

# Chris Martin with bakernobakery

**David Crabill:** Welcome to the Forrager Podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I am talking with Chris Martin.

But first I wanna talk about your cottage food business website. I recently researched all of the free website builders out there, and I found that the best one for cottage food businesses is Square online. So I created a brand new free tutorial that walks you through the steps you need to take to build a nice and powerful e-commerce website for your cottage food business for free.

You might be thinking, what's the catch? There isn't One Square Online is a really incredible tool that I personally use for my own business, and I'm constantly amazed that cottage food entrepreneurs still use other website builders like Wix, Squarespace, and GoDaddy. So if you wanna learn more, you can watch my free tutorial by going to [forrager.com/website](http://forrager.com/website)

Alright, so I have Chris Martin on the show today. She lives in Charlottesville, Virginia and sells Latin American baked goods with her cottage food business bakernobakery. Chris has been selling baked goods since she was in high school, which led her to culinary school and eventually working for some of the best chefs in the country.

While working at a high-end hotel and restaurant, she started selling her own French pastries on the side just for fun, and they eventually became so popular that she quit her career in fine dining to focus solely on her cottage food bakery. But a couple of years later when her business was booming, she completely pivoted to selling Latin American baked goods instead.

In many ways, she had to start over, but after only a year or two, she was able to rebuild her business back to the same levels before. In this episode, Chris shares how she used grants to raise money for her bakery, how she built a dream kitchen in her basement, and many of the ups and downs in her business journey. And with that, let's jump right into this episode.

Welcome to the show, Chris. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:05] **Chris Martin:** Hi. I am so happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

[00:02:09] **David Crabill:** Well, Chris, can you take me way back to the beginning of your journey? How did it all get started?

[00:02:15] **Chris Martin:** It all started in high school when I really started having an interest in cooking professionally. I had always grown up with food around me. My dad was the cook in the house and really loved William Sonoma, like the, all, the whole line of cookbooks and Alton Brown specifically.

I grew up in that generation of food network like kids. So it's been long brewing in me to want to cook professionally and to want to be a chef or a pastry chef in this case.

[00:02:43] **David Crabill:** What do you think inspired you to start selling way back in high school?

[00:02:48] **Chris Martin:** Yeah, I really wanted to be my own boss and have independence and own a business and just be in charge. And so starting with cakes and the royal icing cookies in high school really opened me up to being able to get into the industry and cook and bake professionally. They weren't great, that's for sure.

But it was really fun and I'm really grateful for the folks who gave me that opportunity to try at that age.

[00:03:16] **David Crabill:** Well, a lot of people do start selling when they're that young, but a lot of them don't carry it forward. So what was your next step into the food world?

[00:03:26] **Chris Martin:** Yeah. My next step was looking at pastry programs and I applied at Johnson and Wales, got in and I did two years of baking and pastry and got the associates. And during that time I did two internships, one at Manresa in California my freshman year and then the other at Grace my sophomore year.

[00:03:45] **David Crabill:** I saw you mentioned somewhere that you had an interesting story about how you got into one of those internships. Can you share that?

[00:03:55] **Chris Martin:** getting into that level of restaurant was kind of mind boggling that had even happened. And I didn't really have any cooking

experience going into school. Like I had scooped ice cream and I had made lattes, but I really hadn't like, cooked professionally.

So my freshman year I tweeted Chef David Kinch, that I would peel a thousand potatoes to intern at his restaurants when I was looking for internships. And he actually responded and sent me a DM and asked me to send a resume, to send an email. And I did and I ended up going in and I. It went well.

I got an internship. It was totally bonkers. 'cause yeah, I'd only really, I did have a job in a restaurant, but I was food running. Like I had worked one shift on as a fry cook and they were like, I don't know. And I was like, that's fine, I'll just do front of house. It's okay. And I ended up getting an internship at Manresa and it was incredible.

Like I learned so much and they were so kind and it was, it totally changed my life. And there I was able to make a connection to Chef Mitch who had spent time and worked at Grace in Chicago. And so that was my connection into the [00:05:00] Chicago restaurant scene and was able to do an internship there for two and a half, three months over the summer as well, the following year.

[00:05:07] **David Crabill:** Was it overwhelming when you stepped into that kind of kitchen environment for the first time?

[00:05:13] **Chris Martin:** Oh God, it was terrifying and I didn't even, like, I was so afraid to even say hello to anybody walking in, like just to even exist in the space with any of those cooks. At that point I was so green. I was like 18 and 19 like so, so, so green. It was crazy. I was so scared and luckily they were so kind and so patient even though I was just a squirrel and so shaky and so nervous almost all the time.

[00:05:40] **David Crabill:** Is that like your personality, that, like, I know it's a super intense environment. Like is that, do you have that intensity in you? Or was it really uncomfortable to be in the kitchen?

[00:05:51] **Chris Martin:** I have that intensity in me for sure. Like I want to. Succeed and do well and basically focus and I am really an intense person. I like to really dig into projects and learn throughout that. Like I am really committed to learning through experience. So being in those kitchens, even though I was so nervous and so shaky to be able to have their patient guidance, it was the best, best environment for me to be able to have like that level of standard for execution and cleanliness and neatness.

It set the groundwork for my ability to execute essentially as a one person team with some part-time help here and there. Like without that base, I wouldn't be able to do what I do now.

[00:06:36] **David Crabill:** I'm actually a little surprised to hear that they're so kind and so helpful. 'cause I, I feel like I hear a horror story about how cutthroat it is in the kitchen. That wasn't your experience.

[00:06:48] **Chris Martin:** No, I, I feel like I landed into two kitchens that were unbelievably well run. And of course, like I got thrown off the line absolutely. But like, did I deserve it? a hundred percent. it's just one of those things where I was willing to be in those environments and also just was open to instruction and open and not saying other people weren't, but it's just like I really was able to thrive in those types of environments and my personality type and.

The fact that I was so green and had literally no habits to be able to learn all the habits from scratch enabled me to have a much easier time in those types of environments.

[00:07:28] **David Crabill:** So you moved from there to Chicago. Can you tell me a little more about your time working in Chicago?

