

let them eat cake



...AND COOKIES
AND PASTRIES



RENOWNED CAKE MAKER **MARTINE HOLZMAN** HAS MOVED TO EAST THIRD STREET
AND EXPANDED HER SELECTION OF DELECTABLE CAKES AND PASTRIES,
PLUS ADDED BREAKFAST AND LUNCH SERVICE



Martine and Jim Holzman are thrilled to be part of the East End neighborhood.

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By Patti Nickell | Photos by Lee P. Thomas

Entering Martine's Pastries, in a renovated 1873 building on East Third Street, is like entering a café in Paris' Montparnasse or Le Marais districts. Patrons linger over double espressos and buttery croissants; bakers concoct all sorts of frothy delicacies in the kitchen easily visible from the dining area, and tantalizing aromas waft through the room.

It would be easy to imagine Martine's as a place whose main function is as a refuge for those who love to sit and argue Proust and Camus all day over endless cups of café au lait.

That is, until you notice the impressive display of cakes — confectionery towers layered with creamy icing and decorated with sugar roses. For it is these works of art, praised in publications such as *Bride's Magazine*, *Southern Living*, and *Martha Stewart Living*, that have given Martine Holzman, with her ready smile and rimless glasses, the unofficial title of



Bakers are at work well before dawn to ensure the first customers can choose from a wide selection of pastries and other delectables when Martine's opens at 7 a.m. on weekdays. Martine's opens at 8 a.m. on Saturdays and is closed on Sundays.

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Lexington's wizard of wedding cakes.

The title may be an honorific, but Martine's passion for pastries — especially cakes — is real and has been since she was a 6-year-old growing up in the village of Saint Sandoux in France's Auvergne region. Inspired by her grandmother, also a baker, she knew early on what her career path would be.

After attending culinary school in the south of France and indulging her wanderlust in exotic destinations such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Malaysia, she wound up as personal chef to Philippe Foriel-Destezet, a member of France's aristocratic Bourbon family.



Holzman places the final decorations on a wedding cake as bakers Floyd Dunn and Caitlyn Johnson assist.

With this prestigious appointment, you might wonder how Martine came to leave the splendors of the Bourbons only to end up in Bourbon country. In a nutshell, it was love, although not the kind you might expect. This was a love more likely to be chronicled on the Nature Channel than the Hallmark Channel.

Martine had married Jim Holzman, a native Californian, and the peripatetic duo had lived for brief periods in both France and California, as well as in New Orleans, Chicago, and New Jersey. But when Jim, a dedicated rock climber, first saw the craggy cliffs of the Red River Gorge, he was hooked, and it didn't take much to hook his wife as well.

Martine says it was amour at first sight, when she got lost on Paris Pike driving from New Jersey to Lexington. "I just knew this was the place for me," she said.

Now, all that was needed was to make it a place for her pastries as well. In 1999 she rented a one-room studio kitchen near Gratz Park and embarked on her cake-making career. In no time she had outgrown her small kitchen, and she and Jim — who had left his real estate



Martine's cakes are as beautiful to look at as they are delicious to eat.

business to become his wife's business partner — moved their operation to a warehouse on Industry Road where they remained for 18 years.

Initially, with just the two of them to fill a growing number of orders for her wedding cakes, Martine pressed her husband into duty. She taught Jim to bake and to make the buttercream fillings and frostings her cakes are known for, while she concentrated on the decorating.

They proved to be a formidable team. Martine soon became recognized as one of the 50 best cake decorators in America, and Jim — no longer confined to the

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Haley Lawson carefully ices a cake.



Left, chef Ashley Quinton and front-of-house manager Tyler Donahue concentrate on their tasks.

bake oven — took on the marketing duties, even setting up a YouTube channel to, as he says, “help deconstruct some of the myths surrounding our elaborate cakes.”

Who needs myth when the reality of Martine’s wedding cakes is so fantastic? The reason: They are all custom made

— no cake mix; real batter, cream, and butter. As Holzman likes to say about her wedding cakes, “We bake your love from scratch.”

