

lookout food

Have Your Cake and Drink It, Too

Bake the booze right into your pies and cupcakes for adults-only treats

Brooke Siem and Leslie Feinberg were just two 20-something victims of the recession when they starting hitting the bottle to make a living. Siem — a trained pastry chef working in kitchens across New York City — and Feinberg — a bartender and mixologist — decided to combine their passions for booze and baked goods in a decadent way. But unlike bakers who use liquors just for flavor — effectively diffusing the intoxicating effects of alcohol in a 350-degree oven — the pair wanted to make more potent treats.

That's why their kid-unfriendly cupcake catering business, aptly named Prohibition Bakery (646-454-9970, Prohibitionbakery.com), specializes in a loaded version of New York's perennial favorite dessert: cupcakes featuring liquors — gin, scotch, Baileys — in their gooey centers.

Siem and Feinberg call the mini-sweets “shotcakes” or “cuptails.” Since the liquor (or beer, in the case of the popular brewski-pretzel concoction) is whipped into the icing or injected as filling, snarfing a half dozen of these cakelets could get you buzzed.

“We want the cupcakes to be for adults,” Siem says. “The flavors are very sophisticated — not just vanilla and chocolate. They’re modeled accurately after the ingredients in the cocktail.”

Combining booze and baked goods isn't a new concept. (Think Grandma's uber-tipsy rum bundt cake or a Kentucky-style chocolate-bourbon pecan pie.) It's an idea that's usually driven by flavor, not a desire to party.

“It's about enhancing flavors, like bringing out the taste of orange with Cointreau or chocolate with rum,” says retired pastry chef Valerie Lifhack, who works at Old Town baking supply store La Cuisine (323 Cameron St., Alexandria; 703-836-4435).

Any hooch that tastes good in a glass would also work well in a dessert — and sometimes, baking a high-proof liquid into a dish can temper its bite. “I'm not a huge fan of bourbons and brandies to drink, but the rich flavors go really well in pie,” says Connecticut bakery

do

“Think about the flavor of your dessert when deciding what sort of liquor to use,” says La Cuisine's Valerie Lifhack. “Accentuate flavors, like by putting Chamboard cassis liquor with a berry tart.”

don't

Forget that baking burns off alcohol, not taste.

“If you add bourbon to a cake, the flavors are heightened, not diminished,” says Leah Daniels of Hill's Kitchen.



do

Use alcohol to moisten a dry cake, say, by adding Myers's Rum to a coconut angel food concoction.

don't

Be heavy-handed.

If you put too much liquor into whipping cream or a glaze, the effect could resemble one of those bad mix-your-own drinks on an airplane.



owner Michele Stuart, author of "Perfect Pies: The Best Sweet and Savory Recipes From America's Pie-Baking Champion" (\$16.50, Ballantine). Stuart adds brandy and bourbon to fruit, nut or even chocolate pies. And since her desserts are baked, which evaporates most of the alcohol, the added oomph won't make anyone drunk.

Indeed, it's the choice of whether to let alcohol burn off in a 300-plus-degree oven — or whether to douse your dessert with a boozy, unbaked icing, glaze or filling — that determines whether a sweet goes on the kids' table or on an adults-only menu.

"I don't want the alcohol to bake off — I want it to ooze out."

— WINNETTE MCINTOSH AMBROSE, THE SWEET LOBBY CO-OWNER AND BAKER.

Leah Daniels, owner of Hill's Kitchen (713 D St. SE; 202-543-1997), likes her treats on the buzzy side. "I add alcohol — rum, Kahlua — to frosting," she says. "I use it like you would vanilla or almond extract. I think you taste it more."

Cakes, pies and cookies are all ripe for spiking. "I love the flavor alcohol brings to macaroons," says Winnette McIntosh Ambrose, co-owner of and baker at Capitol Hill's the Sweet Lobby (404 8th St. SE; 202-544-2404), who amps up the traditional cookies with infusions of brandy or champagne filling. "I don't want the alcohol to bake off — I want it to ooze out. (Sweet Lobby also sells special-order cupcakes in flavors such as pina colada, limoncello-lemon zest and Boston creme dressed up with Irish whiskey.)"

Recipe File



CHOCOLATE-PECAN-BOURBON PIE

Makes one 9-inch pie or about six to eight slices.

Crust

- 1 recipe for pie crust for a 9-inch pie or a prepared pie crust
- 1/4 cup heavy cream (to glaze the crimped pie edges)

Filling

- 3 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 1/4 cups dark corn syrup
- 1/2 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon bourbon
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and warm
- 1 1/2 cups chopped pecans
- 3/4 cup semisweet chocolate chips

FROM "PERFECT PIES: THE BEST SWEET AND SAVORY RECIPES FROM AMERICA'S PIE-BAKING CHAMPION" (\$16.50, BALLANTINE)

Make It

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

To prepare the pie shell: On a clean, lightly floured work surface, roll out half a ball of dough with a rolling pin until it forms a 10-inch circle. Wrap the remaining half of dough tightly in plastic wrap and reserve it in the refrigerator for future use for up to five days. Fold the circle in half, place it in a 9-inch pie plate so that the edges of the circle drop over the rim, and unfold the dough to completely cover the pie plate. Using your thumb and index finger, crimp the edges of the pie shell. Brush the edges of the shell with heavy cream to create a golden brown finish. Set the pie shell to the side while you make the filling.

To prepare the filling, using an electric mixer on medium speed, mix together the eggs, sugar, corn syrup, vanilla and bourbon. Scrape the sides and bottom of the bowl at least two times while mixing. Add the warm melted butter and mix well. In a separate bowl, combine the pecans and chocolate chips. Sprinkle the pecan-chocolate chip mixture across the bottom of the pie shell. Pour the filling over the nuts and chips, covering them completely.

To bake, place the pie plate on a baking sheet and bake for 40 to 45 minutes, or until the pie is firm. The edges of the filling will rise, but the middle will remain a little loose. Don't worry about this — the pie will continue to bake after it's removed from the oven. Transfer the pie plate to a wire cooling rack and allow the pie to cool and set for two to three hours before serving.



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— BROOKE SIEM, CO-OWNER OF PROHIBITION BAKERY, WHICH MAKES LIQUOR-INFUSED CUPCAKES.



MARIE EL EXPRES

If you want to come up with your own highball-inspired treats, look to the bar cart as much as the dessert menu. A cherry tart might get a rye-vermouth whipping cream to emulate a Manhattan; a chocolate cake merits a White Russian-ish Kahlua-infusion. Still, "don't use your most premium bottle," McIntosh Ambrose says.

And while it's tempting to think more is more when it comes to booze and baking, remember that turning flour, sugar and friends into sweets is a scientific art. If you tweak your recipe too much, you'll get a soggy mess, not an intoxicating success. This means adding a tablespoon or two, not a martini pitcher full, of alcohol. "You want to make sure the cake can rise," McIntosh Ambrose says.

Plus, you want your guests to feel like they can gobble a second piece of pie and still drive home safely.

KATHERINE BOYLE (EXPRESS)

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