[00:07:35] **Chris Martin:** Yeah, it was definitely turbulent. I finished up my associates and started my junior year to work on my bachelor's in entrepreneurship and I ended up moving to Chicago to take a job at Grace. And I was there for about six days until the restaurant closed and I had to scramble to find another job and ended up, like, I worked at Band of Bohemia for three months and that was really incredible because it was a chef's counter for pastry.

So working service, it's like also interacting with guests and also plating up a bunch of desserts and with an a la carte menu and a tasting menu and. It was a really incredible time. I started making chocolates there. They were really flexible and open to my idea to want to create and start something and do something, even though I literally was still so green, like in the grand scheme of things, like to have only had really, I worked at a catering company in Providence, so that was great to be able to get more.

Time in a kitchen professionally, So some of that was able to translate into Band of Emia, but it's like for me to start a chocolate program there and I was 20 uh, really had been working professionally for about a year, was ridiculous.

And I'm really grateful that they did because it's actually led to me having chocolate be involved with my career at multiple points. And I still do chocolates once or twice a year, the molded ones that are painted and all that stuff. But yeah, I was there for about three months until the pastry chef from Grace chef Natalie Saban, she was opening Pacific Standard time with Chef Erling and she wanted to bring me on that team And being able to work for Natalie and really get to understand her.

'cause she was at Grace for a long time and she worked for some pretty stellar chefs before then. So to be able to be on that team with her it was a really, really fun time to be doing. It wasn't necessarily turn and burn, but 450 covers, four 80 on like a Saturday.

I learned how to move and I learned how to prep and I learned how to do volume and also execute at the level that Natalie brought to the table was a phenomenal learning experience to actually, I that's, I was there for a little over a year and it was awesome.

[00:09:42] **David Crabill:** No, hold on you. You just glossed over a part there where you said you moved to Chicago to get a job and then six days later the restaurant closed. So was that just not a big deal to you at the time? I

[00:09:59] **Chris Martin:** It was the biggest heartbreak I've ever experienced in my life. But it's also one of those things where that storyline, as much as it impacted me as being like 20, just moving to a big city and really being like, this is my big break. You know, when I went through that, when I experienced that, and even up until I was like 25, I was like, ah, like just zoomed in on me in that story and so angry and so upset, and it's like.

There was so much more going on and like, I think in being an entrepreneur now and experiencing, I mean, after that restaurant closed, another restaurant closed on me and that's why I ended up leaving Chicago. But it's just like that was so much bigger of a thing for literally so many other people in that story.

Like I had the privilege of being able to put grace on my resume to be able to have connections from that, to be able to get opportunities from that. And I, as much as I would've wished to have been able to move Chicago and work there for as many years as I could have and learned as much and climb the ranks and learn all the different stations and pastry, like, I've really come to peace with the fact that that's not my arc.

that arc, that storyline that's, that's more about Chef Curtis Duffy and Michael Meuser and Amy Cordell and a lot of those, like, I mean so many other cooks and chefs in that arc had been in the restaurant for a long time, had families, had mortgages, had all these types of things weighing in on that and to be an entrepreneur now and look at it and see how hard it's to run a restaurant and like at that level with those margins, with that wine room, like it was really impactful for me as a young cook.

And it totally shapes why I do what I do today, but it's, for me, it's like now just ironed in as opposed to being something that I'm like, my life changed forever. Like it's, that wasn't about me. I was just there. And that's okay.

[00:11:51] **David Crabill:** Well, I, I can tell you've gotten over it, but it still sounds like it was a big part of your journey. How do you feel like it's affected you as you've moved forward and into now having your own business?

[00:12:06] **Chris Martin:** Oh man. I think, I mean, in the grand scheme, it really affected the way that I moved in other restaurants and the, the pedestal that I put that restaurant on, and wanting the places that I went to after that point, in like a naive way, expecting and hoping, and seeing in other restaurants that I worked at, hoping that that would be the same.

Environment . But everything is different and everything is, you know, it, it would be unfair to put those expectations on the restaurants that I worked in. But I still find myself leaning on those cleaning habits, leaning on the way that I'll set up the dish pit, leaning on like the memories of the grind and really so grateful that I had that time to be there and. Yeah, I still polish and shine my stainless steel table. Not as much as I should be, but really, you know, once or twice a year I really get into it, I only have one stainless surface. Everything else is wood, for working just 'cause it's all dough. But you know, It's really nice to polish the stainless steel manually and just get it real shiny and real smooth.

And there's a certain like meditation and peace that comes with that because it just reminds me of the time when everybody was all together and thinking, and I was just a baby in that room. But everybody was focused and executing and it was really beautiful to be a part of for sure. And it shines through in a few of the things that I like to do.

[00:13:20] **David Crabill:** You're throwing around a lot of names of restaurants and chefs and you know, some people might not be familiar with those, but these are super high-end fine dining restaurants, correct.



[00:13:31] **Chris Martin:** Yeah. Um, Three Michelin was Grace and Manresa, and then Band of Bohemian had a star and has since closed and then, yeah, I ended up doing three weeks at Bunny Bakery in Chicago before it closed. And that was owned and operated by someone who also had a Michelin Star restaurant operating.

So it's like a lot of my background is Michelin, like I wanted to submerge myself in these restaurants that were operating at the absolute highest level to be able to learn and absorb as much as I could from them.

[00:14:03] **David Crabill:** Yeah, it's interesting 'cause you know, you worked in these restaurants that catered to very wealthy people, and I saw that one thing you're passionate about doing today in your business is making your products affordable. So I wanted to ask about what you've brought from your previous experience into your business and what that contrast is like.

[00:14:25] **Chris Martin:** I think it gets into technique and refinement and efficiency as well. So being able to, like, I think the Concha is the best example for this. I did 14 different versions of it for r and d over the course of like about a month and a half. And I'm not Mexican. Like me, I'm my family, half my family is from Nicaragua.

So to be able to apply the same level of attention to detail and like intensity of ingredients and quality. To a in Charlottesville, which typically that type of embellishment is only applied to croissants and things in that European type of [00:15:00] housing. That's where I'm able to deliver on refinement and on elegance.

Even though, you know, the CIA and the stuff that I do can be more rustic, I really try to like to dial it in and aim for perfection across the board in whatever that looks like for said pastry. And really the ingredients to be able, I grow a lot of my own ingredients and all the eggs come from my backyard chickens.

