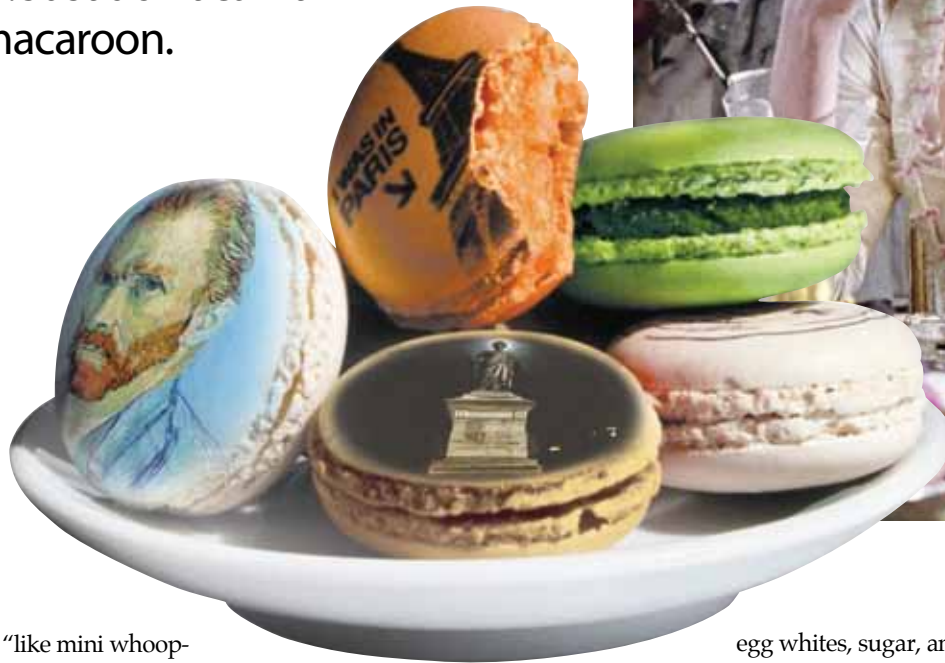


Let Them Eat Macarons

The 'new cupcake' is feisty and fun. Just don't call it a macaroon.



Think of macarons “like mini whoopie pies,” says Isabelle Julien, who sells them at her Portland coffee shop, Mornings in Paris. “They’re perfect for Maine.”

History buffs say the sweet, dainty nibbles have been fashionable since 1533, when Catherine de Medici and her chefs brought them from Italy to France. But for a long time the flavors were fairly standard—vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, and lemon. “Then, about 15 years ago, chefs started to play very creatively with them,” Julien says. “Now everyone has a twist.”

Hers include honey lavender, rose water, sea salt caramel, espresso, and chestnut.

“People are suddenly like, ‘Oh my gosh, I have to have them!’” says Heather Adams at The European Bakery in Falmouth. She’s offering violet-lavender, chocolate-ginger, sesame-lime, and *crème brûlée*.

Julia McClure, owner of Sweets & Meats Market in Rockland, dares express the inexpressible: “They’re the new cupcake.”

Macarons are two tiny, half-domed cookie discs made from ground almonds,

egg whites, sugar, and some sort of flavoring, filled with flavored buttercream, jam, or ganache. By contrast, the English macaroon is an altogether different, coconut confection (though it shares a meringue base and there are coconut macarons). What a difference an “O” makes!

Also known as a French or Parisian macaron, macarons owe their ancestry to the Italian *maccherone* or *maccherone*, meaning “fine dough,” also the origin of “macaroni.”

To some eyes, the macaron looks like a solid-colored, micro hamburger. McDonald’s in Paris (what on earth do they call



Macarons are a guilty pleasure for Kirsten Dunst's *Marie Antoinette*. Sweets & Meats Market's Julia McClure believes the film inspired the recent craze for the "light and elegant" treat.

FROM LEFT: MACARON ART/CHRIS RYMER PHOTO ILLUSTRATION; MARIE ANTOINETTE, COLUMBIA PICTURES CORPORATION

their french fries?) actually sells macarons, playfully noting how much their shape resembles a diminutive Big Mac.

Japan-born Atsuko Fujimoto was working at Standard Baking Company in Portland when the tsunami hit her native land in 2011. To help victims, she decided to bake macarons—also popular in Japan—and donate proceeds to the Red Cross relief effort.

"I created green tea macarons with white chocolate filling, black sesame praline macarons with milk chocolate ganache, cherry macarons with cherry jam, and mac-

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Macarons (continued from page 51)

arons made with yuzu [a citrusy flavor popular in the Far East].

“Most people in Maine had never seen them before, but when they tried them, they loved them,” Fujimoto says. In just six weeks, selling four for \$5 to \$6, she raised \$1,000. Now she makes macarons at Portland’s Pai Men Miyake restaurant, where she works as pastry chef. She’s since added more flavors to her repertoire, including “azuki bean. I might try out mousse-filled macarons or ones with ice cream. I’ve heard of foie gras with jam. I’m open.”

McClure, whose basil buttercream macaron is so popular, is experimenting with “rosemary, cheese, and tomato” flavors.

Jill DeWitt, who owns Good Eats Boutique in Portland, thinks the macarons’ pastel shades make them especially well-suited to spring. She’s encouraging her chefs to design them “as ovals, like Easter eggs, with springtime flavors such as lemon with a fresh coconut filling, raspberry mascarpone, or pistachio with cream, with maybe an icing rosette or a fleur-de-lis or a rosebud on top,” she says. “Wouldn’t that be cute?”

Yes, but why are macarons so popular now? “I think people are looking for things that are bite-sized. I can’t remember when we made a traditional, four-tiered wedding cake,” DeWitt says. “With macarons, you don’t need plates or forks. It’s all pickup. They’re *different*. And with no flour, they’re gluten-free. The colors and flavor varieties are great for weddings and baby showers, and you can put them in decorative wrappers. They’re little round discs of yum. The fillings just take you away.”

McClure believes that, like most trends, this one “is driven by the media. People saw them being served in the movie *Marie Antoinette*. That started it. Then, when people sampled them, they realized how light and elegant they are—and delicious.”

“They’re easy to eat and not heavy, so you don’t feel too guilty,” Julien adds.

Who doesn’t crave a bite of luxury?

Then, too, one wonders if Maine’s whoopie pie isn’t somehow descended from the macaron—starting with Italy, then France, then New France (Quebec), and finally to our state as part of the Franco-American tradition. So much for your claim of being first to make whoopies, Pennsylvania! It’s back to the drawing board for you. ■

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