Martine’s takes orders for about 200 cakes a year, with the typical cake taking four-and-a-half hours from start to finish. Some, of course, require even more

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time and level of expertise, such as the six-tier upside down cake she did for a prominent Louisville couple's wedding.

"That one was really challenging as it was more structural design than artistic touches. I really felt more like an architect than a decorator," she said with a laugh.

Holzman, who currently has five decorator artists working with her, says it took her five years to get to the level of expertise to feel confident. Confident enough to charge top dollar for her fanciful creations. "The cost depends on the size and design and can range from several hundred to several thousand dollars," she said.

Asked about her most expensive project, she appears almost apologetic and says, "\$8,000, but it did involve a lot of work. It took seven of us 35 hours working non-stop to finish it."

While former University of Kentucky basketball great Nazr Mohammed hired her to design the cake for his wedding, other high-profile clients such as Lexington Mayor Jim Gray, mayoral candidate Linda Gorton, and local television personality Lee Cruse are fans of her celebration cakes, created for any occasion from birthdays and anniversaries to dinner parties, and are more modestly priced from \$28 to \$100.

Holzman also provides her premier pastries to some 20 local restaurants, from Ouita Michel's Wallace Station and Windy Corner to Red River Rock House. Additionally, she has contributed three of her signatures to Keeneland Race Course (her butter cake and flourless chocolate cake are on the menu, and her lemon bar, on the clubhouse buffet), and at last report, were holding their own with the track's iconic bread pudding.

New kids on the block

The Holzmanns are a long way from



Traditional French pastries such as croissants are morning favorites.



Italian delicacies also tempt.

that microscopic studio kitchen where they started nearly 20 years ago. Now operating out of a 6,000-square-foot building at 400 E. Third St., they love to talk about just how much the extra space has meant to their business model.

In addition to the wedding cakes and pastries, Martine's now offers brunch and lunch, with menu items sourced from local Kentucky artisans such as Kenny's Farmhouse Cheese, Brown-

“

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—CO-OWNER JIM HOLZMAN

ing's Country Ham, Sunrise Bakery, and Stone Cross Farm.

That means country ham-cheddar-local vegetable frittatas and buttermilk chive biscuits with Stonecross Farms sausage, Kenny's white cheddar and blueberry compote for brunch, and the popular croque monsieur with Brown-ing's country ham, bechamel sauce, and gruyere for lunch.

"We've seen in the short time we've been in this location what this expanded menu has meant to our business," said Jim.

In addition to the boost in business, the Holzmanns are excited about being part of the renaissance of Lexington's

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Holzman greets customer Olivia Davis and offers suggestions on what to select.

historic East End. “Saving this beautiful building was our first thought, followed quickly by the knowledge that, after so many years spent isolated in an industrial location, we wanted to be part of a community,” Martine explained.

The couple had spent several years watching as other neighborhoods such as Jefferson, West Sixth, and Manchester streets flourished. They made the decision they wanted to be participants rather than observers. They opted for their East End location because of both its historic past (Isaac Murphy Memorial Garden and Lyric Theater) and its dynamic future (the Legacy Trail and the Town Branch Commons).

Martine’s previously housed a li-



The popular croque monsieur with Browning’s country ham goes well with the tomato bisque soup.

quor store for 30 years and before that a market. Renovations took 14 months. Apart from the brick exterior, all that was kept were the original floors, baseboards, and doors, which were removed and then returned after the walls had been stripped and replaced. The building also contains new plumbing and

electrical outlets and fixtures, security, and high-tech measures.

“We came in a full year before opening as renovation on the building was starting,” said Jim. “We joined the neighborhood associations to meet the people we would be serving and to get actively involved in the community we would be living in.”

Nodding her head with its untamed blonde curls, Martine added, “We wanted to integrate, not infiltrate.”

And that is just what the Holzmanns have done. Martine’s, with its cool, casual Parisian vibe, has made Lexington’s East End a little more cosmopolitan. Its selection of fantasy cakes and pastries has definitely made it a lot sweeter. **KM**