And it's that level of quality that I'm able to create and put in myself. Like if I'm able to grow herbs and harvest them that day and then process 'em that day and then the next day they go on a pastry. Like on a torta, which is a, like a Spanish flatbread of sorts, you know, I'm able to, at a much lower price point, be able to bring a very similar level of ingredient quality without having to, go through Chef's warehouse or like, I do buy from a lot of local farmers, but you know, there's still a few days in between harvest and delivery and all that.

Like I can still try to focus on those fine dining, farm to table, et cetera, values and techniques and applications, but do it in my own way and cost it all out on my end to be able to still offer people like a \$2 cookie and also be able to, like, I've been getting a little bit more since I'm not doing the farmer's market anymore and focusing on popups and pre-orders.

To be able to offer something like a \$7 me Luna. That's like, you know, has some bells and whistles on it, but like, woo, \$7 pastry. I mean, Especially in Central Virginia, like we, it's, we're not in a major city to be able to, like I think it's pretty standard now for croissants to cost anywhere between five to even eight to \$9 if you're getting something that's fancier in a major city.

But in Central Virginia, like there's definitely a threshold for that

[00:16:37] **David Crabill:** So you, you had all this work experience in Chicago and then in Rhode Island. Where does your story go from there?

[00:16:45] **Chris Martin:** from Chicago. I ended up moving back to the Bay Area, hoping to just reset, kind of dig into some work and I was lurking on a restaurant opening that was going to happen in la and I really wanted to work under. one of my very most excellent and good friends from school. So I was like, okay, I'll camp out, I'll hang out in San Francisco for a little bit, I'll find some things to do and fill the time and come off of like you know, two restaurant clothes in Chicago and kind of like going through the wringer of it all.

I was like, ah, I, I wanna grind. So I did one day a week just interning, staging at Mensa Bread and then five days a week at Marad on their pastry prep team. So I was working an AM shift and then on Saturdays I volunteered my time to be able to go and help with the purchasing at the farmer's market.

And since I was really young, like I had really always romanticized the idea of San Francisco and the ferry building and the farmer's market and all of that. So to be able to live like that, to be able to go buy produce for the restaurant and get to know the farmers and like to do the thing and you know, get the little chef cart and see the Sioux from the Italian crown and be like, oh my gosh.

Like, it's just so crazy to have lived that and done that. I was working a lot, but it was worth it because I was living with my parents and I was sober at [00:18:00] that time and I was just like, okay, just crush, just go. And yeah, I really, really, really enjoyed that. And basically in January I had quit marad and by that time I had also developed a slight flour allergy.



So my time at Manresa Bread was shorter just because of the mill and it got in the air and I have really sensitive lungs. So working in a mill type of space with that much volume of flour was really not gonna be conducive to good health. But had quit marad and. Was like, all right, I'm gonna move to la.

Like, just to switch it up just to be in a new environment, learn some new skills. But then the pandemic hit in 2020 So I was still at my parents' house, got really, I was like really zen for a while doing some yoga hanging out two months passed and I was like, I really need to do something.

So I started working on a weekly, naturally leavened focused menu. It was small. It was like four or five items. All naturally loving because I couldn't find yeast in the store. And, I ended up buying flour wholesale through a local dim sum donut shop that I had gone to ever since I was a little kid.

So I'd really gotten to know them. So I was like, can I buy 50 pounds of flour from you And so they ended up linking me into their purveyor system. They would just sell it to me, a little bit higher. But I was able to push like 400 pounds of flour out of my parents' carpeted living room. And then, you know, the kitchen that didn't have carpet, but the majority of it, my folding and all of that was like, I had moved their dining room table away.

I had put in like, this metal table on the corner and I was like, I'm gonna do this here. Yeah, it was like over two months, 400 pounds of flour, six bread baskets, just like taking pre-orders, doing contactless delivery and pickup, like porch pickups from my parents' house. And it was crazy.

It was, you know, it's what I needed to do at that point. It was just like, at, that's when my costing started taking place and like I made a little bit of YouTube content. Like it was really good for me to be able to dig into that part of entrepreneurship.

[00:19:52] **David Crabill:** All right, so you kind of started your cottage food journey in California, but it sounds like that was pretty short-lived. What?

[00:20:00] What happened after that?

[00:20:01] **Chris Martin:** Pretty short-lived pretty, you know, below board. But you know, in the summertime of Covid, my Tia, my aunt Jackie And my mom were talking and did their little pots stirring thing and they're like, oh, Christina should come to Charlottesville, where my cousins and my generation had now moved and had opened their restaurant and were like, getting things moving.

They were also like, you know, in the transition of leaving Miami and having some other friends move out there, and they were like, Christina should come here because restaurants, California were still closed. I had quit my job, so I didn't qualify for unemployment. Like, it was just like, I ultimately really needed to do those popups at my parents' house, but like, what was I doing on, carpeted living room?

So me and my mom drove across the country in like June, 2020, I ended up losing my housing in Charlottesville. It was just like a Craigslist scam, which was fine, but we had all the travel books, so we just kept going.

And I ended up being able to secure a stage at the, in Little Washington. And so my mom and I, you know, are in a little Washington, about an hour away from Charlottesville. So we came in and we saw my cousin, we saw the restaurant. We're like cool, cool, cool. Let's see how this goes. Like, I was just trying to field a bunch of different stuff.

And the Inn was still open and I ended up getting a job there and then still kind of like doing some pop ups. I was living in R away from Kohl Pepper, so I worked at the Inn.

And then I got a two bedroom apartment. So in the second bedroom I bought my little 20 quart mixer and put in another little metal table and like was doing like Maybe, maybe 80 pieces out of like one of those tiny apartment ovens that like only fits like a half sheet pan, like two racks, two half sheets, that's all you get.

Not even like the three quarter sheet. It was just ridiculous. So I would be doing little popups and trying to figure out shipping and kind of just multitasking. Still a lot between like July, 2020 and up until February, 2021 when I was like, you know, I'm not, I'm gonna leave the inn. I'm gonna go, I'm gonna work for my cousins.

I'm gonna learn how to make gallo pinto in huge batches, which is like the rice and beans from Nicaragua and they were moving to a new location, a little bit bigger, scaling up in size. Like my ability to be able to do volume and be able to prep for them while also being able to use their space a bit to help build my business.

