

# Sweet reinventions

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*By A.K. Whitney*

Sometimes a great disaster can lead to a great reinvention.

Five years ago, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, destroying large parts of the city, killing more than 1,500 people and displacing more than a quarter million.

Grace Bauer, author of the just-released "Los Angeles Classic Desserts" (Pelican Publishing; \$16.95) was one of the luckier ones. Her home was in a part of the city that got through the storm relatively unscathed.

"We stayed through the storm," Bauer said. "We saw the roof peeling off the Superdome."

Bauer said she had no idea at the time that thousands were sheltering there. It wasn't until after the storm, when she and her family finally evacuated, that she realized just how much damage had been done, and that it would be a long time before things would get back to normal.

The commercial design business she had nurtured for 25 years - a business that has had clients as varied as a casino in the Bahamas, a hospital in Beirut and ferries in different countries - fell apart.

"After Katrina, our lives changed," Bauer said. "We had been downsizing the company before Katrina, but after Katrina, the staff scattered."

So did Bauer, who decided to leave the city she had lived in all her life to come to California. It was not a random decision. Her daughter Allison Meyerson, a photographer (she took most of the photos for the cookbook), had moved to California 12 years earlier. Once in Los Angeles, and without a business to run, Bauer decided to try something different.

She applied to the Cordon Bleu in Pasadena - "I always had a passion for culinary things." After graduation, she was able to return to New Orleans, and secured an externship at Arnaud's, the famed French Quarter restaurant.

It was hard work, and Bauer worked not just on the kitchen line, but with the pastry chef and the saucier. Once the externship was over, she started doing test cooking for a woman writing a cookbook about desserts from classic New Orleans restaurants.

The woman's publisher was Louisiana-based Pelican Publishing, and the publisher had started a series covering restaurant recipes all over the country.

For Bauer, who was now splitting her time between the City of Angels and the Big Easy, it was an opportunity. It was also a challenge - not quite akin to rebuilding a city after a hurricane, but still formidable.

"There are 27,000 restaurants in this area," Bauer said. "How do I choose, and how do I get it to represent L.A.? I realized how much there is to embrace."

She decided to start with the classics - landmarks like the now-defunct Brown Derby and Chasen's, and still-going-strong Lawry's and Canter's Deli. And since this was a dessert cookbook, she was also able to include bakeries, such as Joan's on Third, Sweet Lady Jane's and La Brea Bakery.

"A lot of the places have such strong identities," Bauer said. "You want the places people identify with the city."

But Bauer didn't just limit herself to Los Angeles. One of her recipes came from Disneyland - oatmeal-

raisin cookies from the Disneyland Cafe - and another from Knott's Berry Farm - boysenberry pie. These were chosen, Bauer said, because Knott's and Disneyland are so associated with the Los Angeles experience.

Narrowing down her choices was only the first step. Next came contacting restaurants and bakeries and asking them to, essentially, give up something that contributes to their livelihood.

Bauer couldn't quite describe how she was so successful at coaxing recipes out of the likes of the Two Hot Tamales and chefs at the Polo Lounge and Water Grill - about three dozen in all - but gives partial credit to her long-ago psychology degree from the University of New Orleans.

David LeFevre, executive chef at the Water Grill in downtown Los Angeles, did not seem too perturbed at giving Bauer the recipe for one of his best-selling desserts, the red velvet pudding.

"One of our previous pastry chefs, John Park, designed it a few years ago," LeFevre said. "It's one of our most popular desserts."

LeFevre did add, though, that if cooks found the recipe challenging, or just wanted to compare and contrast, since some parts, like the raspberry tuile, were considered too difficult for the home cook, that it would be even better if they came to the restaurant.

Jane Lockhart, owner of Sweet Lady Jane's, a cafe and bakery on Melrose Avenue, was happy to share her recipe for raspberry

cheesecake.

"Cheesecake is one of the first things we got known for," Lockhart said. "The cheesecake was a logical choice at that point for the home cook. And raspberries are easy to find."

Lockhart's point about raspberries was not lost on Bauer, who went out of her way to choose recipes that called for ingredients that are not too hard to find.

