

805

95
LIVING

JULY/AUGUST 2011

SUMMER DAYS

IT'S THE BEST TIME OF YEAR FOR FAMILIES,
SURFERS, GRADUATES, FOODIES, AND
JUST ABOUT EVERYONE ELSE.



Taste of the Town

By Angela Pettera Photographs by Gary Moss

A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS

Coffee cakes, cream puffs, bread puddings, and pies from local bakeries.

ON MY LIST OF FAVORITE THINGS, brown paper packages tied up with string run a close second to sugary treats that come in pink cardboard boxes. Pies, cakes, cookies, and brownies bring out my inner Gretel. I get all giddy inside when I think about these decadent treats from our local bakeries.

Strawberry Rhubarb Pie

The ladies—Nancy Blau and Hana Miller—behind **Simply Pies** (simplypiessb.com) in Santa Barbara have perfected their art. I make pie for my husband all the time. He's not shy about telling me that my piecrust lacks something. When he tried the small six-inch apple pie (\$11) from Simply Pies, a look flashed across his face that said, "Oh my word! This crust is so much better than yours!" We've been married long enough that he knew to keep quiet. But I understood. When I tasted the large nine-inch strawberry rhubarb pie (\$22) made with agave syrup instead of sugar (the fruit pies have a "no sugar" option available), it took me back to my aunt's farm in North Carolina where I first tasted rhubarb, that tart, red celery-like vegetable which Southerners like me love to pair with strawberries. The scarlet strawberry-rhubarb filling is summer personified, wrapped in a perfect piecrust.

Peanut-Butter Chocolate-Chip Cookie

The Bread Basket Cake Company (breadbasketcake.com) in Camarillo is mobbed on Saturdays with people picking

up loaves of cinnamon-raisin walnut bread and tall frosted cakes topped with chocolate-dipped strawberries. All the while, sitting quietly on the shelf is a bombshell of a cookie: The peanut-butter chocolate-chip cookie (\$1 each) is crispy on the outside, chewy inside, and loaded with chunks of peanut and chocolate, giving it just the right balance of salty and sweet.

Cinnamon-Crumb Coffee Cake

I'm always on the lookout for a perfect hostess gift, so I was thrilled to see that **Panera Bread** (panerabread.com) sells a whole version of its cinnamon-crumb coffee cake (\$15), a treat that's moist yet crumbly in all the right places. It carries a serious cinnamon payload and looks fantastic in its Bundt shape.

Mini Éclairs

The new **LivLee Bakery** (livleebakery.com) in Thousand Oaks is stocked with all sorts of wonderful goodies. The tiny raspberry parfait cake is as tasty as it is adorable. But it's the little cream puffs (\$0.85 each) and the mini éclairs (\$1 each) that haunt my dreams. In both, crunchy *choux* pastry is filled with plenty of vanilla custard. The éclairs, more

oblong in shape, are then slicked with a chocolate glaze. The cream puffs also come in a chocolate version with pudding-like filling. If Charlie Sheen were eating these right now, he'd say, "Winning!"

Cinnamon Chopper

StoneGround Breads Bakery (stonegroundbreads.com) has supplied Agoura Hills with artisan breads from its small storefront on Kanan Road since 2004. They expect to be moved into their new 5,500-square-foot digs this month just across the freeway in The Shops at Oak Creek (next to Jinky's). They've hired a pastry chef to stock the refrigerated cases with treats like caramel apples and brownie pops. The new space will also feature pizzas, patio seating, and a coffee bar. Of course, the classics like the kosher artisan breads made on site with the bakery's own milled flours will still be available, along with their amazing version of the cinnamon bun called the Cinnamon Chopper (\$2.55). Baked in a muffin tin, the chopper's base oozes with gooey cinnamon-laced caramel. From the top burst splayed petals of dough that become crunchy during cooking, giving the whole thing a textural one-two punch.