Took more shape. And that's when my uncle was like, you need an LLC. And I was like. You are right. And I got a business bank account, and did all the things. So February, 2021 was when I really got into a much more official type

of space of being able to get into QuickBooks and the business bank account and like opening up square and actually being able to like, operate a lot more officially and be able to have the space that could do much more in regards to volume than my tiny little oven.

and getting into the farmer's market and still working out of Gus, my cousin's restaurant in Charlottesville. And it just all snowballed from there. Like my volume got a little bit too big for their walk-in. And I was like, okay, okay, okay.

And then there was a period of time when I was like, okay, I'll have five jobs. I'll prepare for them in the morning. I'll start like, but before I prepare for them from like seven to three, I'll go to Plenty, which is a meal prep restaurant here. But I was able to rent space from them from 1:00 AM to 7:00 AM So I was like, okay, my day was plenty from 1:00 AM to 7:00 AM and then I'd go to Gujis and work from like eight to three.

And then I would go home and work on freelance articles to still try to fill in the blanks because I still like starting a business. And I was only working like 10 hours a week at my cousin's restaurant. Like just multitasking way too much, too many side hustles, delivering food.

And I did that for about a month until plenty got a lot more secured and my market took much more of a hold. So by the end of 2021, I think I only had two jobs like the freelance writing gig. It was crazy. But at the farmer's market at Charlottesville, I was still doing some of that, like naturally loving stuff, but mostly French pastry and more of like a brioche tart type of situation with donuts as well.

[00:23:56] **David Crabill:** You mentioned there that you bought a little 20 quart mixer and I don't feel like many people would consider 20 quarts to be little, but you bought that at the same time that you were working at the end at Little Washington and you didn't mention that the N is another three Michelin star restaurant and I feel like most people in that situation would just be happy working at the end.

So what do you think was causing you at this time to invest in equipment and try to start a business and pursue entrepreneurship even in the midst of having a successful career.

[00:24:34] **Chris Martin:** Oh man, I don't. No, I just love doing things. So I was like, well, it's fine. I'd just like to do a popup at the same time. And like seeing everybody that I knew in restaurants still in big cities. I mean, 'cause

being a little Washington is about like maybe an hour, hour and a half out of DC it is rural.

So it's like we were able to operate differently than people in big cities. So all my friends in big cities who were working in restaurants and then were no longer working at restaurants, we're still doing popups. And I was like, well, I still wanna do pop ups. I'm just gonna work too. It's more of like a workaholism type of situation as opposed to a uh, like a discontent situation.

and those products did really well in the market space in Charlottesville, so it was really good to be able to build that stability, at least like income wise to be able to buy and continue to scale and continue to grow. Until I ended up, I bought a house here and put a bakery in the basement and it's been just equipment hoarding since then, you know, fridges and a sheeter and applying for grants and getting funding and.

Like, 60 quart mixer and now I have a full speed rack size proofer sort of, it's the chickens and the garden and all of that. Like, plenty House me for about six months because I knew, I was like, okay, I have to be here and then I've gotta like, figure out something solid and open a brick and mortar.

I had some money in savings from living with my parents and I was like I don't know how to do a brick and mortar with the way that the world works now. It's insane to me personally, like for people who are able to pull that off and like to make it happen. It's so beyond wild to me to be able to.

Get it all together and open to the public and manage the staff and do all those things. I was like, I need to be able to invest and put my money into like a roof over my head.

so I was like priority number one, place to live, priority number two, that place needs to have enough space in the electrical panel to be able to host all the equipment that I need to be able to do.

And I cannot believe the house that I was able to get. Like it's, it's just such a privilege and such, I'm so incredibly grateful to be able to have this space and this stability. especially right now, to be able to have a place to live and have a place to do business and be able to scale up and scale down as like the market, like the general market, not the farmer's market demands of my more niche Latin pastries now.

And like, I'm just so grateful to be able to, to be able to live. It's crazy.

[00:26:58] **David Crabill:** So, Virginia actually has a couple cottage food laws. They have sort of their basic law and then they have theirs, like home food processing law. Are you falling under, I assume, like the home food processing law, or do you actually like getting your kitchen inspected as a commercial kitchen?

[00:27:18] **Chris Martin:** So I am, I guess I probably, it's the food processing. I haven't looked at my certificate in a. But I do have an inspector from the Department of Agriculture who, he'll inspect chicken farms and also inspect basically setups like mine.

This business model really thrives because I'm able to operate in Virginia, which the Department of Agriculture here is, I mean, in the grant scheme, pretty lax. We don't have income maximums. I'm able to do wholesale, do catering, do a bunch of different stuff within the realms of an inspected kitchen in Virginia.

[00:27:49] **Chris Martin:** So the way I have it set up down there. The inspector comes in, sees all the blue tape and the labeling and everything is like just, well, just like a restaurant essentially. I try to figure out how to get inspected by the health department and it's just like, it's basically impossible for what I do.

And there's some interesting mixed zoning things kind of happening in our small town, local government. And I'm just really trying to figure out how to be an example in that. Like I just got farm certified like two weeks ago. And being able to operate as an urban farm and I know it sounds scary to some people who are like, I, ugh, health department, I mean, LA did the home restaurant thing.

I'm like, I don't know, come take a look. Like, come look in my basement. It's completely commercial down there. Say for example, I don't have any aluminum on the walls, but that's more so like a financial barrier as opposed to like, I wish I had aluminum on the walls. Like, it's just a matter of getting it installed and making it happen.

[00:28:44] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean, I, I saw that you have some pretty intense. Equipment could you share a little bit more about like what kind of equipment you have in there?

[00:28:55] **Chris Martin:** So, a lot of it is grant funded and I got a lot of help from my [00:29:00] parents and my grandma to be able to have the funding to initially start it. And basically I have two long wooden tables. Well, one's an eight footer and one's a four footer. And I have a 20 quart unex and then a 30 quart refurbished tow bar.

She is a sparkly purple color and a 60 quart spiral mixer. And then I have the KitchenAid that I've had for a long time, The little four quart artisan and then I have the seven quart or the sixth quart, kinda like a residential commercial.

It's not the commercial one 'cause it doesn't have the orange cord. yeah, so that's like my little, my mixer setup. And then I have basically the full rack size proofre two convertible 21 cubic foot fridges. That one runs as a fridge and the one runs as a freezer right now. A commercial oven, A commercial dishwasher.

