

**Back to the Pack**  
Briefcases and totes are leaving us lopsided. It's time to reconsider the two-strap **D4**



# OFF DUTY



**On Wine**  
What goes best with turkey? Well-priced American wine, says Lettie Teague **D5**

EATING | DRINKING | STYLE | FASHION | DESIGN | DECORATING | ADVENTURE | TRAVEL | GEAR | GADGETS

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## So Much for Humble

This Thanksgiving, trade homespun sweets for something more haute. Welcome to the baroque era of pie



**PIE OH MY** Clockwise from top: Caramel-apple 'pie élevée,' sweet potato pie with whipped-cream quenelles, cranberry-sage pie, chocolate-rye tart.

Christina Holmes for The Wall Street Journal. Food Styling by Heather Meldrom. Prop Styling by Cindy DiPrima

BY GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

**IN AMERICA, PIE** equates with a lot of things. Patriotism. The harvest. Home baking. Thanksgiving. Mom. But the beauty queen of the dessert table it's not. Nor has the flaky-crust pastry traditionally been a vessel for fancy, whimsy or showy ornamentation on these shores. Its appeal has been more of the steadfastly rustic variety—until now.

In recent years, shops intent on reviving the traditional craft have opened all over the country—Hoosier Mama Pie Company in Chicago, Mission Pie in San Francisco, Pie Lab in

Greensboro, Ala., and Random Order Coffeehouse & Bakery in Portland, Ore., to name a few. At trendy restaurants like the Dutch in Manhattan and Miami, pie is the cornerstone of the pastry program, and pie cookbooks keep on rolling out, such as last month's "The Four & Twenty Blackbirds Pie Book" from Brooklyn's new-wave pie outfit of the same name. All of the above have championed the seasonal fruit fillings, from-scratch custards and hand-formed crusts that typify our collective pie ideal. This is farm-to-table distilled: the freshest ingredients, messed with minimally.

Nor some of those same pie pros are using their skills to make their desserts not just delicious, but show-stopping

too. In their book, Melissa and Emily Elsen of Four & Twenty Blackbirds embellish pies with all sorts of geometric pastry patterns—think lattice that looks more Aztec than picnic. Jennifer Yee, of Lafayette Grand Café & Bakery in Manhattan, bakes caramel-apple behemoths that stand tall, free of a pie tin, like their meat-filled cousins from across the pond. At Tartine Bakery & Cafe in San Francisco, Chad Robertson's chocolate-rye tart has a dramatic checkerboard pattern: snowy meringue overlaid with dark-brown lattice. And Tiffany MacIsaac of Buzz Bakery in the Washington, D.C., area crowns pies with elegant whipped-cream quenelles.

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## EATING &amp; DRINKING

## A BAROQUE ERA FOR PIE

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They're all a radical departure from their plain predecessors—kind of like seeing the girl next door in lipstick and heels for the very first time. It seems the pie renaissance has given way to something new: an expressive, ornamental baroque period.

According to Michael Krondl, author of "Sweet Invention: A History of Dessert," there's a reason American pies have traditionally been rather homely. "In New England, the pilgrims didn't have much choice but to have Mom make the apple pie from start to finish," he said. In England, by contrast, pastry was the province of professionals as much as home cooks, and from the medieval period until the 18th century, pies occupied pride of place on the banquet table. In the wealthiest households, pies were lavishly constructed masterpieces that could be shaped like castles, calves' heads and peacocks; painted different colors, decorated with icing and embellished with cutouts; and even filled with live rabbits and birds that fled once the top crust was lifted.

Many of those intricately embellished Old World pies were savory creations—or a fusion of sweet and savory, as a lot of medieval dishes were. According to Janet Clarkson, author of "Pie: A Global History," colonial American settlers moved toward a distinctly sweet pie repertoire due to circumstances of geography and agriculture. "When migrants go to any country they try to recreate what they have at home," said Ms. Clarkson. "In New England, they didn't have much wheat, but with what wheat they had, they made pastry. Apples and other orchard fruit grew quickly and easily there, and those were already part of the British pie tradition."

Though some stateside pastry chefs are beginning to embrace loftier pie architecture, they are, as a rule, remaining true to their American

'If there was ever a time to put something glorious on the table, it's Thanksgiving.'

roots and keeping the fillings sweet. Ms. Yee, who is doing a caramel-apple "pie élevée" at Lafayette this Thanksgiving, studied pastry in England and designed her crust with the British tradition in mind. "I love the look of raised pies. I love the structure, I love that it contains a lot of filling and I think it looks regal and glorious," said Ms. Yee. "If there was ever a time to put something regal and glorious on the table, it's Thanksgiving."

Pies are once again in the hands of craftspeople, as they were centuries ago. "My pies are \$32," said Ms. MacIsaac of Buzz Bakery, whose signature is dainty whipped-cream piping. "When people pick them up, they understand what they're getting—not just plain pumpkin." Is America ready for them? "Everyone has a specific idea of what pie should taste like," said Ms. MacIsaac. "But when you put it on the table and it looks like something you haven't seen before, that's really special."

