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Dawn of a Delicacy

New Local Sweet Shop Produces Increasingly Popular French Pastry the Macaron



By EMILY HEIL

Washingtonians typically greet the opening of a new lobbying shop with all the enthusiasm they might muster for a new podiatrist or a dry cleaner.

But the Sweet Lobby is another kind of enterprise entirely. The owners of the jewel-box-sized shop, just opened on Barracks Row, are sweetening deals in a way that even the best K Streeter might envy, offering confections such as shortbreads, cupcakes and madeleines.

And amid the glut of candy-pink cupcakeries, the Sweet Lobby is turning out what might be the best macarons this side of the Champs-Élysées.

The puffy-shelled pastries — airy, filled with buttercream and not to be confused with the more pedestrian cookies called macarons — boast delicate flavors such as rose, orange-ginger and hazelnut praline with salted caramel.

Winnette McIntosh, who worked with her brother, Timothy, to bring about the Sweet Lobby, says she has been “obsessed” with macarons since tasting them on visits

to Paris and wanted to bring them — as well as the simple but chic style of display found in many of the French city’s boutiques — to her adopted home of Washington.

And in true macaron-aficionado form, she has a favorite Parisian macaron purveyor: She prefers Pierre Hermé to Ladurée (a choice akin to the raging debate of Five Guys vs. In-N-Out Burger).

Macarons, once a delicacy known only to Parisians and discerning tourists, are having their own cultural moment. Starbucks briefly offered them recently, and they’re practically a recurring character on the TV show “Gossip Girl,” beloved by the Francophilic socialite characters.

And the McIntoshes’ story is pretty sweet stuff, too.

Raised in Trinidad, both attended MIT as undergraduates and pursued careers far from the kitchen: Winnette, 36, got her Ph.D. and became a researcher at the National Institutes of Health; Timothy, 26, worked for the city of Boston designing science curriculum for middle schools.

Winnette and her husband settled on See MACARONS, Page 21



Siblings Timothy and Winnette McIntosh recently opened the Sweet Lobby on Barracks Row. The shop offers a variety of goodies, including macarons, an up-and-coming Parisian pastry.

The Sweet Lobby Labors to Make Perfect Pastry

Siblings’ Travels to Paris, Asia Inspire Shop’s Confections and Presentation, Yet They Pay Tribute to Washington With Their Name and Packaging Design

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Capitol Hill, where she experimented with recipes in her kitchen, dreaming of someday opening a business of her own. A year ago, she decided to take the plunge and called her brother in Boston.

The two had long talked about doing a food or hospitality venture together. And so she didn’t have to exert too much older-sister influence to get him to agree. They spent a year preparing, testing recipes like mad scientists and finally signing on a space just blocks from Winnette’s home.

The interior, once a beauty salon and now a sliver of a store done in dark-chocolate brown with piles of macarons under a glass counter, reflects the siblings’ worldly travels. “It’s more boutique and less bakery,” Timothy says. “It reflects our trips to Asia and Paris. The way of presenting is very Paris, and the minimalist feeling is Asia.”

The name of the shop, they say, is meant to evoke the neighborhood’s political flavor, but it has other layers of meaning. A lobby is an area where people mingle, and MIT’s campus features an area known as “Lobby 10,” where students can showcase projects and ideas.

They pay homage to their environs, too, in the design of their packaging. The “Monumental” box that holds 40 macarons



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is emblazoned with a line drawing of Washington landmarks, and the “Barracks Row” box that holds 16 is decorated with an anchor, a nod to the nearby Navy Yard.

In addition to a rotating cast of about 10

macaron flavors and 15 cupcake offerings, the shop also offers loose teas, shortbread cookies and even a savory treat, a parmesan-spiked hazelnut-thyme cracker, that begs for a glass of wine to drink with it.

Timothy mans the store, while Win-

nette continues working full time at NIH. But the one thing she won’t leave to the baker whom the siblings hired are the macarons. She makes them herself, either before or after work.

Exquisite care goes into each. The shells contain only four ingredients: egg whites, almond flour, powdered sugar and granulated sugar. Combining them, though, is the tricky part. “It’s all in the technique,” she says. The final product must have a smooth top and a little ruffle on the bottom edge, known as “feet” or “pied.”

After baking, the gems are aged for 24 to 48 hours, a process that allows them to soften and their flavors to meld.

And for all the attention lavished on the macarons, the Sweet Lobby’s cupcakes aren’t exactly chopped liver. Lemon cupcakes are made with cream steeped in fresh lemon zest, and the chocolate features Valrhona, a fudge filling, and a whipped ganache frosting crowned with chocolate pearls.

The siblings have found that they’re going through so much citrus zest that they’re planning to introduce some kind of juice offering to make use of the naked fruits accumulating in the kitchen.

Winnette is diplomatic when it comes to the inevitable cupcake-vs.-macaron debate, even though she’s clearly a macaron partisan at heart. “There will always be a place for cupcakes and their nostalgic perfection,” she says. “But the macaron ...”

She trails off.