Because when I really thought about labor and operating at the volume that I was, which is anywhere between 200 to 700 pages a week to be doing the three bay sink thing, I was like, I'm literally, it's worth my time to. Have that commercial dishwasher. And I was doing so many donuts and also laminating a ton.

So I went in on a, I think it's the 15 inch tabletop sheeter that often is sold to pizza restaurants, but it can also work really well for laminating. It's not as gentle as like the big old sheer would be, but I just don't have space for that. and truck with two dehydrators just because I love being able to use my dehydrator to preserve fruit from the market that is just so ripe and it needs to be processed right away.

And it's like, okay, I can turn this into essentially a strawberry raisin that I semi dehydrate for this one cookie that I do. It just helps me process all the herbs in the garden as well. And most recently with the help of a grant I was able to get a freeze dryer from Costco, which is like my nerdiest laboratory investment yet for equipment.

And it's got so many, it can do so many things, and I'm just like, I'm gonna dry fruit and powder it. I'm gonna make a puree. I'm gonna put it in the freeze dryer and I'm gonna powder it. And I've just been able to, like, you can buy all the freeze dried fruits from Trader Joe's, but I can't get peaches.

I can't get this weird local variety of Japanese plums. Like me, I am able to dry and powder. And the reason is, I make a lot of flavored sugar cookies, which can be flavored with the powder or with extracts. for the, the concha topping is also really malleable with powdered ingredients for flavor.

So I'm like. If I can powder anything, I can basically create any flavor. It's just very, nerdy, and it really, I'm at the maximum capacity for equipment and it was like my special cherry on top investment that I didn't necessarily need. But I was like, I'm just gonna do it. I'm gonna do it.



I'm gonna get it and it's gonna be really fun. And so far it's like I have a few people who are just inquiring about being able to hire me or contract me to be able to freeze dry things for them. Not on like a prepper capacity, but like, similar to the capacity that I'm doing. So some buddies just, they're like, could you just, I've seen that garlic mustard that grows in your backyard and videos.

Can you harvest that this year and powder it for me and ship it to me? And I'm like, yeah, I dunno. I love side quests. Let's go. Like, it's really fun. But yeah, I just, It took me a long time to be able to get a Vitamix and a robot coupe. In the last grant that I got alongside the freeze dryer, I was like, it's time.

I had been using this poor Ninja blender forever, and it just kind of screamed a little bit, but it still works. And I was like, ah, there's just no way. So having a Vitamix and having just a robot coupe has been life changing.

[00:32:31] **David Crabill:** So you obviously have gotten a lot of your equipment through grants, but if you had had the money up front to invest in this equipment yourself,

Do you feel like with the sales you've made, you've already gotten to the point where you've made your money back on some of those investments?

[00:32:47] **Chris Martin:** Yeah, I basically used French donuts and pastry to break even on investments in my first year of like the sheeter and the dishwasher and like all those types of things, like on the p and Ls, like I need to be able to make that amount and It worked because I sold donuts.

Like donuts really made this whole thing happen, I think I only, I only had, I had a true cooler that died. But it was a true cooler. It was a 20 quart mixer. It was my two little KitchenAid, the dishwasher and the sheeter, and then grants. I started applying for grants locally and nationally and got some support.

So I was able to get the eight foot wooden table and the proofer and then replace the true cooler that died. And it's taken a long time to get where I'm at. Like, I bought the house in February, 2022 So over three years, like I've been able to finally have all the equipment that I want.

Like it's, it's good. It's done. I can, and that's why I also took a step back from the market 'because I was like, all right, I don't have to keep working too. keep buying equipment and I can maybe pay myself, but instead, actually, I think I'm gonna put a metal roof on the chickens and then build a water catchment thing.

So it's like, and now I bartend on the side because I'm like, well, I wanna keep doing cool stuff like the kitchen's done. But what about the garden? What about everything else? it's just, I'm fine with it, taking a long time to build something that's really cool as opposed to going just super deep into brick and mortar and super deep into operating a little bit more traditionally.

I feel like I'm able to do it more sustainably for myself and just for the environment in general to operate like in a home-based kitchen.

[00:34:21] **David Crabill:** You mentioned all the equipment that most people would carry. Are about, but I personally self fudge and what I'm jealous of is your guitar slicer.

[00:34:30] **Chris Martin:** Oh yeah. Oh, that was a gift. Let's talk about Paul. I love Paul. So we went to culinary school together. And he is a nerd like me where he wants to have just all the cool equipment and do all the cool stuff and like work on really fun stuff.

And he got this guitar and he was like. I really don't need this. Do you want this guitar? And I was like, I please. I'll do anything for the guitar. And he has actually been one of my biggest supporters over the years, even when I was cooking through the closures and everything, like he is really kept up with it all.

And the guitar is a gift for Paul. He is the best.

[00:35:05] **David Crabill:** So, You used grants to fund a lot of this equipment. Can you share a little more about what you did to get a grant?

[00:35:15] **Chris Martin:** when I started, I kept records of everything in Google. based on files, folders and everything. I just kept everything when I started my business, all the certificates, all the articles of everything, like. Keep all of it. And I luckily am a pretty solid writer.

So people would send me grants from the local SBDC or United Way or like the N-G-L-C-C, which is the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. The business gaze as I refer to them. They are amazing and incredibly supportive through them and United Way and CIC, which is like a local collaborative that supports small business and entrepreneurship.

And also the Chamber of Commerce here in Charlottesville has a bipoc wing of it. I've been really lucky to apply and take all those. Basically it's like you have to submit so much paperwork and you have to write essays. So it's like if you

keep records of all the essays and you keep records of all the paperwork, and it's just a matter of plugging it in and making sure that your writing is good enough.

And also under the word limit, which is mistakes that I've made in the past and applying to grants too many words. And that's, you know, swinging. You miss, like, it's, it's okay. Yeah, it takes time to really watch 'em. And right now, like I was really looking at this grant for urban farming in Virginia through like Virginia State universities.

And I mean it currently, I think too, right now, I think it is, it doesn't exist. And they were gonna do it, they did it last year and they're gonna do it again this year. And I was gonna use it to fund my chicken roof water catchment situation. But private grants are still around. I think I wanna keep my eyes open for the one from foods where they support [00:37:00] Hispanic entrepreneurs in the US and see, but it's like now the focus is on the farming and I actually really have to get much better at farming.

