

## Selling Custom Macarons From Home with Nicole Barry

**David Crabill:** Welcome to the Forrager podcast where I talk with cottage food businesses about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill. And today I am talking with Nicole Berry. Nicole just moved to Portland, Oregon, but since 2016, she has been selling custom macarons and other French pastries with her cottage food business, [Bake Toujours](#) in Pasadena, California.

Nicole is a very talented pastry chef. So when I say custom macarons, I mean, macarons that are multicolored custom decorated. And sometimes even custom shaped, which if you know how. macarons are made, you know, that's not easy to do. Aside from selling her creations. She has taken her skills to [YouTube](#) and produces very high quality videos, teaching a growing audience of followers, how to make these delectable desserts.

And with that, welcome to the show, Nicole. Nice to have you here.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:00:57] Thank you so much. It's good to be here.

**David Crabill:** [00:00:59] So Nicole, can you take us through, I know you you've done some training you've, learned from some very talented chefs. Can you take us through sort of the beginning

**Nicole Barry:** [00:01:10] Yeah. So it was kind of a long road. In 2010, I went to pastry school in Chicago. We lived right down the street from the French pastry school and it was this amazing, French taught lots of chefs directly from France, so it was a pretty prestigious school. They sent me to France after, and I got to work in bakeries and Alsace, France, and, um, so we were still in Chicago and I moved to California without my husband to work and at Hotel Bel-Air with, pastry chef Sherry Yard.

And Spago so Beverly Hills Spago. and I couldn't live that far away from my husband anymore. So we were back in Chicago together. And, through this whole time he was doing medical school. it was an perfect time to be in the restaurant business. Cause he was so busy and I could just put all my attention into making pastries, but once we, we got into the next stage of our life with kids, it just wasn't a right fit anymore.

And, that's when the cottage food business took its form and I was able to kind of start. Producing exactly what I wanted to produce out of my own kitchen and be able to sell it and make a small profit.

**David Crabill:** [00:02:40] Okay. So you've, you've learned in France and you've also learned under some very prestigious chefs in the United States here. What was it like to work in those kind of, I don't know, are they bakeries that you were working in? Like, what is it like to work in that kind of establishment?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:02:57] It was rigorous. You have to earn your place and you just have to that take things too personally, and be able to accept criticism and improve.

There I would be working for 12 hours with, you know, minimal breaks and you figure out you do something wrong and you're yelled at. And at the end you just kind of want to cry, but you have to hold it together. Or, you know, there were days where you felt like you just did. All your production, you checked everything off. You did great. And it felt so fulfilling. So there were great experiences as well. I don't want it to. Sound too negative, but in the higher end places that I worked, it was put your head down work. And it was definitely the satisfaction of seeing improvement and not getting yelled at that kept me going at those places.

**David Crabill:** [00:03:58] so you worked in a restaurant environment and, uh, I'm sure transferred a lot of those skills over to your cottage food business, but, do you think you needed to have that kind of. Restaurant or industry experience in order to do well with the cottage food business.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:04:18] I think it helped immensely. it set me up for success in the sense of knowing sanitary issues. You know, making sure. I have food safety, of course, being efficient at working in those high stress jobs definitely make you understand how to do things quickly and most efficiently. And it helps me to be able to put my work down, down, be with my kids and, you know, separate those things.

And also just production-wise how much am I going to feed? You know, just realizing from the first farmer's market that I did. Okay. This is how many people bought this and this just being able to just like a restaurant, when you know about how many orders you do a night on a weekend or knowing the tally of how much to bring to different places.

So you're not wasting a lot of product, if that makes sense.

**David Crabill:** [00:05:16] Are there any techniques that you would recommend that come to your mind of things that you do in your home kitchen that you probably wouldn't think of doing? If you hadn't had the experience in a commercial bakery or commercial restaurant

**Nicole Barry:** [00:05:31] for one, just the way restaurants are set up. So I just got a huge, like industrial rack. In my house here. So everything is easily accessible. Pull out your bowls, pull out everything, your ingredients. It's all right there on the rack instead of way up high. I'm short too. So like getting things out of a high cupboard really annoys me.

So everything just laying it out accessible for you really helps. I know it seems. Trivial, but these things, every little thing adds up, also speed racks, like getting certain equipment from Webstaurant or whatever. well-priced like restaurant grade equipment that you can fit into your home. I mean, I had a 700 square foot home, but a little teeny half-speed rack really helped my efficiency. Cause I was able to get a lot of sheet pans of macarons piped out, resting on that. so yeah, I think maximizing space and being able to have things readily available really does help efficiency.

