The Boston Blobe

By Sonia Rao June 7, 2017

WednesdayFood



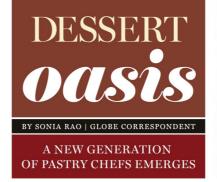


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Giselle Miller (top), pastry chef at Café ArtScience, creates a hazelnut parfait with hazelnut pralines and sable, a green apple-fennel sorbet, and tres leches.





iselle Miller dreams of herbs. It is to be expected, after almost a de-cade working in the restaurant industry and several months orchestrating the creation of desserts at Cambridge's Café ArtScience. While asleep, the pastry chef's mind wanders to a plentiful herb basil? It'd pair well with lemon verbena, and perhaps a dollop of tangy sorbet.

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"I really want the guests to be pleasantly surprised by everything we do," says Deuxave pastry chef Shaun Velez. "I want [desserts] to be something they've never had before."



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New pastry chefs upend traditional notions of dessert

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service throughout the afternoon, and departs several hours after the sun goes down. The Birkenstock-clad chef therefore spends most of his time away from the sunlight, but that's par for the course.

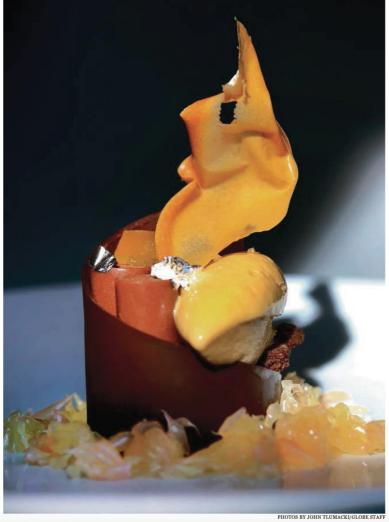
"I've spent the majority of my ca-reer in basements," Velez said, shrug-

ging. Born and raised in New York City, Velez worked in a number of full, hec-tic kitchens – Café Boulud and Dan-iel among them – after attending the French Culinary Institute, now called the International Culinary Center. Following Velez's move to Boston's slower-paced food scene early in 2016, Deuxave chef-owner Chris Coombs gave his new pastry chef free rein over the dessert menu. Velez works independently, aside from an assistant who often helps with bread.

His workspace, tucked into the back corner of the kitchen, reflects his disciplined style. Each ingredient fills a clear container that matches its neighbors, neatly labeled in black marker. Ratios for caramel, made with a seaweed-based stabilizer called agar, are outlined in a chart. Velez recognizes the precise science behind his work.

his work. "Tm a perfectionist," he said, care-fully peeling a colored sheet of sugar off a silicone mat. "You have to be." The fragile sheets are then rolled into tubes, designed to hold a delicate mint and yuzu mousse. While work-ing on the last of the sugar, Velez mur-mered."Endic and consist to are demured, "This one's going to crack — you can just tell." It didn't. Instead, the filled sugar found its way to the

finished plate, accompanied by pista-chio dacquoise and pralines. Velez always knew he'd end up in this field, though he initially pursued



zelnut, and fennel – and then selects additional components with their texture in mind.

"And then also the mouthfeel of ev-erything," she said. At 28, Miller moved up the culi-

nary ladder rather quickly. The Bridgeport, Conn., native and former Haverhill resident has stuck around New England for her entire career, beginning at a New Hampshire branch of Le Cordon Bleu and work-ing her way through the now-shuttered restaurants Sel De La Terre and Radius.

Throughout that time, Miller no-ticed a diminishing number of fresheved graduates entering the pastry field. Students look for jobs that pay the most, she said, instead of working with chefs that'll push them to learn everything from bread to candy making. It's difficult to sustain a serious

ing. It's difficult to sustain a serious pastry program with such low num-bers, and Miller currently works with just one full-time pastry assistant. "It hurts, and it's the worst thing ever," She said. "I feel like a restaurant with a pastry department — and even a bread department — is a really great thing. It's very noticeable and a lot of the customers notice the difference." the customers notice the difference.

Renae Connolly, pastry chef at Benedetto in Harvard Square, takes her job seriously for this very reason. The industry-wide staffing shortage has led young cooks to take on a tran-sient quality, she said, and most won't stick around at one restaurant if there's a higher-ranking position available elsewhere. "I have a very strong pastry staff, and I do what I can to make sure I

keep things challenging for them, that they're constantly learning, and that it's exciting for them," said Con-nolly, 31. "As much as I need them, I want to make sure that they need me, too.'