Like I'm a good gardener right now. But I think getting into much more cultivation and eliminating all the invasives on the property and the edge of the property. Like my house on two sides, borders, city land full of walnuts and tree of heaven. So it's like having to navigate the invasive vines, the kudzu, the wine, like there's wine berry Vines.

It's just, it's a whole journey. So it's like applying for grants is a really amazing way to get funding. And it's also like you have to look at each grant and see what. They want applicants and be able to see if your business actually does fit that or think about a new project that your business could do that you wanted to add on if you wanna open another can of worms for your business.

For me it's like the farm is the next step now that I have an urban farm. We're not getting super crazy but a little crazy. It's a journey. It's just documentation and keeping evidence of all the essays because you can rework and reuse essays and make sure that you're not like doing more work.

Because I feel like running a cottage food business and working all the time, mixing dough and doing all these things and yeah, the grants just take a while, but if you have the infrastructure and the backend on it and the record keeping, you'll be able to apply a lot more smoothly.

[00:38:19] **David Crabill:** Well, it takes a lot to just run a food business, but then on top of it, you've got the farm, you've got the garden, you've got the chickens. And I know those help, you know, with the food business, but they

still take a lot of time. What drives you to run a farm in addition to a food business?

[00:38:39] **Chris Martin:** Oh, it's just so nice to have fresh everything I mean, it's a way to cut costs if I'm not paying myself. But I have to, that's the next step, is really being able to figure out what a reasonable hourly rate or like salary would be to build into the cost of the ingredients that I get from the garden and the cost from the chickens.

Like the, I just kept, like in my costing. Recipes are still like whatever I was buying for 15 dozen eggs from like two years ago. Like, I just kept it there. because it just breaks down differently. That's like, you know, I just have to figure out what that value is. But currently it's like the way I'm able to, it's just my time that I'm investing, which does have value for sure.

Do I know what it is? Not really right now, but that's okay. Like it's all building and growing and compounding and just worth it to be able to work with such fresh things, the herbs, and to see it grow. And it's so beautiful. And like, a quarter of my revenue is the leches cakes, which I do like two or three layers. With the cake and the caramelized honey buttercream and jam that I make from fruits from farmers in the peak of all the seasons. And so you get those layers. But really like my skill set in cake decorating is not all the details and the piping, all those things.

It's like I'm able to grow a ton of edible flowers and use the cake as my base for more of a floral arrangement and like to do some abstract piping and fun stuff. like to have to purchase all the florals to be able to do something like that from local farms. It would be extremely cross prohibitive for myself and anybody to purchase them.

They would just be so much more expensive. But it's like if I grow it myself, like I can charge less than having to buy an artisanal, locally organic food grade bouquet at probably \$15 to \$20 a pop to decorate a cake. Like I've just got the zinnias outside. Any of the nias or pansies, violas, forage, all that type of stuff.

Erum, I'm able to use it at, like, I harvest it in the morning and then I put it on the cake six hours later. And I send little people away with little packages. If they cake is for the next day, it's like I use like more demo flowers 'cause I know they're gonna wilt in the fridge overnight and I give them a little box or a, a deli container with flowers to put in the fridge so that they can replace them so they have fresh flowers.

But it's like, it's only because I grow them and I see them and like, I think sometimes I think about how like a 50 count of pansies, if you're buying it from a purveyor is probably gonna be like 15, 20 bucks, maybe even more. Like, it just gets really expensive for floral because the refrigeration involved and like all that.

But I'm like, I'm not growing with pesticides. It's all food grade. I can sell my extras to restaurants to make money back.

but I wanna make beautiful things, and I wanna work with beautiful ingredients.

And to be able to keep that affordable for people who enable me to make beautiful things with beautiful ingredients, it involves growing it myself. And it just takes that time and takes that energy to be able to, to do it. But it's worth it.

[00:41:29] **David Crabill:** Well, given that everything that you grow is organic and you have truly free range eggs and you're using these items in your products? Do you charge a premium for that?

[00:41:42] **Chris Martin:** No, I suffer from that thing where they talk about like, there's four different types of entrepreneurs and one's like has a business concept that's like, destined to make money and like, is designed to make money and like to do all those things.

And like as long as I'm able to live, I can grow my own food to save money on groceries, save money on ingredient costs, save money on all that type of stuff, [00:42:00] and like pick up a job when I eat it here and there. 'cause people buying their little treats right now is definitely edging off. But I'm the entrepreneur who's like, I'm an artist and I wanna have fun and I need to be able to profit and I do profit and I focus on those types of things.

Like I've been profitable and every year I've been in business except for like the first one when I was on carpet and all that stuff. Well I guess, yeah, no, even 2021 it was profitable. 'cause I had a QuickBooks from January, 2021 on, but I don't know. I wanna have fun.

The chickens are like little crazy goofballs and they're just so fun.

And the eggs are just so good. even the farm eggs sometimes that I get, I'm just like, man, my eggs are so nice. Mostly because it was laid four days ago and the yolk is just so crazy. But I live a very manicured, pretty little life in my

backyard, and they eat many snacks and they get all the cuttings from the garden.

Like it's a closed loop system of the chickens. Produce, Produce the chicken manure, which then goes into the compost, which then can cycle back into the garden, and the [00:43:00] garden grows the cabbage and the cabbage feeds me and the crusty leaves at the bottom of the cabbage feeds the chickens.

And the chickens. They make the egg and then they also poop. Again, like it's just It takes time, but it's much more sustainable and I'm really not interested in charging a premium for it because it only, it just enriches my life so much to have that as my hobby and to be able to do it and be able to bring that value to my customers. I don't know. Life is expensive for all of us as it is, and I have liked the privilege of being able to own a home and have support from my parents when I needed to buy something like a commercial dishwasher, like to be able to volunteer my time. I like local organizations and nonprofits and like to give out advice and like to help mentor people who are starting and get things going.

I'm just not interested in becoming rich off of selling pastry. I also think it's impossible. Like I don't I severely doubt the ability, like anybody who's like, oh my gosh, mad at the seven croissants anywhere. It's like nobody's getting rich off a \$7 [00:44:00] croissant. I promise you, no matter what the inputs are, it's just not happening.