**David Crabill:** [00:06:39] well, I know let's talk about your cottage food business. I know that you moved just recently to Oregon, like really recently, right? Like, are you still in the moving process?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:06:50] Yeah. So we moved three weeks ago So we're here for two years only. It's just so difficult when we're on time restrictions building a customer base can take years and only having two years for sure. Here for my husband's work has. Made it difficult for me to jump right in. So I'm trying to figure it all out, weigh the options. But as you said, building my YouTube base and teaching has really given me purpose in my career right now and I'm enjoying it.

So for now that might be. Where I focus, but it's hard not to sell too. So I'm definitely at a crossroad.

**David Crabill:** [00:07:35] Well, we'll talk about the videos a little later, but I do want to talk a little bit about your cottage food business that you had in California. I know you started at the end of 2016, take us through what it was like to start that business. And, you know, the early days.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:07:51] Yeah. So the early days it actually started as a teaching. Opportunity as well, I would go into people's homes and teach them how to make macarons or pâte à choux éclairs, um, croissants. And then they liked the food so much and were like, you really need to sell this. And so I looked into actually selling the product and that's when I got the cottage food license.

I took it for about a year just selling to, you know, people off Instagram or locals that I already knew all local people, but, People would find me through Instagram or word of mouth. Those are the best marketing tools that I had. And after about a year, I realized I wanted to do more. And then I got into farmer's markets.

**David Crabill:** [00:08:46] Okay, so the farmer's markets, um, tell us a little bit about those and how you started and how much you made and what you sold your products for and what products you were selling at the time.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:08:58] Yeah. So I always have sold French pastries. So I tried to keep my menu small so I could do a variety of different ones. And I, we did macarons croissants. And financier, which are like little, teacakes almost, , but I, all those things I sold macarons for \$2.50 each.

Croissants for \$3 or pain a chocolat croissant for \$3.50. I was very timid with pricing. Pricing was definitely something that I struggled with. You need to really value your work and your time to price at a good point. And I learned that. Slowly. So I did increase my prices for croissants eventually to \$4 and \$4.50 for chocolate croissants, but it definitely took me some time to figure out the pricing stuff. I would price per unit, but ended up realizing I wasn't putting enough value on my time. If that makes sense.

**David Crabill:** [00:10:10] Yeah. And to preface this a little bit, I mean, you were living in Pasadena. These prices are a bit high, but, I've been to Pasadena and I know that everything is pretty expensive down there. So, yeah, \$2.50 for a little macaron. I mean, they're not that big. I know they're, they're not easy to make, but, How does that compare to say what a bakery in Pasadena was selling their macarons for.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:10:35] Yeah. So it range from about \$1.85 to \$3.50. For one, If you go to a French macaron bakery, they're very expensive. You can get half dozen for about \$25. So I was definitely on the lower end of the pricing point.

**David Crabill:** [00:10:58] Yeah. And I'd imagine that it's because there's, they're pretty time intensive to make right.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:11:03] Time-intensive, finicky. So you have some product waste as well as expensive ingredients.

**David Crabill:** [00:11:10] Well, let's talk a little bit about your macarons because I mean, I'm not a macaron expert. Maybe I haven't been checking all the. Facebook pages of the different Macaron makers out there, but your macarons really stand out to me. Like they are truly some of the most unique, macarons. I have ever seen. I mean, they're custom decorated custom shaped. is that really common in industry or, um, where'd you learn those skills?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:11:40] Well first, thank you. I did not learn any of that in pastry school. It's definitely become a thing in the last few years. There's people playing around with macarons as they become more popular in the United States. Instagram is a breeding zone for creativity, and I feel like pastry artists or Macaron, bakers, whatever we want to call this new group of bakers.

But, they keep pushing each other. We all keep kind of. Inspiring one another to try something new. And I feel like it's definitely the good part about social media is being inspired and taking things to new levels,

**David Crabill:** [00:12:26] so what types of macarons have you made? I know you've made a lot of custom shapes. Can you just explain to us what kind of creativity you've been using with your macarons?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:12:38] Recently I made Pikachu macarons. for my, my son graduating kindergarten, we've also done cupcake shaped macarons. I've done footballs. I mean, you name it. Any party theme you can make into macarons, shells, mermaid shells, like clam shell. what else?

**David Crabill:** [00:13:04] Well, I just looked at your, yeah. I looked at your page recently and there were a lot there. I remember one whole display that was like bees and strawberries and plants and beehives and, And a sun. And I was just like, I mean, they were just, it was like a whole display.

And like, how do you make these custom shapes? Because, uh, or explain how macarons are made and the challenges of making a custom shape with a macaron.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:13:33] So macarons are if you think about it, seem. Fairly simple. It's very little ingredients. You've got your meringue, which is just whipping up your egg whites, and sugar, and then your dry ingredients, almond flour, and confectioner's sugar. You make a

stiff meringue and this is where a lot of people, I feel like can have issues because meringue is, if you're doing the French method needs to be very stiff.

