

Liam Charles

Stokey-born Liam Charles is carving out a unique career in the world of food, three years on from his stint on *The Great British Bake Off*. He talks to BEAST about baking, bowling and the best places to eat in East London.

“I bet you we are gunna bump into my nan here,” says Liam Charles, two minutes before bumping into his nan. We are amid the weekday bustle of Ridley Road Market in Dalston, shooting our ‘Food Heroes’ front cover. It’s a place Liam knows well.

“I spent a lot of my childhood here with my nan — on school holidays or when I was ‘sick’. Ha! I’d be her bag carrier.” He has his arm wrapped around his nan’s shoulders. She rolls her eyes lovingly, tutting at him for not coming to see her more often.

“Truth is, I’ve been so busy — but I know it’s not an excuse.”

He’s right, though, he has been busy. Since first gracing our screens in 2017 on *The Great British Bake Off* and winning over a nation with his cheeky, smiley, laid-back nature, Liam’s star is continuing to rise. He already has two books to his name and currently hosts *Junior Bake Off* and *Bake Off: The Professionals*. “We’re starting filming next week and it’s going to be mad — but I love it.”

Despite his celebrity status, Liam is as grounded as they come: “It’s my mum! She makes sure my head doesn’t get too big.” There are no airs and graces here — in fact, he arrived at Draughts on Kingsland Road, our base for the day, bang on time, bright and breezy, with a suit bag full of

clothes. “Mum helped me pull together some outfits — she said I have to look smart!”

As we head out to our photoshoot, it’s clear Liam is still as embedded as ever in the local community. He bounces around market stalls saying hello to old friends and happily taking selfies with anyone who asks. However, it turns out he wasn’t always as into cooking as he is now.

“It was my nan who was the big cook — I was always the eater. She came over from Jamaica at a young age and she instilled in me a real taste for good, home-cooked food. I grew up eating curried goat and salt fish.”

Where did baking come into it then? “That wasn’t until I was at university,” he says. “Baking has played a huge part in instilling confidence in me. It offered me a way to express myself. As

much as it’s a science, an artist’s flair is needed too. Baking is proof that art doesn’t have to just be taught in traditional forms.”

It’s for this reason Liam feels so passionate about his job presenting *Junior Bake Off*: “It’s heartening to see such an interest in baking from young people (contestants are aged nine to 15). There’s a new generation of bakers springing up around the country — from East London to Manchester and beyond.” ■■■

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WORDS: EMMA WINTERSCHLADEN. PHOTOGRAPH BY HAARALA HAMILTON. © HODDER & STOUGHTON



As for Liam's own corner of East London, Stoke Newington, he says he's watched it shift and change dramatically over the years.

"Gentrification is real. It's crazy, man," he says. "The area around Dalston, where I used to go to school, was so run down, but it's hardly recognisable now and I wasn't at school that long ago!" However, Liam – who is still only 22 – talks fondly of the area's ever-growing, diverse food scene. "You're never short of places to go on Stoke Newington Church Street, and luckily some of the classics are still there like The Spence Bakery. I spent a lot of time there in secondary school."

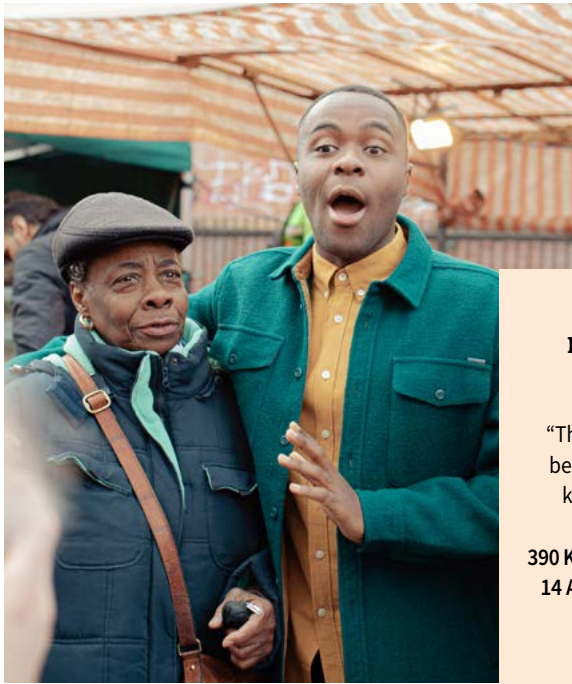
But it's not all about the food for Liam. His other great love (verging on, in his own words, an "obsession") is bowling. "It's my new guilty pleasure. I probably shouldn't be going at the rate I do, but it's how I wind down and relax. I'm trying to reach 250 points." He's yet to get his own bowling ball, but when he does, it'll be, he says, "a cupcake with icing on top – in fact, I think I need to open up a cake-themed bowling alley".

But one thing's certain – whether Liam carries on his broadcasting career or goes on to become a bake 'n' bowling entrepreneur, East London will always be home. "I've got 'Stokey' in my veins." 🍪

Follow Liam on Instagram and Twitter @LiamCBakes



Second Helpings
by Liam Charles
(Hodder & Stoughton, £22)



Liam bumped into his nan on Ridley Road Market while on the BEAST cover photoshoot

**Liam's
EAST LONDON**

CHICK'N'SOURS

"Their fried chicken is one of the best! I really enjoy their chicken katsu with Japanese pickles. Great cocktails too."
390 Kingsland Road, Dalston, E8 4AA
14 Artillery Passage, Spitalfields, E1 7LJ

BEIGEL BAKE

"If you don't know about this, where have you been? They're open 24 hours in case you need a 4am bagel."
159 Brick Lane, Shoreditch, E1 6SB

ITTO

"I love dim sum. I love prawn dumplings. I love this place"
226 Stoke Newington High Street, N16 7HU

DEVVRAN RESTAURANT

"This is the place to go for really good Turkish food. Try their falafel with hummus and prawns to start, then the mixed grill for one so you can sample everything."
170-172 Stoke Newington Road, N16 7UY

LUMINARY BAKERY

"Their cakes are bangin', and it's a social enterprise run by women for women. They provide training, community and employment opportunities."
71-73 Allen Road, Stoke Newington, N16 8RY

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