[00:44:05] **David Crabill:** Now, I know that your business today looks quite a lot different than what it looked like from the beginning. You'd mentioned that donuts carried you through. So what was that first year or two with your menu and what you were selling? What did that look like?

[00:44:20] **Chris Martin:** Yeah, so the first year or two it was, I would run two different menus because I didn't feel like the people in Charlottesville, if I had one menu on Saturday for the market and then another menu on Sunday at a popup, I, having the same menu wouldn't draw people. Like I had this thought in my mind, it was like, well, if I have two different menus, then I could even get the same customer two days in a row if they felt crazy, if they wanted to get crazy with it, and they were interested in what I was selling.

So I would do these really elaborate danishes, savory and sweet, and then, I'd have maybe one donut on Saturday, but then the brioche tarts and these cookies. And this thing that I call a caramel bun, which is basically like a sticky bun and



a morning bun had a baby, but it was glazed in like a sour cream mounted caramel glaze.

It was a journey. They're really good. I just haven't made them in a long time. It was just an opportunity to laminate more, and that sold really, really well. I was able to have, basically, my record days selling those types of pastries here in Charlottesville. Like people were really jazzed about them and really into them.

[00:45:21] **David Crabill:** Now, I know that you switched entirely to selling more Latin American, South American products, and it sounds like up to that point, your European baked goods or your French baked goods were doing really well.

[00:45:36] **Chris Martin:** doing incredibly.

[00:45:37] **David Crabill:** Yeah, and I feel like most entrepreneurs in that situation would just keep going. Like they wouldn't be like, Hey let's, let's start over, essentially.

So what inspired you to drop the French pastries and move entirely into the Latin American bakes?

[00:45:59] **Chris Martin:** Yeah, [00:46:00] that just boils down all into competition. Like Charlottesville had six or seven French bakeries and one square mile of downtown. And we're not a big place like you can get anywhere in like 15 to 20 minutes. Like to have that concentration competition was really stiff. Like every time any bakery would open, I would actually feel it in my sales for like the following months.

To be able, I'm like, oh, they opened and, you know, all my accounts that were pretty strategic. Nothing else has changed, like pretty solid economic growth in the city. Like I. All right. Like, I felt it, I felt, I felt that bakery. So in order to like not feel that I was like, I just have to do something different

and like to stand out and to like to make a difference in the baking community, if that makes any sense. I was like, I don't know. I wanna contribute something. I wanna work on something weird.

I just wanna do something fun. I wanna do something different. I wanna bring something different to this city, and everybody here is making croissants, so I'm gonna make artisanal pane. And it really opened up a huge can of worms in regards to really digging into my Nicaraguan heritage and that side of the

family. And like [00:47:00] really beginning to appreciate how delightful baking Latin baked goods can be and how much fun I could have with it by incorporating something like my own. Fine dining European like career background and being able to layer that into basically CHE and the Illa, which is like a Salvador and breakfast cake and like all these different types of things, like just focusing on Latino America. And what I'm doing is not new at all. Like it's in these big cities in Central America.

Like there are insane people, insanely talented people doing insanely cool things. And I am just excited to be a little part of that and be able to like. I'm not fluent in Spanish, but doing this has totally pushed me to continue to actually learn Spanish after years of being like, no, I'm gonna get fluent.

I'm gonna get fluent, I'm gonna do it. And it's like I grew up like I was little and I was fluent and like could speak it and then I lost it as I got older. And so it's really, I don't know, it's more of a personal project. It's not. It's not as profitable as I wish it could be. Like it took me two whole years to hit my [00:48:00] same sales record from European pastry when I was fresh and new in Charlottesville and nobody really knew who I was, but like the product from the table was like, oh yeah, I know what that is.

Like I can, I can do that. It took a lot more education and a lot more like honestly struggling to be able to sell Charlottesville and educate Charlottesville on the type of pastries that I was making. And I mean, you go to the conches at the racks in the Latin markets here and like our price points are entirely different 'cause I'm using local flour on the backyard eggs and like those types of things in line with most of the Europeans' price points.

But selling something that is only valued at like a dollar to a dollar 50 really to like Latino Hispanic people. So it's like, it's, it was weird. It's still, it's still strange, to find and be able to sell and be able to educate. What I do and luckily, like I've really been able to find some footing here in Charlottesville and people who really are excited about what I'm creating and excited about what I'm doing

[00:48:51] **David Crabill:** So obviously one of the most notable things about Charlottesville is that it's a college town. You know, you've got UVA, the University of Virginia there? So [00:49:00] does that affect your business in any way? Like, do you get orders from students there?

[00:49:05] **Chris Martin:** Yeah, I am able to cater to the university, which definitely has a different demographic than the broader unit of Charlottesville.

Like all the Spanish schools, they really support me. The LGBT groups on campus support me and a lot of them, like the Latina. college, undergrad groups and graduate groups, the lawyers, the architects, I get really fun orders and it's really, really, really incredible to be able to bring them bundles that say that it's still warm a lot of the time, like, and be like, aha.

Especially when they're in a town where sometimes bundles say they are coming from Baltimore, coming from Richmond and sat on a little bakery rack for like, two or three days before they were able to get to the store to buy their cia. Like bringing you a fresh, warm CIA to your classroom and you're, maybe you're from Houston or you're from New York, or you're from somewhere and you're like, oh my gosh, this is so crazy to be able to have something that's nostalgic and like from home.

So the university has been a really great customer for me. I'm in, I'm selling at their dining hall [00:50:00] as well through like a little convenience store. It's just a fun different side quest and it's consistent and it's easy to be able to prepare for it. My prep lists are all built out and I know exactly what I need to do at least a week in advance usually. And it makes it really easy for me to do my bartending gig at night. And it's so like, bartending is so fun, it's like my own little adventure. Like I miss restaurants a lot. I work alone the majority of the time. So to be able to be around people outside of my basement cave, I'm like, it's a merriment of all the things that I like to do.

But shout out to you, the University of Virginia

[00:50:33] **David Crabill:** So did you already know how to make these products from your childhood?

[00:50:38] **Chris Martin:** I mean, I had a pretty strong base and they're honestly not at all that insanely different. The Concha is actually way harder than you would think it to be. I ended up hanging out with my friend Josh from college who I was gonna end up hopefully working under and, COVID whatever, like Basically the only way to hang out with my friend Josh was to go. And work and hang out [00:51:00] with him there. So I ended up making Queen Emans and just showed him how to do that. ' And then he was like, oh yeah, we're gonna make the conchas.

