

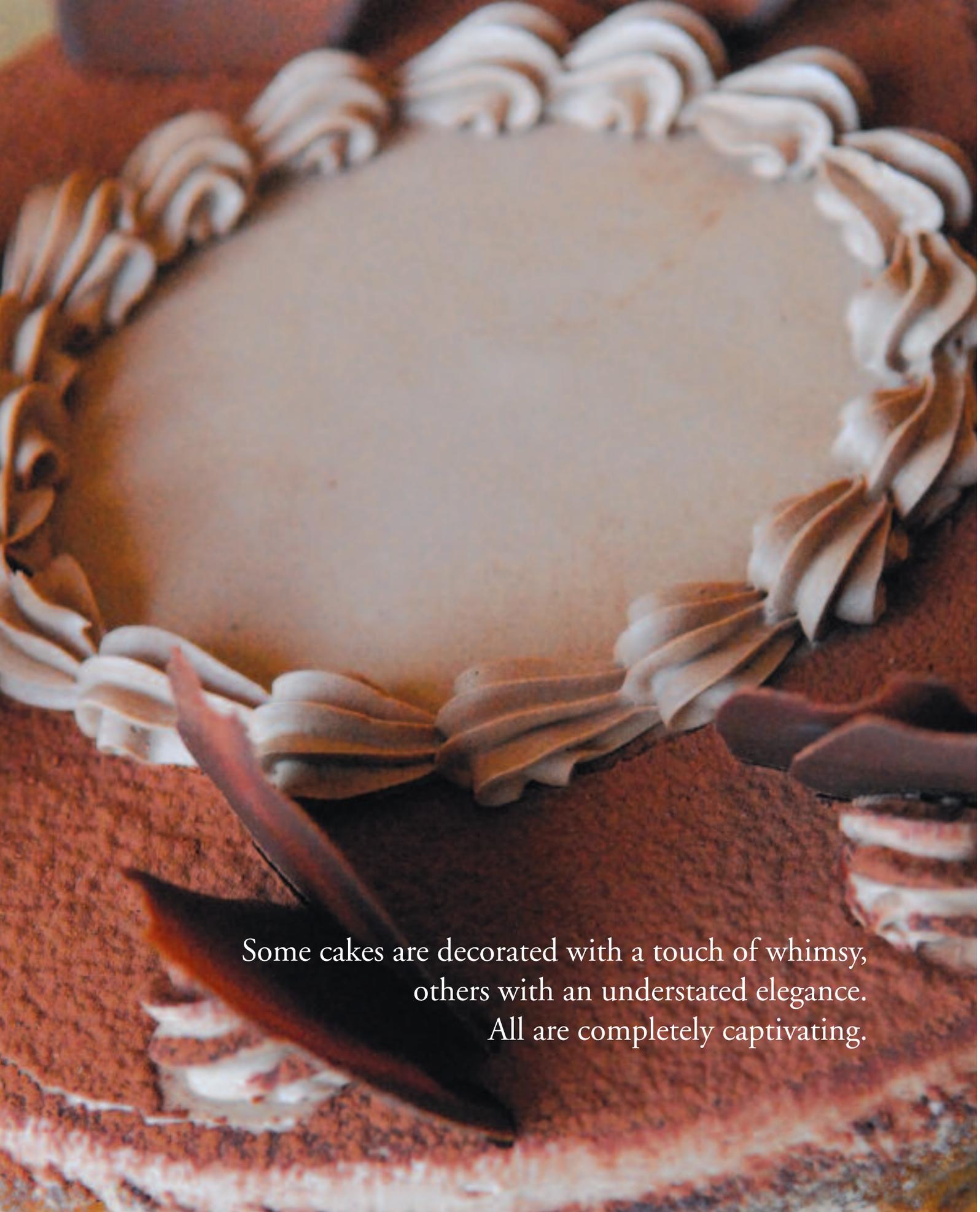
The background of the cover is a close-up photograph of two glass jars. The jar on the left is filled with white carrots and has embossed markings for '1500', '1000', and '500'. The jar on the right is filled with orange carrots and has embossed markings for 'CUPS' and 'PINTS'.

edible RHODY[®]

Celebrating the Bounty of Rhode Island, Season by Season
Winter 2008 • Number 8

LATE NIGHT EATS
GO NUTS • CHEF MAGNIFIQUE
WINTER ON THE WATERFRONT
FRESH EGGS

Member Edible Communities



Some cakes are decorated with a touch of whimsy,
others with an understated elegance.
All are completely captivating.