The Fresno, Calif. native, once head pastry chef at Café ArtScience, is familiar with the desire to drift.

"It's our personality type — quick reward from our tasks," she said. "We want to see the finished product. You don't always think about the longterm effects and where your career's going to go." After graduating from the Califor-

nia Culinary Academy, Connolly took on a 4 a.m. baker's shift — "That'll flip your life on its head" — and worked in the Bay Area until moving to Boston



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the savory track. After an FCI instruc-tor told Velez to place his hands over fire during a lesson on grilling and testing meat, he quickly declined to do so and instead signed up for a one-week pastry program. "The irony of the story is that

when you do pastry, for when they teach you how to do soft ball and hard ball for your sugar, you have to stick your hand in a hot pot of sugar," Velez said. "I did that one, though. Not the open flames."

After a career of whipping up Urfa-spiced chocolate and plating vacherin on a spinning record player, Velez hopes to someday return to a more "I want to have jars of different

confit fruits, tarts that I can just cut to

order, candy bars, anything," he said. Miller, who left Deuxave mid-2014 for Liquid Art House, then helmed by Rachel Klein, also aims to set out on Rachel Klein, also aims to set out on her own one day, but with an ice cream store. This passion is evi-denced by her menu at Café Art-Science, an airy Kendall Square res-taurant where she started working late last year. A majority of desserts feature ice cream or sorbet, but here's no chocolate or French vanilla there's no chocolate or French vanilla in sight. We're talking green apple fennel sorbet, pistachio ice cream, and the like.

"Even traditional French desserts,

with ingredients like chestnut or va-nilla, you can still make them cool without sounding or looking boring," thing that I enjoy. I'm a little bit of a weirdo." Miller said, "I feel like that's some

Channeling the latter half of the restaurant's name, much of Miller's inspiration derives from her love of science fiction. Her interest influenc-es all stages of production and plays off innovative cocktails. The inclusion of frieze-dried yogurt in an orange "cream soda" dish comes to mind. "We're all trying to be our own, in-

dependent selves now. We're not afraid of it," Miller said, carefully plat-ing compressed apple slices with surgical precision, features tree leches cake; hazelnut sablé, glued onto the plate with an apple fennel gel; and the aforementioned apple fennel sorbet

Miller's desserts are complex, but their numerous elements carefully complement one another. She picks three main flavors based on seasonal ingredients - in this case, apple, ha

Above: The chocolate decor by pastry chef Shaun Velez at Deuxave. Below: Velez prepares a yuzu mousse, first sifting sugar, then pouring a sugar mix onto mats for baking. The thin sheets are rolled into tubes designed to hold the mousse, which is served with pistachio dacquoise and pralines (at bottom).









in 2006. She snagged a position as an assistant pastry chef at Ken Oringer's Clio early the next year, eventually moving up to head the department for three more years. But at a certain point, she knew it was time to go. "These are the techniques that I

know, and I've refined them to the best of my ability right now," Connolly recalled thinking, "But without step-ping out of this environment and see-ing another way and having someone else to look over my shoulder and cor-rect me, I'm not going to progress at the rate that I want to at this point."

After spending three years in New Arter spending three years in New York, Connolly tried her hand at bar-tending in Boston for a year before re-turning to her pastry roots. Todd Maul, whom Connolly knew from their time at Clio, decided to open up Café ArtScience in 2014, and she signed on as pastry chef. She worked there for around two years until leaving to open Benedetto with owner Michael Pagliarini late last year, when Miller took her place. Connolly has mastered her routine

at Benedetto. The kitchen's elongated shape means she constantly runs back and forth to grab frozen choco-late pudding for one dessert and thick lemon curd for another. She spravs chocolate onto the frozen pudding with an industrial spray gun, only to put it away and spread the curd onto rounds of lemon chiffon cake minutes

later. Connolly beams while multi-tasking, this time also musing on the depiction of her profession on television

" "The Great British Bake Off' is the greatest cooking show there is on TV," she said, quickly and skillfully spreading the curd.

The cake is the simplest yet most popular option on Benedetto's dessert menu, a sign of Connolly having to scale her experimental desserts back in order to appeal to the 200-seat res-taurant's diverse set of visitors. But she still makes sure to incorporate unconventional elements - with the cake, a vibrant prickly pear sorbetto. Rose-frosted almonds and diced cucumbers in ginger syrup top off the dish

"I think what makes pastry really special," Connolly said, "is that once you understand all these very specific rules, you can learn where to bend them and where to break them."

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