You fold in your dry ingredients and you can go wrong by over beating your batter, getting it too runny underbeating your batter, making it not taking out enough air, which is called the macaronage process. So there's all these key steps in critical moments where you can go wrong, even though it's a very.

Simple process in theory. So when you're making shapes, I tend to make a template. I will draw something myself and cut it out and then trace it onto the shape onto a parchment over and over. So I can just lay a silpat or a Silicon mat over the parchment. And then I have that template underneath. To pipe on.

You just have to make sure that your batter isn't sitting for too long. If you're trying to mix a lot of different colors in or else, your batter starts to break down and your macarons will not turn out, so kind of have to move quickly and then pipe them and let them dry and then bake them off.

**David Crabill:** [00:15:10] And I've seen some of the videos when you do this and it's all being hand done, you know, your hand creating it, the piping bag, but I was wondering, is it possible to use like a cookie cutter just to dump the batter into the cookie cutter and then lift that off? Have you tried that or is that not going to work?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:15:31] It ruins the, the feet of the macaron. I have tried a heart cookie cutter. And it actually limits when it's in the oven, the ability for your feet to rise or that the, the little ruffle at the bottom of the macaron

**David Crabill:** [00:15:50] So it takes, you know, a fair amount of dexterity to make these custom shapes, long story short.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:15:57] long story short, for sure.

**David Crabill:** [00:16:00] and you do a really good job. They're all very similar to each other, very consistent, which you know, is just a testament to how much time you've spent baking and making these desserts. Um, you talked a little bit. About using the French method. And I know there's, there's different methods for making macarons.

Can you explain like the French versus the Italian method and what the difference is.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:16:25] Of course. So there are three different methods that I am aware of. People use either a French meringue to make their macarons Italian meringue, or a Swiss meringue. And the French is what I just described. The Italian meringue is when you heat up a sugar syrup too about 118 Celsius. I think that's 244 Fahrenheit.

And then you pour this hot syrup into whipping egg whites to make this beautiful, shiny meringue, it's definitely a more stable meringue that you make. With the Italian method. So people enjoy that. It's definitely what most bakeries use, because it's more stable and you can make a ton with the Italian method.

however, it takes longer and I feel like it's more efficient. Just pounding out those French meringue methods, but there's definitely, I feel like you're either on one side or the other and it's a debate. And then there's the Swiss method, which I've only tried once. But in theory, I love the idea of it.

You just over a double boiler, you have your egg, whites and sugar, you whisk until all that sugar is dissolved and it flows off of the whisk you don't develop any type of peak, but you just kind of whisk it to dissolve the sugar, foam it up a bit, and then you put it on the stand mixer whip up. And I guess that's supposed to create a more stable meringue than a French meringue. Does that make sense?

**David Crabill:** [00:18:02] Interesting. Yeah. And I actually, this isn't on the topic of macarons, but, as we were talking about meringues, there's also very common in the industry trying to make Swiss meringue, butter creams, Italian, meringue butter creams. I don't think I've heard of a French meringue buttercream, but it probably exists. So are these all the same techniques that are being used, but just adding butter for those types of frosting?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:18:27] Yes. And because the French method is not pasteurizing anything. Whereas with the Italian method, you're heating up this sugar syrup and it ends up pasteurizing the egg whites, and then with Swiss meringue buttercream, you know, you're on the double boiler till it reaches a pasteurized point.

Because macarons, you don't have to worry so much about the temperature because you're baking it later. But for the buttercream, you know, you're pasteurizing those egg whites, whereas French, you don't. So I don't think there is a French meringue butter cream

**David Crabill:** [00:18:59] That makes sense. I mean, or it would have to be refrigerated.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:19:03] exactly. Yeah.

**David Crabill:** [00:19:05] Okay. So, what would you say for somebody who's interested in getting into macarons or selling macarons? Whatever advice you have for somebody who wants to get into this kind of French pastry world?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:19:18] the number one way to improve with macarons is to just go through all your trials, practice, practice, practice. Because as much as you watch videos, you try to find the best recipe or you pay \$300 for someone's fool proof recipe. You're still gonna have issues because you have to adapt for your own environment.

So getting a recipe, trying it out at least seven times. And if you don't see improvement switching to a different recipe, it took me as much as all my pastry school, me and being in restaurants, switching to a home kitchen is so much different. I couldn't use my recipes from pastry school in my home oven. So, you know, I went through a year of trials and trying to get down exactly how I wanted my macarons to be like out of my home oven.

**David Crabill:** [00:20:17] And you mentioned that you had some kind of product loss because it's finicky. Do you still have issues or, or do you make them perfect every time nowadays?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:20:29] Ha. I still have issues. And I hate to say that, but I do. I never want people to think like, you'll hit this perfect spot and never will a macaron fool you again, but they are, they are divas of the cookie world and they will still get you. and sometimes. It's like, you know, just that it's raining outside and they all crack because of the humidity. It's, it's a fun world, the macaron world, because you're always on your toes.

