow programme. *Bake Off* is a comfy pair of slippers, just before the kids go back to school."

It can also be life-changing for those who've discovered an unexplored passion for baking just by watching the show.

"It's the rewards that it gives to children who perhaps haven't come through with flying colours at school," says Mary. "The ones who are always getting told: 'Oh, can't you do better?' They watch *Bake Off* and it's: 'Can I have a go, Mum or Dad?' Often Dad. Then they make something and it means they are flavour of the month in their family. Anybody can bake."

"It's lovely seeing all the kids' pictures with their bakes," says Paul. "They put them up on Facebook and I have to give them a thumbs-up. It's amazing how many kids love to bake."

All the same, Paul wouldn't recommend the life of a baker and chef to his own son. "It's hard work," he admits. "Long hours, early mornings. Your social life goes out the window. When I worked in hotels for 20-odd years, it was really tough. You have to be driven. But Josh is the current Gingerbread House *Bake Off* champion. Every Christmas, our family goes skiing and we do a special *Bake Off*. I play the theme tune and the tense music through speakers. Everyone brings their gingerbread up to me and I pick a winner."

With nervous bakers awaiting their afternoon appraisals in the tent, it's time for Paul and Mary to get back to business, but there's just enough time for one final reflection of how *Bake Off* has changed their lives.

"It's allowed me to go away," says Paul. "I went abroad once when I was a kid. Now I've just come back from Naples with the family. It's about life experiences when you do a programme like this and it becomes popular. I was brought up in a very normal family, so I count myself very lucky indeed."

"We now go away with all our family," smiles Mary. "All [five] grandchildren. It's great. We have been spoiling ourselves with holidays."

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"Privacy has gone, *Bake Off's* changed that. I've always been a quiet, shy person"
PAUL



Smells good: TV Magazine's Paul heads to the *Bake Off* tent in Welford Park

Words: Paul Simpson; Photographs: Mark Harrison