► See the recipe for Lafayette's caramel-apple "pie élevée" at [WSJ.com/OffDuty](http://WSJ.com/OffDuty).



## Four &amp; Twenty Blackbirds' Cranberry-Sage Pie

ACTIVE TIME: 1 hour TOTAL TIME: 3 hours MAKES: One 9-inch pie

## For the crust:

2½ cups all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
1 tablespoon sugar  
2 sticks unsalted butter, cold, cut into ½-inch pieces  
1 cup cold water  
¼ cup cider vinegar  
1 cup ice cubes

## For the cranberry-sage filling:

¾ cup dried cranberries

½ cup granulated sugar  
½ cup packed light brown sugar  
1 tablespoon coarsely chopped fresh sage  
½ teaspoon kosher salt  
4 tablespoons ground arrowroot  
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon ground allspice  
4 cups fresh cranberries, or two 10-ounce bags frozen

1 small baking apple, such as Northern Spy or Golden Delicious, peeled and coarsely grated  
1 tablespoon vanilla extract  
1 large egg, lightly beaten

## For the egg wash:

1 large egg  
1 teaspoon water  
Pinch salt  
Demerara sugar, for finishing

1. Make crust: In a bowl, combine flour, salt and sugar. Add butter and coat with flour mixture. Use a pastry blender or bench scraper to cut butter into flour, working quickly, until pea-size pieces form.
2. In a small bowl, combine water, vinegar and ice. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons water mixture over flour mixture. Use a bench scraper or spatula to fully incorporate into flour. Continue to incorporate water mixture, 1-2 tablespoons at a time, until dough just begins to form a ball. Use your hands to fully bring dough together into a ball.
3. Divide dough into two equal pieces. Shape each into a flat disc and wrap in plastic. Refrigerate at least 1 hour and preferably overnight.
4. On a lightly floured surface, roll out 1 dough disk, rotating periodically, into a circle 14 inches across and about ⅛-inch thick. Place dough in a 9-inch pie pan, pressing into sides, and refrigerate.
5. Make filling: Fill a heatproof bowl with dried cranberries. Pour boiling water into bowl, covering cranberries by about 1 inch. Meanwhile, in a food processor fitted with blade attachment, pulse sugars, sage, salt, arrowroot, cinnamon and allspice until fully combined. Transfer sugar mixture into a large bowl.
6. In the food processor, roughly chop 2 cups fresh or frozen cranberries. Add chopped and remaining whole cranberries to sugar mixture.
7. Drain plumped dried cranberries in a colander. Add apple and plumped cranberries to sugar mixture and stir to combine. Stir in vanilla extract and egg until combined.
8. Make pie: Pour filling into refrigerated pie shell. Chill filled pie shell 10-15 minutes. Meanwhile, position oven racks in bottom and center positions

and place a rimmed baking sheet on bottom rack. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

9. Create starburst lattice: Roll out second dough disk, rotating periodically, into a circle 14 inches across and about ⅛-inch thick. Using a pizza cutter or sharp knife, cut four 11-inch-long, ½-inch-wide dough strips and four 5-inch-long, ½-inch-wide dough strips. Cover and place in refrigerator.

10. By inserting rows of toothpicks, divide surface of pie into four even triangles. Starting at edge of pie, run a long dough strip up one row of toothpicks toward center of pie, stopping short of center. Reverse direction, folding dough strip back along opposite row of toothpicks to form a triangle. Repeat with remaining long dough strips to form three large dough-strip triangles.

11. Using shorter strips, repeat process above, forming smaller triangles inside large ones. Remove toothpicks. Press ends of dough strips firmly into bottom crust and fold crust overhang back over ends of strips. Pinch edge of crust tightly and crimp. Make egg wash: In a small bowl, whisk together egg, water and salt until combined. Brush dough with egg wash, taking care not to drag filling onto lattice top as it will burn. Sprinkle with Demerara sugar.

12. Place pie on rimmed baking sheet. Bake until pastry is set and beginning to brown, 20-25 minutes. Decrease temperature to 375 degrees. Move baking sheet to center rack and continue to bake until pastry is deep golden-brown and juices are bubbling, another 35-45 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool, 2-3 hours. Serve slightly warm or at room temperature. Pie will keep 3 days refrigerated or up to 2 days at room temperature.



## Buzz Bakery's Sweet Potato Pie With Whipped-Cream Quenelles

ACTIVE TIME: 1 hour TOTAL TIME: 4½ hours MAKES: One 9-inch pie

## For the crust:

2½ cups flour, plus more for dusting  
¾ teaspoon kosher salt  
½ sticks unsalted butter, diced and chilled  
2½ teaspoons vodka  
2 tablespoons ice water

## For the filling:

2 large sweet potatoes  
2 teaspoons water  
½ cup granulated sugar  
6 tablespoons butter, melted and cooled  
2 large eggs  
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract  
¼ teaspoon kosher salt  
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon peeled, grated fresh ginger  
¾ cup whole milk