**David Crabill:** [00:21:03] So let's transition into the selling side of things. Um, you know, you started to sell at the farmer's markets and, um, let's start there. What did you learn through selling at the markets?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:21:15] I learned specifically that. There might be farmer's markets that are good for you. And there might be some that don't fit your product and being able to realize it's not your product. You might just need a different audience. So that was a big thing to learn. I was at an amazing farmer's market. It was a lot of kids though.

They would come after school. It was Wednesdays at 3:00 PM. so kids would buy the birthday cake macarons and you know, you kind of have to tailor to your audience and. Be able to adapt from what you wanted.

I am big on flavors. I always want to experiment with flavors. And once I started a farmer's market, I realized that my customer base there did not appreciate it as much as I did. So I had to adapt and make sure I had those customer favorites all the time. Um,

**David Crabill:** [00:22:17] Customer favorites. Like what.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:22:19] Like cookies and cream and birthday cake macarons and chocolate Carmel, you know, basic ones that are big crowd pleasers or just plain vanilla.

Whereas I'm here, you know, doing way too many components, like a composed pastry dish at a restaurant into a macarons and no one's purchasing it, you know? So trying to not getting stuck on your own. desires or what you prefer and really tailoring to your audience is something I had to learn at my farmer's market.

Once I did that, my sales went double it was easier for me too and cost less. So it worked out.

**David Crabill:** [00:23:04] Listening to your audience always pays off.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:23:08] Yes, it really does.

**David Crabill:** [00:23:09] And when you started your business, I saw you were making some pretty elaborate, sugar cookies, decorated sugar cookies. You were making custom cakes and did you start your business thinking it would look different than it ended up looking after a couple of years?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:23:25] So much so. I don't like doing cakes. So I, in the beginning just wanted to get as many customers as possible and would say yes to everything. With that, I learned how much I do dislike cakes and sugar cookies and all those things.

So it was a learning process for me as I took these orders. And then you realize that. If you're not enjoying it, it's not worth your time.

**David Crabill:** [00:23:52] So do you think that the transition to macarons was just your own personal interest and not customer driven?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:24:01] to some extent. When I stopped making cakes and everything, that was my own, choice. But having everything be macarons on my feed is definitely because that's what social media wants. So that part has limited me actually, and kind of cornered me into macarons. Which I love macs don't get me wrong, but I didn't name myself Nicole's Macarons for a reason, you know, I'm Bake Toujours and I like to bake all the time and lots of different things, mostly French pastries. So it has been also social media cornering me in and liking mostly macarons on my feed. So I have focused on that. So that's definitely driven. My YouTube channel. And that's mostly what I do on there for now.

**David Crabill:** [00:24:56] So earlier, you were talking about the good side of social media being that it pushes people to be more creative, but so it sounds like the bad side of social media is that. They can push you into just one niche when you want to do much more with your business.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:25:10] A hundred percent. Yes.

**David Crabill:** [00:25:13] Interesting. I don't know if I've heard anyone put it quite that way, Um, so getting back to your business, you, you were doing the markets. But were you also doing custom orders of macarons and, and, and things like events.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:25:32] Yes. So I took a lot less custom orders once I started the regular production of a farmer's market, but I did do custom orders and I would do weddings here and there, or just birthday parties, custom orders for birthday parties. I try not to take too many per week as I tried to keep a part time hourly work week because I have two kids.

But. I love doing custom orders too, because it's just so fun to be able to tailor it to an event and have it If you get a picture of a dessert table with everything all together, it's just one of the biggest, it's very exciting for me. I'm nerding out on that.

**David Crabill:** [00:26:17] Wait. So I often hear about people who start at the farmer's market or a generic event, and then kind of move to the custom route. But. You're saying that you sort of dropped a lot of the custom stuff when you started doing the market. So were you making more money through the markets than you could through just custom orders?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:26:39] I think so, because I was doing regular production. I like to put a lot of effort into one thing at once and I don't multitask well, if that makes sense.

So having a lot of custom orders in one week together would make me feel guilty that I wasn't fully focusing on the other order. So once I was doing regular production And then being able to do like one custom order a week. That helped me actually, which is, I know it sounds weird, but it helped me make more money all in all. Cause I was able to make more without being stressed about the custom orders.

**David Crabill:** [00:27:20] One of the challenges I would think about the markets is the shelf life of your macarons and having to make enough for the market and there's always going to be variations in how much anyone buys at a given market. Can you talk a little bit about how you prepared for a market, how much you made, were you able to guess how much people were going to, buy at any given market on any given week?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:27:46] Yeah, it was pretty consistent. Unless there was a holiday or something where the schools were out Like a Thanksgiving break time, not as many families would come out to the market. It really depended. And if it was raining, Oh goodness. In California, if it's raining or Southern California, at least, no one's coming to the market.