ARTISANS

BY GENIE McPHERSON TREVOR
PHOTOS BY CAROLE TOPALIAN

PASTICHE FINE DESSERTS

25 Years of Temptation

On a quiet weekday morning all seems calm in the café of Pastiche Fine Desserts. But back in the kitchen, a veteran team of bakers work elbow to elbow amid the whir of mixers, the rattling of cake pans and the sheer bliss of the glazer creating the hazelnut tortes, the chocolate mousse cakes or the decadent layer cakes that customers find so alluring.

Pastiche is tucked away on a side street on Federal Hill just off DePasquale Square in a cheerfully painted house where inside awaits an enticing array of cakes, tarts and treats. As a part of the Pastiche cake cognoscenti, I have admired, celebrated with and indulged in those beautiful desserts for almost 20 years, falling under their spell after just one bite of lemon mousse cake. Witnessing the motion behind the magic gave me an entirely new appreciation for the desserts that taste just as incredible as they look.

It all began 25 years ago in an apartment kitchen on Providence's East Side, where husband and wife Brandt Heckert and Eileen Collins were crafting cakes of European sophistication for a local restaurant. When they decided to expand with a professional kitchen no plans were made for a retail store. Desserts were sold solely to local restaurants. Soon enough restaurant customers were seeking them out. The Pastiche café was the natural conclusion and Rhode Island has been blessed with fine dessert ever since.

Consistency is a driving force at Pastiche, where Brandt still keeps watch over the operations. Many of Eileen's original recipes are still being used, although she can now be found in the art studio more than the kitchen. "We don't do a high volume but still the kitchen is running from 6 in the morning to 10 at night and it hardly slows down. Around Christmastime things get really crazy," said Brandt. "One thing I can say after 25 years is that we make a point to never compromise on the ingredients we use, and to never take shortcuts."

Another reason for the consistent deliciousness that emanates from the kitchen at Pastiche is the baking staff led by Johnson & Wales grad Scot Stegmann. With 22 years of baking at Pastiche, Scot is the senior pastry chef and, at 6 feet 4 inches tall, the gentle giant of the kitchen.

Scot orchestrates the flow of the desserts, planning days ahead for the two shifts of 11 other pastry chefs who are needed to produce those sought-after desserts. Most of the cake baking and tart shell making is completed in the afternoons and evenings. The decorating is finished the following morning with swirls of frosting and chocolate flower petals.

As the senior veteran staffer, Scot clearly enjoys the work ... and he also enjoys the cake. "I still remember the apricot cheesecake with hazelnut crust I had 22 years ago when I first found Pastiche on a walk through Federal Hill. Right away I applied for a job," recalled Scot. "I still eat a piece of cake every day." He adds with a sheepish grin, "It's a good thing I mountain-bike too."

Wedded bliss in the kitchen? Scot's wife Lin Lee is another long-time Pastiche pastry chef, the two taking alternate shifts to cover the kids on the home front.

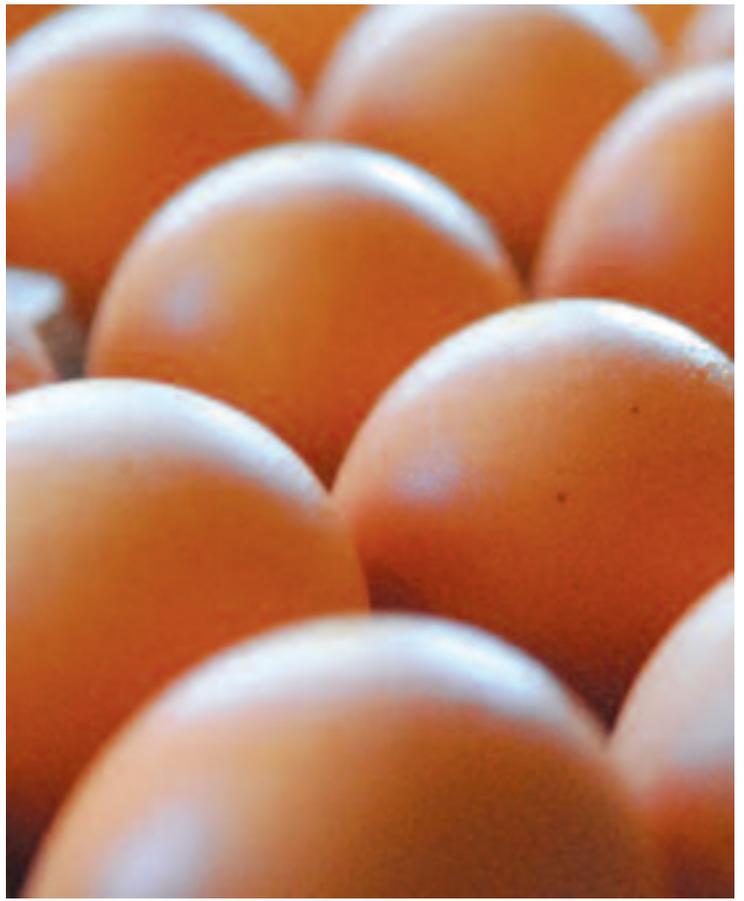
Long-term employment is the norm rather than the exception at Pastiche. Amy Foster who runs the front café has been at Pastiche for 17 years. Nadia McKinnon, decorator extraordinaire, who works alongside her baker/decorator husband, Craig, has been at Pastiche for nine years.

