

Baking a Masterpiece

The Cake Shop of San Jose creates delectably imaginative works of culinary art. By **Richard Banks**



ABOVE: "My grandmother is an artist," says Doug Krovicka, "and she says it breaks her heart to know how long we work on these cakes, only to have someone cut into them the next day."

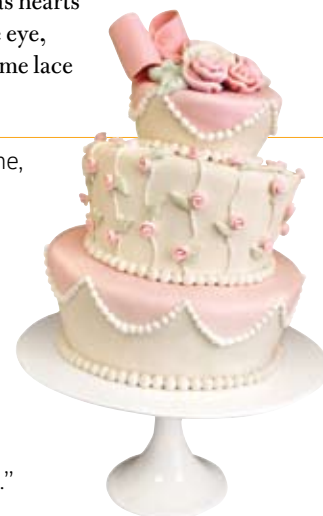
RIGHT: The Cake Shop's topsy-turvy cake offers a fun take on the traditional.

Tool Time

The staff at The Cake Shop uses gadgets and tools—such as a pasta machine, Masonite boards, and florist wire—not typically associated with baking to create their spectacular cakes.

"When my husband and I go to the hardware store," says sort-of-kind-of retired Cake Shop cofounder Anna DeLoach, "I head for the spackling tools. They're a big help to smooth the sides of icing. We also use a level to make sure the cakes are even."

Gail notes that yardsticks and rulers provide a straight edge for scoring fondant, while craft knives are the best tools for making precise cuts. Then there are dowel rods, the best friend of anyone trying to bake multitiered cakes. "They hold the layers together," she says, "like columns on a building."



Not only are the flowers edible, but so are the container, soil, and stalks. After a cursory glance, the eyes register a terra-cotta pot and gerbera daisies. Upon closer inspection, there's little indication that deception is involved. It still looks like something you'd put on your patio instead of in your mouth.

Get the nose involved, however, and your taste buds scream, "Cake!" Just like the cars, purses, hats, shoes, and even stadiums created here at The Cake Shop of San Jose, this planter and its contents are not just edible; they're delicious.

To Die For "We are artisan bakers," says Gail Wilson, The Cake Shop owner and cofounder. "We can create a masterpiece for any occasion. Our cakes have been called art, but they're still cakes, and they are so good."

Opened in 2001 in the San Jose section of Jacksonville by Gail and her recently "retired" partner Anna DeLoach (she's more on reserve status, working when needed), The Cake Shop offers an array of baked goods—from cookies and brownies to petits fours and, of course, cakes. The offerings here are to die for. Everything is made from scratch, and they have a wide variety of flavors, including their own lighter version of buttercream frosting. But the first thing that grabs the attention is the eye-candy appeal of the shop's elegant wedding and whimsical sculpted cakes.

Willing and Able "People are just blown away by what can be done with cakes," says Doug Krovicka, the shop's sculpted cake specialist and Anna's son. "When customers first talk to us about one of these cakes, they're so excited that we're actually willing to do it."

Their wedding cakes are also works of art, featuring flowers and ribbon made of fondant and gum paste, as well as painstakingly applied edible embellishments such as hearts and pearls. Finishes, too, can fool the eye, looking as if they're made from the same lace



and satin gracing a bride's gown. Designs range from traditional to "topsy-turvy"—a look and shape that seems straight out of a Tim Burton movie.

It can take as much as three hours of consultation with the client and three workdays to get the final product completed. Prices for wedding cakes start at \$375 for a two-tier and \$675 for a three-tier, while sculpted ones are \$375 and up.

The Dilemma Once the cake is complete, Doug says that he and the other staffers are as excited as the client. "We had this one client who actually cried because she loved the cake so much," he remembers. "It was just one of those heartfelt moments that made me go, 'Wow, this is such a cool job!'"

Customers, however, often face a difficult dilemma: Leave the cake intact and admire its beauty or cut and demolish it to enjoy the yummy treat. "Some of the customers don't want to cut it," says Regina Wilson, Gail's daughter and a member of the shop's staff. "They should just take a picture of it, though, and eat it. Our cakes are too tasty not to."

Trade Secrets Delicious ingredients and fantastic designs aside, the staff agrees that one of the biggest secrets to The Cake Shop's



FAR LEFT: A cake that looks just like a terra-cotta planter gives a whole meaning to “dig in.” **LEFT:** The Cake Shop staff typically works together to complete a project.

Food Fight

Sample a few of The Cake Shop’s delicious creations at the 19th Annual Jacksonville FOODFIGHT, to be held June 4, 2009 at the Jacksonville Municipal Stadium. For more information visit www.lssjax.com, or call (904) 739-7074.

success is they have each other. “What makes our situation a little more special,” says Doug, “is that everybody is multi-talented. Bill, our baker, does everything from baking to cake design and handles all the gum paste work. Linda does a little of everything. Regina is our cupcake guru.”

Also, the staff loves to experiment. “We will take something traditional and pick it apart,” Gail says. “Anna is a chemist at heart, and she and I will play with things to see what works and doesn’t. Our butter-

cream frosting is different and kind of the vehicle that carries all the flavors.”

Pressed to divulge what makes The Cake Shop’s buttercream so delectable, however, Gail explains, “Technique and ingredients and...it’s a secret,” she says. “That’s why they come through those doors.” ●

The Cake Shop of San Jose: 3911 Hendricks Avenue, Jacksonville, FL 32207; www.jaxcakeshop.com or (904) 306-0303.