So, I would definitely tailor it to the weather and do less for holidays, which sounds. sort of counterintuitive, but that was what I learned at this specific market. I would sell about 13 dozen macarons. and sometimes it would be as low as like seven dozen and that was, you know, I would keep most of my macarons and products in a chest freezer. And then usually I could actually keep those and they wouldn't lose their shelf life because it's still cold. I'm not having it out in the sun or anything. And I could keep it for one more market if it was a really bad selling week, but I would definitely have to try every step of the way, try my macarons, make sure they're up to par, but they were able to be saved and frozen.

**David Crabill:** [00:29:02] And so were you freezing all of your macarons before a market?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:29:07] Yes. So macarons freeze great. I wouldn't freeze my croissants or anything. But yeah, that is what we did in. Restaurants as well. And it's a really great way to keep them keep their shelf life and not have to worry so much about losing all your product.

**David Crabill:** [00:29:26] Yeah, of course. And how long do they keep frozen?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:29:30] I've tried them a few months later and they're fine, but I would do as a rule of thumb of just if they've gone out once before the second time I would not, they were ours to eat. After that, but if they, if it was leftovers in the freezer, I mean, macarons can keep for three months and still have a nice bite if you have a good seal on your freezer.

But if you're going in and out, I would not do it more than once and like out to a market and back in, if that makes sense

**David Crabill:** [00:30:04] Yeah, cause you're defrosting it partially and freezing it again. And what about the packaging when you're putting them into the freezer? Do you try to minimize the amount of air that's around the macarons?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:30:16] I would just put like a big Rubbermaid Tupperware. I'd put them all in there. Each flavor would have its own Tupperware and then air tight container. And then you put them in the freezer.

**David Crabill:** [00:30:30] Yeah, it's a pretty simple, and they're not like trying to stick to each other or anything after being in the freezer.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:30:36] they do really well. Even with Royal icing designs or, if I were to do Airbrushing, even that sticks pretty well, and it doesn't when it, you have to temper them out of the freezer, into the fridge refrigerator. So it doesn't sweat and make condensation.

That's an important part. But other than that, freezing macarons. They are one of the best pastry to freeze and keep well with their shelf life and not destroy the product.

**David Crabill:** [00:31:07] Hmm. And were you trying any kind of custom decorated macarons at the markets or did you try them at a, like a marked up price?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:31:19] Because most of my audience were children there. I did not Mark up the price, but I did do Easter bunnies for holidays. I would do. A fun shape. I did bees around earth day and did like lavender honey flavored. I would do fun things and usually it coincided with a collaboration on Instagram. So I would do something more exciting. Use it as content as well as sell.

**David Crabill:** [00:31:50] Hmm. So, yeah, I mean,

**Nicole Barry:** [00:31:55] They should have been priced higher.

**David Crabill:** [00:31:58] I can imagine they probably took a lot longer to make right.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:32:01] So much longer. And like I said before, I really had a difficult time raising prices, or pricing properly. And I get a lot of crap for that from my loved ones. that's why I like YouTube because I don't have to get paid through actual people. I get paid through a company and it feels like less true obtrusive? I don't even know. Business is something that I am learning and it's hard for me to. Make money. I don't. Does that even make sense?

**David Crabill:** [00:32:41] Yeah, no, no. You, you prefer the indirect monetization model instead of the direct monetization model. You, you struggle with the, um, You know, asking too much. I mean, as you raise your prices, you're going to be getting some pushback from that. But then again, you know, I think it's also important to realize that the money that you're charging is what supports your business and keeps it moving. And if, if it can encourage you to. Stay in business and do more of it then, you're doing a service to your customers, right? By, you know, giving you an incentive to keep on going or make those special designs or whatever, if that's what your customers demand.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:33:24] Absolutely. There is this future dream of mine to have a small niche bakery, very, very small, maybe even like a window, like a food truck or something. I don't want it to be a full fledged bakery cause that's just another baby in itself. But I feel like maybe having more direct payment of rent and all those types of things will really help me see how much this is important and helps me run. But as a cottage food business, I think was harder for me to price my products out higher because I'm like, Oh, I'm not having that overhead even though you are. And you're using all that electricity and water for all those dishes, but not seeing it in a paper, I think deterred me from charging more.

**David Crabill:** [00:34:13] Yeah. Some of the fixed costs versus the variable costs, some of those fixed costs are hidden until the end of the year when you do your taxes, right?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:34:21] Yes.

**David Crabill:** [00:34:22] Yeah. Um, but when you were doing the custom orders, I don't know if you did any custom shaped or decorated macaron orders. Were you charging more for your products for those.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:34:37] Yes. I would charge \$24 for regular macarons for a dozen. If they were custom ordered, it would be \$30 a dozen. Starting at, depending on what else they would put, it might be a little bit more for dipping the macaron and chocolate or so I definitely would for custom orders charge more, but the farmer's market stayed pretty flat and equal.

