

Pastry Chef Devon Morgan: Puffed Perfection



What is it about chefs that make them so delicious? Their search for the world's best olive oil, their latest obsession with tamarind paste, or that secret ingredient they use to finish a dish. What is this crave? They inspire us to play with unique ingredients, mentor us on kitchen technique and have taught us how to celebrate around scrumptious food.



“Stick with the seasons. No matter what you make, choose items that are in season. It will give you the best flavor and require less sugar to make your item really pop.”

Pâte a choux, a fundamental part of the baker's repertoire, is a versatile dough that most of us have enjoyed in its light, airy prime — whether used as a sandwich for ice cream or as the mold to a chocolatey-filled pastry cream, the infamous éclair. Devon Morgan, Pastry Chef at the Sheraton Capitol Square Columbus, loves choux for this reason — it's very versatile in terms of shape, baking options and finishing techniques. It can be sweet or savory and provide a great base for hors d'oeuvres and desserts. “I love choux, because my favorite thing is to fill it with pastry cream and dip it in ganache – it's an oldie, but a goodie.” At the hotel, she uses pâte a choux to make profiteroles, cream puffs, eclairs and gougères. Depending on the size of the party, they can make anywhere from 50 shells to 150.

From making the dough to baking it, it's finding that right balance for a successful finish. Piping over 5,000 choux molds in her pastry career, Devon can claim the secret to making a great choux paste. Steam is the main leavening that gives the choux its puff. How many eggs you add will help to determine the consistency of your dough and how much it will puff.

She has a great trick that she will share to making this step a success at her upcoming [North Market School of Cooking Class on March 17th](#).

Find useful baking tips, her favorite kitchen tools and resourceful pastry books in my interview with Devon below:

One ingredient you couldn't live without and why?

DM: Vanilla Beans – no matter what you are making the addition of vanilla can round out the flavor. Vanilla beans are what they use to make vanilla extract. You can use the seeds in your dessert or use them to make your own extract by steeping the pods in Vodka. You can also place them in sugar and make vanilla sugar.

When making custards we split the beans and remove the seeds and add to the cream or milk. We save the pod to add to our on-going batch of homemade extract or to make more vanilla sugar. We allow the cream to reach a low boil and infuse the cream with the flavor. Vanilla beans are best stored in the freezer – to keep them from going moldy due to warm temperatures in the kitchen and to keep them at their freshest.

Often you find pastry chefs looking to France for perfection in baking and technique. What country has influenced your baking the most and why?

DM: I have yet to make it to France, but I have had the pleasure of going to Austria and enjoying the beautiful cafes and wonderful dedication they have to desserts. Vienna is a city much rooted in tradition and classics with new things here and there. It is very inspiring to see a classic dessert turned into a more modern version of itself.

One of the most famous cakes in Austria is the [Sacher torte](#). I love the dense chocolate cake with the tang of apricot. I have made a brownie version of this cake with a intense chocolate cake, apricot preserves and ganache glaze on top. Not everyone is a fan of the fruit/chocolate combo, but I love the contrast.

Are there other countries or cities that have inspired your own personal recipes? Please describe.

DM: I love places that have a dessert they are known for – like the Boston Cream Pie or here in Columbus the Buckeye – and making it into my own. It keeps things exciting and allows people to stay with tradition, but still feel like they are trying something new.

We have a 'buckeye' tart on our banquet menu. It is a soft creamy filling in a chocolate cup with ganache on top. It really provides that peanut butter flavor that people here in the buckeye state crave.

What is one of your recently designed pastry menu items at the hotel?

DM: One of the fun things we have on our current banquet menu is 'old school treats'. My pastry team mate Bo and I came up with our version of a 'Twinkie, Oreo and Ding Dong'. We tested several recipes and flavors until we came up with the right fillings, flavors and combinations. The two biggest sellers on our restaurant menu are the Malt Pot de Creme and the Toffee Bread Pudding. Depending on your desire for hot or cold, these desserts offer a wonderful way to finish out a meal.

Must have kitchen supply or utensil in your home kitchen

DM: Micro zester. If you are making anything with citrus this is a must use tool.

I made a Meyer Lemon almond custard. The aromatics from the very finely zested skin allows the intense lemon flavor to come through in your desserts. One of the best ways to incorporate the flavor is to add the zest to the sugar

and rub together.



Left: Toffee bread pudding, right: Malt pot de creme

This releases the oils and flavor.

Your pastry “bible” found in your cookbook/baking book library

DM: Anything by [Wayne Gisslen](#) is a go to book for most basics items. It gives you small and large formulas and percentages to accommodate for any number of quests. For the home enthusiast, I recommend [The Secrets of Baking by, Sherry Yard](#). It is a great basic book that gives you recipes to build on and try new things using great building blocks.

Favorite pastry to make (sweet or savory) and why?

DM: I love to make quick breads. They offer a great base for a multitude of flavors and they can be dressed down for breakfast or a snack and dressed up for a very elegant dessert.

We make a really yummy cream cheese pound cake at the hotel. We have used it as a morning coffee cake with apples and streusel on top, turned it into a lemon cake and used it in a trifle with pudding and berries for a banquet lunch, and made it plain and served it with macerated strawberries and a quenelle of lightly sweetened whipped cream for after dinner dessert.

Inspirational figures you follow and look to for the next big thing

DM: Christina Tosi from [Momofuku](#) in New York City. I love all that she creates. It could be as simple as Cereal Milk or as interesting as liquid Cheesecake – she is amazing!

If you could apprentice any chef (living or not living,) who would it be and why?

DM: I would love to work with [Pastry Chef Johnny Iuzzini](#). I really like his style of desserts and how he combines savory flavors with sweet to make a unique flavor profile. He has also had a lot of varied job experiences and I think I could learn a lot from his skill set and knowledge.

Although I have never had the pleasure of eating any of his dessert, his book has a wonderful looking creation – a chocolate beet cake. I would like to try this and see how he combines the savory/sweet successfully.

If you could visit any patisserie in the world, where would you go and what would you have?

DM: I would love to go to France and experience any and all the wonderful pastry shops, but for sweets I would

want to make sure I hit [Dalloyau](#), their Canneles look delicious. For bread, it would have to be [Boulangerie Mauvieux](#) for their amazing looking baguettes.

Any advice you can give to the home baker when it comes to equipment?

DM: When choosing equipment, you don't always need those specialty tools to get the job done. Try to buy tools that can be used for more than one purpose. It will save you money and benefit other kitchen duties. For instance, the Burr Mixer is great for smoothies, sauces, soups, fixing broken custards. It is also much easier to clean versus a blender. It can also help to eliminate that bulky blender on your kitchen counter.

When and where did your pastry career begin? When and how did you decide to become a pastry chef?

DM: The idea of my career began to grow after watching a reality show that followed culinary students in Providence, Rhode Island at Johnson & Wales University (JWU). I had always worked in the food industry and it was the best step to make food my career. We moved to Rhode Island from California (via Portland, Oregon) and I started at JWU and the rest as they say is history.

What brought you to Columbus?

DM: My husband is in a graduate program at OSU. We moved here from Boston, Massachusetts.

What is one thing Columbus does not know about you?

DM: I love to read, knit and quilt!

GETTING SEASONAL

Favorite thing to make with rhubarb

DM: One of my favorite things to use it with is to make a fresh lightly cooked compote with strawberries and rose water. I serve it with a lovely vanilla bean panna cotta. It really highlights the tang and the hint of rose adds a unique flavor that most people would not expect.