

TAMMIE COE BAKERY

By Christopher A. Costantino

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At the corner of 40th and Campbell, in the Arcadia District of Phoenix lays a neighborhood icon - La Grande Orange. This place is so popular and well known; the Sunday morning that I visited, it was standing room only. With consistently fresh breakfasts and their gourmet foods, it's no wonder they are so busy. However, no one would argue that part of the reason for their success can be attributed to their exquisite baked goods. (Or should that be baked greats?)

Just a few doors down, Tammie Coe and her staff of 15 rise to meet the challenge of keeping the pastry case at La Grande Orange stocked with cookies, scones, breads, muffins, tarts, croissants and more. During peak months (September to December), they crank out 200 cookies a day. According to Coe, her bakery makes "...pretty much everything a regular bakery can make."

Dedicating to researching my subject matter, I diligently set out about tasting a few of the offerings. I began with a BANANA MUFFIN; moist, though not greasy, it was bursting with fresh banana flavor – nothing artificial here. SOURDOUGH BREAD was crispy on the outside, soft and chewy on the inside; it made the best sandwich I've had in a long time. Saving the best for last, I sampled the PECAN PIE TARTLET – sweet gooey filling inside a buttery flaky crust met its fate quickly. (Take my word and order several of these gems... I was wishing I had!)

Tarts range in price from \$5.00 (individual size) to \$20.00 for a small (4-6 servings) to \$38.00 for a large (8-12 servings). A "rustic fruit galette" (6-8 servings) sells for \$24.00. The "Yummy Extras on the Go" consist of muffins and cookies that sell for \$2.50, and cupcakes, brownies and scones that fetch \$2.25; very reasonable prices considering their artisan origin, top-flight ingredients and mouth-watering taste.

In addition to pastries, Coe is also known for her breathtaking cakes. Several varieties are sold through La Grande Orange, but her real specialty is wedding cakes. As for the clientele, she was hesitant to name-drop, but mentioned she created cakes for several sports figures as well as Hollywood entertainers. One design, called the "Zebra" boasts white chocolate mousse layered with chocolate cake and raspberries. Another utilizes banana pudding, chocolate truffle mousse and espresso angel food cake. Although she has an extensive portfolio of cake designs, Coe is happy to take special order consultations as well. Pre-made cakes come in two sizes: small – \$28 (6-8 servings) and large – \$45 (10-15 servings).

A signature chocolate rolled fondant with a porcelain-smooth finish gives these cakes multiple personalities, from regal pink and gold fit for royalty, to child-like whimsy surely inspired by the timeless imagination of Dr. Seuss. Willing to bake outside the box, Coe takes her designs to many levels; she recently created one that looked like a scale model of a loft development. For those looking to leave a lasting impression, turn to her edible flowers crafted from chocolate or sugar; rest assured they'll be remembered long after they're gone.

Fresh ingredients are a major priority; Coe explains, "When we started, we promised ourselves that we would only use the highest ingredients." She has stayed true to this vision, ordering unsalted European-style butter, premium chocolates, fresh fruits, freshly squeezed juices and the best vanilla (up to three gallons per week!), You won't find preservatives in Coe's dough either – her treats are all natural. With standards just as high, her husband, Michael John, runs MJ Breads from the same location. A variety of artisan breads made from scratch include ciabatta,

sourdough and French baguettes; these are supplied to La Grande Orange, Zinc Bistro and FiAMMA Trattoria at the James Hotel.

Coe is a classically trained pastry chef and graduated from Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island. Earlier in her career, she held positions in Florida, including the Biga Bakery in Miami, the Ritz-Carlton in Naples, and the Breakers in Palm Beach. She and her husband settled in Phoenix 10 years ago. Locally, she has been the assistant pastry chef at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, and the pasty chef at Desert Highlands. Recently, her wares were showcased at the acclaimed Michael's at the Citadel. A couple years ago, she became pastry chef at La Grande Orange and her creations filled their case. In October 2003, she worked from a temporary space next to La Grande Orange, moving into her current location in March 2004.

Over the years, Coe has participated in and won many competitions, including taking first place in the prestigious Puratos Global Wedding Cake Competition in San Francisco. For this petite pastry queen, baking comes from the heart. "I feel blessed that I get to do what I love. I thank God that people are accepting what we do. It's the best feeling in the world that people enjoy my products." In March 2005, look for her new location in the Artisan Village at 7th Street and Roosevelt. For now, check out Tammie Coe's creations at La Grande Orange or visit her website; you can thank me later.