**David Crabill:** [00:35:04] That doesn't seem like that big of a markup though, right? Not for the amount of time it takes to decorate these items. Um, did you try to charge more or did you just never explore that Avenue?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:35:19] I, don't think I tried.

**David Crabill:** [00:35:22] You could have, I know in Pasadena you could have charged \$4 each for your custom decorated macarons, at least.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:35:31] Yeah. So my market was in Altadena and it was right across from Pasadena, but there was a lot of people that used, government assistance for their fruit and stuff like that. So it wasn't like a high end farmer's market in the area I was at.

**David Crabill:** [00:35:50] Yeah, I can understand why that would make it hard. I don't know what you're going to do in Oregon, but, uh, if you start to sell them, you might consider raising your prices a little bit.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:36:02] I think that's a good idea.

**David Crabill:** [00:36:05] Um, so can you talk a little bit about the process of. Making your macarons, you know what what's like the start to finish process. And then when you have, um, customization, like if you're, I know you're sometimes customizing even the colors, multiple colors in a macaron. How does that add to the, the timing and the process?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:36:30] Yeah. So if you're doing multiple colors, you use multiple piping bags and just more product in general and less yield of the batter because it's, if you want like a swirled macarons, you're going to get a little bit of batter left, stuck in one piping bag and one in the other, and you just get a little bit less yield.

So I would charge for. You know, multiple colors a little bit more. If you do like gold leaf, that was more, you know, everything could add up. If you're doing airbrushing a specific design, I have a silhouette, which is like a cricket. And, you know, I'd make my own stencils and then airbrush whatever design they want on there.

And that just all takes time and also produces more waste because you screw up on a few to do a couple of testers. And so that would all just be an extra, you know, usually each additional customization was about \$2 to \$5 more.

**David Crabill:** [00:37:37] \$2 to \$5 more? per dozen? I assume?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:37:42] Per dozen. Yeah, not per, not per macaron.

**David Crabill:** [00:37:47] Of course. Um, where do you source your ingredients and in particular, your egg whites?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:37:54] I would go to Restaurant Depot. They would have liquid egg whites in a carton, and I would use a combination of liquid egg whites, and then regular eggs. So there was less yolk waste. And then yeah, sometimes I would get my eggs at Costco as well, the whole eggs, because you can get a lot for a very good deal.

The regular grocery stores, I feel like we're not my best friend with cost efficiency. So I would do the bigger stores like Costco or Restaurant Depot for most of my products. Or Amazon was a great place for my almond flour.

**David Crabill:** [00:38:40] and do you use any kind of like dried egg whites?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:38:44] I do, I do use dried egg whites. I would just get those on Amazon as well.

**David Crabill:** [00:38:50] So you said that you were making like a. 13 dozen macarons for a market. And you said you were in a 700 square foot home. I believe. How much were you baking at the height of your business?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:39:06] I would bring about 230 macarons to the farmer's market. or I would make about 230 a week.

**David Crabill:** [00:39:17] And was that difficult for you to produce in your little home kitchen?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:39:22] It was only because I only had about three hours a day to work, because that was the only window that both of my kids were at school. My daughter was in preschool and my son was in kindergarten. So I only had a window of three hours that she was at school. So it was a little bit difficult in the sense of balancing that. But just because of time limitations, but space wise, it would have been, it was fine

**David Crabill:** [00:39:53] So a lot of people ask me, they say, you know, I don't know if I have enough time to do this business. or they have a family like you, do. They have kids take care of? I mean, I have a little one, just over one year old. And he's, uh, you know, when he's not being taken care of by grandparents or my wife, he, he's definitely a lot to handle.

But it sounds like you, weren't putting a ton of time into this business and you still had a fairly lucrative business. I mean, a side business. Right. so what would you recommend for someone who doesn't. Maybe it's somebody who has kids, a mom or somebody who it doesn't feel like they have enough time to make a cottage food business work.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:40:33] Yeah, I think it's all about what you value. So as a mom, I wasn't getting everything fulfilled. I needed to work, but I couldn't go out of the home at that time.

Just, I didn't want to, at least I should say I didn't want all my paycheck to go directly to childcare. I just didn't think it was worth it.

But I did need a little flexibility and something, an outlet to keep my skill set up because I know I want to work out of the home again. But at this time, it just wasn't the right fit. So I would say it's definitely worth your time. If you are wanting to stay sane, if that's going to help you in a therapeutic way and being able to produce, you know, some type of financial, monthly income. It might not be a ton when you're doing cottage food business part time. Like I was, but it could definitely be worth it if you need it mentally is what I'm trying to say, I feel like you can definitely put out a lot, if you can focus full, your full time job is your cottage food business. Then you could definitely hit those marks. I think in California, what it's \$50,000 a year now that you can make okay.