"Chefs have resources the home cook doesn't have," Bauer said, adding that in the case of a more exotic ingredient, she made sure to include a note on how to find it.

Two exotics on top of that list were fresh boysenberries ("not even at the farmers market") and rose water. For the former, try frozen, or just substitute raspberries and blackberries. For the latter, try the vitamin and herb section at the supermarket.

But exotic ingredients and recalcitrant chefs were just the beginning. Turning restaurant recipes into directions for the home cook is a Sisyphean task, and desserts are especially hard.

"Cooking is an attitude, baking is a science," Bauer said.

Then there's the fact that restaurants tend to make things in much larger sizes - red velvet pudding at the Water Grill is made in batches of 36, while Sweet Lady Jane's makes cheesecakes in lots of six.

"We took a look at it for batch sizing," LeFevre said.

It took a year for Bauer to test her way through the recipes. Her daughter and her daughter's two young sons helped.

Well, Bauer's grandchildren helped for the most part. Bauer

described an episode in which at least one dessert was consumed before it could be photographed.

Bauer will sign her cookbook from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday at Sam's Club, 7480 Carson St., Long Beach.

## **GINGER SCONES**

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

1/3 cup sugar

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 teaspoon finely chopped lemon zest (about 1/2 lemon)

12 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch cubes and frozen

2/3 cup candied ginger, finely chopped into 1/4-inch pieces

1/2 to 3/4 cup heavy cream, plus extra for brushing tops of scones

Adjust oven rack to middle of oven and preheat oven to 400 degrees.

In the bowl of a food processor fitted with the steel blade, or a stand mixer with the paddle attachment, combine the flour, sugar and baking powder. Pulse or mix on low until combined.

Add lemon zest and butter, and process until mixture is pale yellow and the consistency of fine meal.

Transfer mixture to a bowl and stir in the ginger. Make a well in the center, and pour in half a cup of the cream. Mix together until just combined. If mixture feels dry, add the remaining 1/4 cup.

Wash your hands and dust them with flour. Place dough on a

lightly floured surface and knead gently to gather it into a ball. Roll or pat the dough into a circle about 3/4-inch thick. Cut out circles with a 3-inch round cookie cutter as closely as possible. Gather remaining dough, press together and shape into remaining scones. Place scones 1 inch apart on a parchment-lined baking sheet.. Brush tops with remaining cream.

Bake for 12-16 minutes, or until surfaces crack and are slightly browned.

Makes 8 scones.

*—From La Brea Bakery.*

## **CHOCOLATE PUDDING**

1/2 cup chopped strawberries

1 teaspoon sugar

1 1/2 ounces bittersweet chocolate, preferably Valrhona, finely chopped

1 1/2 ounces white chocolate, finely chopped

3/4 cup sugar

1/4 cup, plus 2 tablespoons cocoa powder

1/4 cup cornstarch

1 pinch kosher salt

2 cups milk

1 cup half-and-half

1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1 cup whipped creme fraiche or whipped cream, for garnish

Combine strawberries and 1 teaspoon sugar in a small bowl. Set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, combine bittersweet and white chocolate. Set aside.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine 3/4 cup sugar, cocoa, cornstarch and salt. Slowly add milk and then half-and-half, whisking to combine until smooth.

Pour mixture through a fine-meshed sieve into a medium heavy-bottom saucepan. Bring mixture to a boil over medium heat, whisking continuously, until mixtures start to thicken.

Reduce heat to a simmer, and cook, still whisking, for another 2 minutes. Remove from heat, and add vanilla. Strain hot mixture into bowl with chocolate. Stir to melt chocolate, and continue to stir until chocolate and pudding are incorporated. Place bowl over an ice bath, and continue to stir until mixture has cooled.

Divide mixture among 8 3-ounce sized ramekins or other containers. Refrigerate until well chilled. To prevent a skin from forming on puddings, top each with a small piece of plastic wrap, pressing wrap directly on surface of each pudding.

Serve puddings with strawberries and a dollop of cream.

Serves 8.

*—From Palate.*