



Dessert First

BY EAGRANIE YUH

Work is the meat of life, pleasure the dessert.

—B. C. Forbes





Why save the best course for last?

THERE'S THE RUB: Everybody loves a happy ending, myself included, but sometimes I don't want to sit through course after course to get it. I don't have the patience to tolerate the appetizer, let alone an entrée too. Dessert is the course I'm really craving. I want dark and sticky, cool and creamy—and I want it now!

To my rescue are a few pastry chefs who put dessert upfront and center on their menus.

In Vancouver, the dessert crowd has found its sweet spot at **Thierry**, the flashy new shop on Alberni Street, bookended by the Shangri-La Hotel and the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver. The sidewalk patio and enormous palm wood door welcome you into the world of pastry chef/chocolatier Thierry Busset. During the day it's a whirl of croissants, pain au chocolat, and fruit danishes. There's also an espresso bar serving up coffees and Thierry's signature Liquid Chocolate, a demitasse of molten dark chocolate that's pure afternoon delight.

AT NIGHT, DESSERTS COME OUT TO PLAY. Glass canisters beckon, each with its own temptation: hazelnut and almond sable cookies, madeleines, palmiers, and tuiles. The Italian marble counter features gem-like chocolates and traditional French cakes in a variety of sizes and slices. Then there's the psychedelic rainbow of macarons, with rich buttercream nestled between light-as-air almond meringues. The cookies fly out of the shop as fast as they're made—"All the colors, it's fantastic," says Busset.

< Left, dessert selections from Pix Patisserie, featuring the "Tiki Tiki." At the top of this page, the pastry case at Alder Pastry and Dessert.

When you have a penchant for pastry, or gnawing craving for cake, you're sure to satisfy your sweet tooth tout de suite at one of these dessert-minded eateries.



Macarons at Thierry

At CinCin, the venerable Italian restaurant in Vancouver where Busset honed his craft, a table of four typically ordered one dessert at the end of their meal. But at Thierry, people come specifically for the sweets. "Everyone gets dessert, no matter what," Busset says.

Another prime, late-night sweet spot, this one in Portland, is **Pix Patisserie**. Owner/chef Cheryl Wakerhauser has indulged the city's nighttime dessert culture for almost a decade.

In 2002 she opened Pix in a raspberry-colored storefront along Southeast Division Street, where her takes on traditional French desserts get paired with Belgian beers and "humongous amounts of Champagne," says Wakerhauser. The concept has caught on—so much so that she opened a second shop in north Portland in 2006.

Most of the desserts at Pix feature classical French combinations, but you wouldn't guess that from the cheeky names. "Tiki Tiki" is a mango-passionfruit cake with coconut meringue and a raft of tropical fruit on top, while "Shazam" conjures the ultimate chocolate cake, with caramel mousse and salted almonds swaddled in a chocolate blanket. For customers with more American palates, Wakerhauser invented "Incognito," which she calls "a cheesecake in disguise. It's cheesecake mousse with French touches: fresh raspberries, crunchy streusel, and candied lemon." I call it divine.

The new kid on Portland's chocolate block, **Alder Pastry and Dessert**, opened this past March with the intention of being a late-night dessert destination. The pastry case is like a jewelry box, where pyramids of ▶



Dessert thali at Poppy

peanut butter mousse have a velveteen finish, and chocolate curlicues balance atop glossy chocolate-caramel tarts.

On weekend evenings, there's a line snaking out the door for pastries, beer, and wine—but owner/chef Matthew Zack's made-from-scratch gelato also has tongues wagging. He keeps a few standard flavors in the gelato case (the pistachio is a real winner), but he isn't afraid to play around—croissant bread pudding gelato, anyone? “For winter, I'm looking at chai gelato, green apple sorbet, lots of cinnamon... and in January, citrus—satsuma and grapefruit.”

The yums continue in Seattle at Capitol Hill's **Poppy**. Chef Jerry Traunfeld's take on Indian cuisine is devotion-worthy, but it's the dessert thali, a platter for two, that makes my sweet tooth swoon. A recent offering of roasted peach, verbena mascarpone ice cream and ginger meringue was served alongside one-bite delights of lavender shortbread, nutter-butter squares, pâtes de fruit, and salted caramel truffles. “There can be seven to eight elements on one dessert thali,” says pastry chef Dionne

Himmelfarb. “They all have to work together.”

Dessert lovers should also sidle up to the three-seat dessert bar at Seattle's **MistralKitchen** and watch pastry chef Lucy Damkoehler work her magic, whipping up whimsical desserts like pumpkin beignets and fancy pop tarts. “I try to take childhood memories and translate them,” she says.

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—Lucy Damkoehler, pastry chef, MistralKitchen

What a delicious translation it is. S'mores are turned into a tower of delicate ice cream sandwiches, while coconut lime trifle with apricot-passionfruit sorbet was playfully tweaked with the addition of cinnamon-y snickerdoodles (which is as fun to say as to eat).

Back at Thierry, I watch the table next to me as four women gleefully demolish a pyramid of hazelnut choux. Past them, a toddler smears whipped cream across his forehead. It's then I realize, while food fads come and go, dessert appeals to all ages and is almost certain to elicit smiles all around. I take a bite of savarin, a rich cake sweet and moist from soaking in syrup, and immediately I'm happy. The end. 🍌

Sweet Spots

Thierry

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Pix Patisserie

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Alder Pastry and Dessert

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Poppy

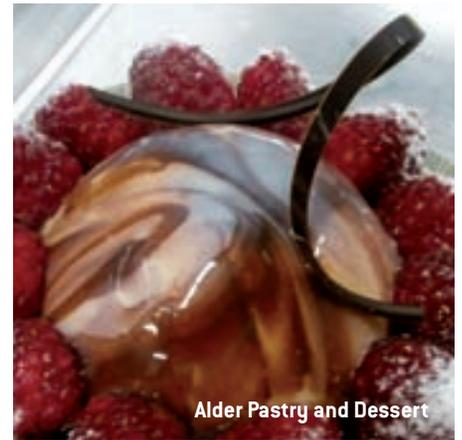
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Pix Patisserie



Alder Pastry and Dessert



Thierry