But here it's only \$20,000, but I was never even near that because I was only doing part time. And, um, you just kind of have to have the mindset of it can be as lucrative as I put into it, and just having that mindset and that expectation there already. Setting those expectations, helped me just know that this is helping the long future goal. Does that make sense?

**David Crabill:** [00:42:19] Yeah, definitely. Um, yeah, we talked a little bit about it earlier, but can you expand a little bit on what you have done to market yourself through social media and what you've found has worked well?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:42:35] Yes. I actually have a friend in Facebook and she had, they get credits. So she promoted one of my posts on social media and on Instagram. And it really did help. I never wanted to pay for promotion and it might not be the thing for everybody, but it helped target the audience to local orders and it increased my local orders, a good amount. So that was great.

Also just doing, getting your name out there doing collaborations and being present on social media. It takes a ton of time and it can be overwhelming, but it does help.

But yeah, I think being a part of the community and being a valued part of it helps your name, get out there and increases your ability to make a profit.

And I mean, now I have an Amazon storefront. Which, you know, I get an income from monthly, as well as the YouTube channel and different sponsors that you can get from businesses that you can get a commission from sales that you make. So there's all of that too involved with once you get a big, bigger base on social media.

**David Crabill:** [00:43:56] Yeah. And a lot of those are probably coming through the videos that you're doing, right. Not so much from the, macaron business.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:44:03] Yes. Yeah. Those are from just social media. Yeah. You're right.

**David Crabill:** [00:44:09] uh, I don't know too many cottage food businesses that have successfully leveraged something like an Amazon storefront for affiliate commissions. Unless they transitioned to teaching some of their skills, which you have done, quite successfully. I

know it's still a relatively new channel on YouTube, but yeah, I've, I've watched a few of the videos and they are extremely impressive production quality. I'm actually blown away by the amount of time you must put, or your husband must put into making these videos, talk about how you started your, um, your YouTube channel and how you decided to start doing that? And, um, some of what you've learned in the process of kind of putting yourself out there as a, as an expert and as a teacher,

**Nicole Barry:** [00:44:56] Yeah. So ever since we knew we were going to move and I was going to lose that customer base, we put attention to online content. So we could hopefully have some type of income. It was kind of a pipe dream because it's not that easy to make money on YouTube, but, we put a lot of money into it. We got a nice camera, some good studio lights and a microphone.

I don't think that's what you need when you're first starting out. But, my husband is already into photography, so it was a good, a good compromise of being able to get some nice things and also say it was for the business and, you know, Strive to make money off of it. So it's worked out really well. Um, we were inspired by vloggers and, how cool their camera work is. And, you know, they take you everywhere and we kind of wanted to give that sense into the baking world, because we hadn't seen that before. It's mostly, you know, we've gone a little bit away from it just because viewers tend to like the more tutorial style, but the vlogging is kind of how we started and wanted it to be.

So hopefully we can go back to a couple of those a week and then, a couple of those a month, my apologies, and then maybe more of a tutorial style once a week,

**David Crabill:** [00:46:20] And wait, what's the difference between the vlogging style and the tutorial style.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:46:25] so vlogging is more like there's a camera and the bowl, or I take you to the grocery store with me, those kinds of things. whereas the tutorial style is more me standing in front of the camera and giving you only that one point of view as I describe how to make those macarons.

**David Crabill:** [00:46:45] Got it. And what is it taking for you to produce a video? Like how much time do one of these higher production videos take.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:46:55] They take a very long time. It's a whole night of filming and then the editing is another day. So it could take up to 16 hours.

**David Crabill:** [00:47:07] Yeah, I can believe it.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:47:09] Yeah.

**David Crabill:** [00:47:10] I've done a little bit of video editing in my time and, uh, I know it takes forever. And it is hard to start a YouTube channel. I mean, there's so much on YouTube, right. Has it been better than you were expecting or has it been harder than you were expecting to get viewers? What's been the experience of just trying to get your name out there.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:47:32] It's definitely been harder than I expected. I thought followers on Instagram would translate to subscribers on YouTube. And it definitely doesn't. It's a whole another ball game that I had to learn and we've had to learn. I should include my husband because he's done a lot of research. And it's been fun to navigate through that because it's more personal in a sense that people start to know you. And they, like, I have a live every week or we try to do a live every week of just baking and hopefully people are baking in their home while they watch and they can ask questions.

And I just feel like we're building this relationship, even though I can't see them. And it just it's, especially during this pandemic, it has given me a social outlet that I don't have frequently besides my family. So it's been fun, but it has not translated into, I, I thought it would be easier, and I'm very naive, to get followers and to make money and it is not.