Clockwise from top left: strawberry rhubarb pie, peanut-butter chocolate-chip cookies, cinnamon-crumb coffee cake, and mini éclairs.

Tierra Sur

AT HERZOG WINE CELLARS



ZAGAT

Highest Rated Restaurant In Ventura County

Tierra Sur boasts Mediterranean influenced seasonal cuisine, utilizing California's fresh produce. The menu is rustic, unpretentious, and ingredient driven, offering such items as pomegranate marinated lamb, or aged rib-eye steak and wild king salmon cooked outdoors over an open flame. Guests may enjoy a special wine tasters menu which pairs Tierra Sur's refined cuisine with Herzog's award-winning wines.



Use the code **ZAGAT805** when booking your reservation to get a complimentary bottle of Reserve Wine included with your dinner.

*You may enjoy the wine with your meal
or take it with you to enjoy at home.*

Bring this ad with you to redeem this offer. Offer ends August 31, 2011

For Reservations Call:

805 | 983 | 1560

www.TierraSurAtHerzog.com

www.HerzogWineCellars.com

» Taste of the Town

Red Velvet Bundt Cake

I want to say up front that I think red velvet cake has been over-hyped. Most of it is inauthentic, which is to say, not even made with cocoa powder and shot through with too much red food coloring. However, the Red Velvet Bundtlet with Butter Cream Cheese (\$4) from **Nothing Bundt Cakes** (nothingbundtcakes.com) in Thousand Oaks takes this treat to the next level with chocolate chips and moist, cocoa-powder-laced batter. Sure, the garnet color is amped up, but the flavor is, too. The thick lines of cream cheese frosting that converge to fill up the well in the center of the cake gild the lily—in a good way.

Lemon Cream Cheese Bread Pudding

I first encountered the lemon cream cheese bread pudding (\$5.50) at **Sweet Arleen's Cupcakes & Bread Puddings** (sweetarleens.com) in Westlake Village as a "flavor of the month." Now it's available every day, which is a wonderful thing. The intense lemon flavor of the small disc, heavy with buttery goodness, stands on its own. It does, however, come with a tart raspberry sauce and reheating instructions.

Meringues

The beautiful pastel colors of the meringues (\$3.50 per bag) caught my eye immediately upon entering **Chocolatine** (chocolatine.net) in Thousand Oaks. The light, airy, egg-white delicacies are all vanilla-flavored, but each disc is colored pale pink, purple, orange, or yellow. Packed in a glassine bag, these meringues make a lovely gift.

Sweet Spice Brownies

In March, Kate Dunbar opened **Petite Rêve Café** (petiterevecafe.com) a half block from the beach on Seaward Avenue in Ventura. Her business (the name means "small dreams" in French), began with handmade truffles and has expanded to include other baked goodies like moist scones, Meyer lemon bars with ample lemon topping, and her unusual Sweet Spice Brownies (\$2.25 each). They have a light cocoa flavor laced with nutmeg, cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, star anise, and—surprisingly—white pepper. Dunbar recommends eating these cakey delights with a red wine like Justin Winery's Isosceles or The Ojai Vineyard's Grenache Thompson.

Pistachio Cake

The four-layer chocolate cake and the brownie sundae get all the glory at **Brent's Deli** (brentsdeli.com) in Westlake Village, but the sleeper treat is the pistachio cake (\$8). The pound-cake texture, the pistachio-extract perfume, and the pale-green color put it over the top for me. Maybe if they called it pistachio pound cake it would get more respect.

Strawberry Shortcake Cupcake

As if the name isn't cute enough, the strawberry shortcake cupcake (\$3.25 each; four for \$12) from the **Cupcakery** (cupcakeryonline.com) in Thousand Oaks looks as darling as it sounds. Oh, and it tastes amazing. The buttercream frosting oozes fresh strawberry flavor, and there's an abundance of it to eat with the delicate white vanilla cake underneath. It's available on Fridays and by special order. ■