And I, like, I made a concha for the first time with him and I had grown up eating them and seen them and all that stuff. But it was really cool to be able to make it and learn how to make it.

And, you know, I kinda like ruminate on that, sat on it for a little while and I was just like, ah. And I was talking to him and I was like, I think I'm just some swish Latin pastry.

[00:51:22] **Chris Martin:** Like, I'm just gonna do something different. I need to be able to stand out. I need to have something that brings something else to the table here. And he, I didn't wanna ask him for too much help in that creative process of working things out. Like I watch a ton of YouTube videos of like Mexican panaderos just deep in their production, just videos of them working in an actual Mexican bakery and just seeing what their techniques were and filling around with my end of the recipe because I didn't want him to think that I was like trying to steal his recipes, trying to like mooch off it.

Like we were both very supportive of each other and both really respectful of each other. So I was like, the last thing I want to do is feel like I'm just taking all this information from you. [00:52:00] And his experience and his just work ethic was a huge inspiration for me as I was restructuring what the bakery would become. And I was able to really like to work in a Nicaraguan background. Like my Grandma Myla is known in the family for her patos, which are like little Nicaraguan hand pies.

So I started working that into the menu and the menu's changed over the years of what I offered and what I saw do well. But there were things that I knew how to do and things that I wanted to learn how to do like cultural posterity, and just, there's just so many pastries out there and I wanna learn about all of them.

[00:52:34] **David Crabill:** I did want to ask more about Josh. Could you just share a bit more about his relationship with you and sort of how that's affected your business?

[00:52:44] **Chris Martin:** Uh, I mean, I can't talk about Josh, but just starting off the fact that he passed away two years ago, like this week. So it's, it's one of those things that's really hard and I keep going and pushing the way I do because of him. We were gonna open a restaurant [00:53:00] together. We met at orientation at Johnson Wales and we're basically like attached to the hip from that point on, like

We always had dreamed of working together and we both thought Thumb Yon was gonna be it. But Pandemic had a different course. So to be able to like him at the beginning of this, for the inspiration of it all, like I started doing and then he died like two months later.

Like it was brutal to be building this new business, essentially meditating on grief, making hundreds and hundreds of coin shows. Like it was gnarly and I cried so much. It's a miracle that anything got done and I've, I mean, I found solace, I found comfort in working because that's what we did best.

We both had our first like 18 hour day together and culinary school, it was just, we just lived off of it. We lived off of working, we lived off of restaurants and thinking about fine dining and pushing ourselves and working on new recipes and hanging out in the study rooms and just going to go visit each other and text each other about ideas and I miss a lot.

And to be at this point in the, it's like I don't see my concept shifting again, mostly because it's a way to be close with him, and it's a way to be close with the heritage and with a language that is half of me and it feels impactful. To be learning about things and being able to be exposed to so much culture in Latino America.

[00:54:30] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like you would be at the point where you are today if it weren't for you having that future business goal? Like was it Josh that really inspired you to get to this point?

[00:54:45] **Chris Martin:** yeah, I mean I was, I justified hoarding all of this commercial equipment in my basement for the eventuality of moving it to wherever our brick and mortar would be like. It's. Everything that I have is gonna be essentially, eventually for us. So it's without, without that push, I don't think I would've necessarily gone in this direction in general for entrepreneurship.

[00:55:07] **David Crabill:** Well, in some ways you are building it with him because, you know, if it weren't for him, you probably wouldn't be at this point, So, you know, in some ways he is living on in this business with you. I

[00:55:18] **Chris Martin:** Yeah, he really is.

[00:55:21] **David Crabill:** Well, you've come a long way in a few years. You know, you've built up this sort of French pastry bakery and then restarts it and have built up this Latin American bakery. What's next for you? What are your plans for the future?

[00:55:37] **Chris Martin:** My plans for the future are building a chicken roof and then maybe getting a high tunnel and seeing if I can continue to do really cool things here in Charlottesville. It would take a lot for me to leave

Charlottesville. It would take a heck of a job offer. I really love it here and I really love being able to be stable and have control over my career after the closures in Chicago, like to have a Vitamix and be like, all right, and be completely equipped.

It's like when restaurants get staffed up, you're like, yeah, like that's how I feel. Like I'm just like, yeah, I did it. I'm like, something else breaks, inevitably, like, that's how it goes. But I'm good. It's nice. I can just be infinite. Growth isn't always sustainable and I kinda was seeking that for a long time, but I think at this point I'm like, okay, that's cool.

Let's, let's, let's cool it. Let's figure it out. Maybe I'll do some fun events here in bigger cities. I did a popup in Chicago like. I just wanna go on fun side quests, like just trying out new things. Do a popup once, be like, woo-hoo, and then like, run away and come back to my little safe place. That's where I'm at now and that's where I see the future.

There's still a kinda weird bed and breakfast fantasy. I'm like, Hmm. That's why I wanted to work at the end. I was like, nah, I wanna, how does he do it? There's a lot of good philosophies that I picked up from his institution of everything. He's got a little farm in the alpaca's and the chickens, so he has got it all.

So it's like, it was a great example, but I mean, that's, that's years, years away, funding away. I really, I would wanna go in with an operator. I think I'm a fine business head and I can, I'm a, I'm a businesswoman is what I try to put myself up to, but really I'm an artist and really I just wanna cook.

The fun bit is just cooking. And that's the part that I value.

[00:57:24] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much, Chris. Now if somebody would like to learn more about you, where can they find you? How can they reach out?

[00:57:33] **Chris Martin:** Yeah. Everything is in one central hub at [www.bakernobakery.com](http://www.bakernobakery.com) and I am most active on Instagram, which is [@bakernobakery](https://www.instagram.com/bakernobakery). I respond to emails really well. The dms I can sometimes miss, but email is great, which is [bakernobakery@gmail.com](mailto:bakernobakery@gmail.com) or [thebaker@bakernobakery.com](mailto:thebaker@bakernobakery.com).

[00:57:53] **David Crabill:** Alright, well thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.



[00:57:57] **Chris Martin:** Thank you. I appreciate you for your time.

[00:58:03] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/139](https://forrager.com/podcast/139).

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Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.