**David Crabill:** [00:48:40] Well, I do. I just looked at like you have about 9,000 subscribers, so that's, that's very impressive. But, uh, how long did it take to get to 9,000

**Nicole Barry:** [00:48:51] So we started in late August or September early September.

**David Crabill:** [00:48:56] of 2019?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:48:58] Yeah.

**David Crabill:** [00:49:00] And, but what was the progression like? Like how long did it take you to get to a thousand?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:49:04] So it was very difficult getting subscribers in the beginning. We actually paid for promotion on, on YouTube, and that got us up to a thousand in a few months. and. That helped a lot because once you get to a thousand, you can start live streaming. And that brings in a lot of new people as well. if we hadn't paid for promotion in the beginning, I think we'd still be probably at about 700. Cause there's a lot of great channels out there and a lot of great, Awesome quality videos that don't get any views because it's so over saturated, right? So, the promotion helped a lot and it was hard to pay for that. But it has helped now we're making money on YouTube. So we justified it through that.

**David Crabill:** [00:49:59] Well, I believe that 10,000 subscribers is another kind of magic number. And once you pass that, I feel like there are even more things that you can do, or maybe that just, it just propels you forward. So you're getting really close to that number.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:50:16] Yeah, that would, that would help. They pay so little. It took so long to get to like a hundred dollars, like two months, I think only a hundred dollars. And then you're talking 16 hours for one video, right. So it's just a lot of work and it can get really discouraging in the beginning.

But we already see an increase in income monthly now, so we're hoping. You know, if we stick it out and be consistent, it can give me some type of income while we're in this, in between stage and not selling my product as much.

**David Crabill:** [00:50:53] Well, yeah, and I think one of the differences with you is that the production quality of these videos is so high and so good. And you're very good on camera. very well edited. That I think that's really helped you just move up because starting YouTube channels is extremely difficult, but it's been less than a year now.

And I'm looking at your YouTube channel right now and it looks like your most popular, like Macaron 101 class. Or Macaron 101 video has 117,000 views. So that's, that's quite a lot. And, uh, I don't think your results are typical, but the difference is that you are a true expert in your field and you are putting a lot of time into the production quality of this.

And I know that, you're on your way up. I mean, maybe you haven't made a lot of money yet, but, uh, I'm pretty sure you will pretty soon.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:51:46] Well, thank you for your confidence. It would be nice. I mean, it's not the goal right now, but it would be nice just to be sustainable for, you know, as someone who was making \$8 an hour in the kitchen, you know, in the restaurant business, it's just, I've never in the food industry, you don't make a ton. So I'm not looking to be rich.

You, I don't think anyone does in the food industry. I just want to be able to support and help my family. And it feels nice to be able to do so. So cross our fingers

**David Crabill:** [00:52:26] I guess what I'm saying is that you're doing all the right things. You're putting all the right pieces in place. You just have to give it a little more time.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:52:33] Yeah, patience, right?

**David Crabill:** [00:52:36] Yeah, it's a slow, slow growth process. Um, well, to get back to the cottage food business, I just wanted to know if there were any times during the last few years that are particularly memorable, any stories or things you've been a part of that come to mind as like fun, fun memories from your time in California, running your business.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:52:59] There really are so many, especially because this job, you know, cottage food business. It just made me feel whole while I was, you know, having small children and being a part of the farmer's market community is one of the best things that I've experienced the whole time I was in California. I don't know, there's something about community that is one of the most important things to me and helps gives you so much satisfaction.

**David Crabill:** [00:53:32] It sounds like your business was very fruitful and hopefully as you transitioned to Oregon and then maybe somewhere else later, you can get back to that, uh, community and selling out at the market again. But anyway, Nicole, we have been talking for quite some time. How can people reach out to you?

**Nicole Barry:** [00:53:54] I have a website that I need to update, but it does have my contact information. My website gives my Gmail account, my business account. They can message me on [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#). I've got lots of different places that they can get ahold of me. You can send a direct inquiry on my website as well, [baketoujours.com](http://baketoujours.com).

**David Crabill:** [00:54:38] Perfect. So [baketoujours.com](http://baketoujours.com) and yeah, you have at the bottom, links to everything the YouTube, the Instagram and certainly people are going to want to check those out because you have some impressive work on display there. Um, but thank you so Nicole for coming on the show. It's been a pleasure.

**Nicole Barry:** [00:54:57] Thank you.

**David Crabill:** [00:55:00] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. Nicole's macarons are super impressive, so you'll definitely want to check out the photos on her [Instagram page](#), as well as her [amazing YouTube videos](#), where she shares a lot of great advice.

If you are thinking about selling macarons or starting any kind of cottage food business, head on over to [forrager.com](http://forrager.com) to [check out your state's cottage food law](#).

For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/17](http://forrager.com/podcast/17). Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.