During Scot's afternoon shift he has carrot cake batter mixing in the blender while he is removing a score of cakes from one of the ovens. Eggs need to be added to the mixer and the timer is buzzing. More cakes are ready—it is perpetual motion. Once the batter is completed, pastry chef Allison Winslow is on hand to assist and it is efficiently divided among a large stack of prepared cake pans, placed on sheet trays and into the oven.

Scot then turns his attention to the eggs delivered from Stamp Farms in Johnston that morning. "We have been using Bobby Stamp's eggs for as long as I can remember. His chickens are free range and the eggs are really fresh. The shells are stronger, which makes the egg stronger. That means the whites are more voluminous when we whip them. The yolks hold together well, which is important when we separate the eggs for the custards and sponge cakes."

In the large standing mixer, with a bowl the size of a bass drum, three and a half pounds of egg whites are whipped up with sugar until they are smooth as silk. When Scot removes the whisk from the mixer, the egg

Italian Mascarpone Torte.



whites glisten, a perfect consistency with soft, mountainous peaks. Scot offers me a spoonful. It's heaven—lightly sweet and purely ethereal.

Another essential (and local) ingredient in the Pastiche kitchen is the heavy cream, which is delivered in old-fashioned stainless steel containers from Rhode Island's Christiansen's Dairy. Each morning, fresh whipped cream is piped around the cheesecakes and chocolate mousse cakes by expert hands. "Christiansen's is the only heavy cream we use because of its high butterfat content. It's pure with no stabilizers and whips up beautifully," remarked Brandt as we watched the flurry of morning activity, trying unsuccessfully to stay out of the way.

Nadia, who is also a Johnson & Wales grad (there is only one pastry chef in the kitchen who did not attend the university), oversees the decorating and completion of cakes and tarts. Like all the chefs in the relatively small kitchen, she keeps the work areas neat and tidy for each project as it is completed. To keep things moving efficiently, ingredients must be close at hand. There is no room for tools and leftover frosting to stack up.

When it's time to pipe the decoration on a batch of mascarpone tortes, Nadia grabs a piping bag and quickly fills it with a luscious-looking chocolate buttercream frosting. While applying gentle pressure to the bag, she makes a circle of perfect, masterful figure-eights and moves onto the next cake. Like most of the rest of the staff, Nadia tells me, she tends to save her cake eating for special occasions.

Once the tortes are complete, she then outfits another piping bag with a tiny tip and begins on the delicate white swirls atop the awaiting raspberry chocolate tortes. "The part of the work I love is being cre-

ative and making things look beautiful," she said. Some cakes are decorated with a touch of whimsy, others with an understated elegance. All are completely captivating.

New cakes appear at Pastiche as tastes evolve and ideas inspire but only after each recipe has withstood repeated testing. Changes come with the seasons as well. Many of the long-favored Pastiche cakes have remained on the menu through a generation now.

As Brandt reflected on the past 25 years of baking he said, "In a romantic sense I like to think of Pastiche as the kind of place where you can go and always find that delicious cake you once tried and liked. I think there is something very important about tradition."

You need only to peer inside the shiny glass case filled with its mouth-watering desserts to identify with the line of customers stretching out door on any given Saturday night. Clearly Rhode Islanders not only appreciate the tradition created at Pastiche but have come to count on it, just as I have, with a slice of lemon mousse cake to prove it. *eR*

Genie McPherson Trevor is a writer who lives and cooks with her family in Providence. She finds comfort in tradition, especially when it's cake.

Pastiche Fine Desserts

92 Spruce St.

Providence

401-861-5190

pastichefinedesserts.com

Clockwise from top left: Passion Coconut Cake from the summer menu at Pastiche; Eggs from Stamp Farms in Johnston; Scot Stegman manning the oven.