## For the whipped cream:

1 pint whipping cream  
¼ cup confectioners' sugar  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Make crust: In a large bowl, whisk together flour and salt. Sprinkle butter over flour mixture. Rub butter and flour between the palms of your hands until butter is evenly incorporated and texture is sandy. Pour vodka and ice water over flour mixture and incorporate so dough barely holds together. Knead lightly, forming a small ball. Wrap in plastic wrap and let rest 1 hour.
2. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough, rotating periodically, into a circle 13 inches across and about ¼-inch thick. Place dough in a 9-inch pie pan and trim excess. Use a fork to poke holes in dough. Chill in refrigerator 15 minutes.
3. Remove dough from refrigerator. Place a large sheet of parchment paper on top and fill with pie weights. Bake 30 minutes. Remove weights and parchment, and continue baking until fully cooked, 10 minutes more. Remove from oven and let shell cool completely. Decrease temperature to 300 degrees.
4. Make filling: Prick potatoes with a fork and sprinkle each with 1 teaspoon water. Wrap potatoes in aluminum foil. Place in oven and bake until tender, 1 hour. Remove and let cool. Peel and purée in a food processor until smooth. Set aside ½ cup purée for filling.
5. In a bowl, whisk potato purée, sugar, butter, eggs, vanilla, salt, cinnamon and ginger until smooth. Add milk and stir to combine. Place mixture in baked pie shell. Bake, rotating after 25 minutes, until filling sets, 45-60 minutes. Let cool completely.
6. Once pie is cool, make whipped cream: Use an electric mixer to whip all ingredients to stiff peaks.
7. Make quenelles: Fill a small bowl with very hot water. Dip a spoon with a deep bowl into water. Tap off excess water. With spoon facing down, place far edge of spoon into whipped cream. Keep near edge of spoon close to cream but do not let it touch. Drag spoon toward you, twisting your wrist to gradually turn bowl of spoon upright. Cream will curl with spoon, forming an egg shape. Place quenelle on top of pie. Clean spoon and repeat process to make more quenelles. Arrange quenelles around outer edge of pie, or around the center, like the petals of a flower.

## Tartine's Chocolate-Rye Tart

ACTIVE TIME: 1 hour TOTAL TIME: 3 hours MAKES: One 9-inch tart

## For the crust:

2 cups plus 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature  
1 cup sugar  
1 large egg, at room temperature  
1 large egg yolk, at room temperature  
½ teaspoon vanilla extract  
2½ cups finely milled rye flour, sifted  
2 cups unsweetened cocoa powder,

sifted, plus more for dusting

## For the chocolate-meringue filling:

4 large egg whites, at room temperature  
1 cup sugar  
½ cup blanched almonds, coarsely ground  
½ vanilla bean, finely chopped

4 ounces grated unsweetened chocolate  
¼ cup apricot jam

## For the egg wash:

1 large egg yolk  
2 tablespoons heavy cream

1. Make crust: Using an electric mixer fitted with paddle attachment, beat butter and sugar on medium speed until creamy, 1-2 minutes. Add egg and mix to combine, then add yolk and mix to combine. Stop mixer and scrape down sides of bowl with a rubber spatula. Turn on mixer to low speed, add vanilla extract and mix to combine. Add flour and cocoa and mix until combined. Transfer dough to a large piece of plastic wrap, form into a rectangle, wrap tightly and refrigerate until firm, at least 1 hour.
2. Divide chilled dough into two equal pieces. Rewrap one piece and place in refrigerator. Lightly dust both sides of other dough piece with cocoa powder. Transfer to a sheet of parchment paper and cover with a second sheet. Roll dough out between parchment sheets, rotating periodically, into a circle 14 inches across and about ⅛-inch thick. Transfer dough (still in parchment) to refrigerator and let chill. Meanwhile, roll out second dough piece, using the same technique. Place in refrigerator to chill. Meanwhile, remove first dough circle and place in a 9-inch tart pan with a removable bottom, lightly pressing dough into sides of pan. Use a sharp knife to trim excess dough hanging over edges. Place tart shell in freezer until firm, 15 minutes.
3. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Remove second pastry round from the refrigerator. Use a pastry wheel, pizza cutter or sharp

knife to cut dough into ¾-inch-wide strips. Return strips to refrigerator. Line tart shell with parchment paper and fill with pie weights. Bake until shell is slightly puffy, 15-20 minutes. Remove from oven and remove pie weights. Let cool to room temperature, then place in the refrigerator. Increase oven temperature to 400 degrees

4. Make filling: Using an electric mixer, whip egg whites on medium-high speed until foamy. Add sugar a little at a time until incorporated. Turn mixer to high and beat whites until stiff peaks form, 3-5 minutes. Turn off mixer and gently fold almonds and vanilla into whites, then fold in chocolate. Remove tart shell from refrigerator. Spread apricot jam over bottom of tart shell, then fill shell with meringue, smoothing it in an even, flat layer. Remove strips of dough from refrigerator and lay half of them across meringue, spaced evenly. Lay remaining dough strips perpendicular to other strips. Trim any excess dough hanging over edge. Press strips into edge of crust to seal.
5. Make egg wash: In a small bowl, whisk together egg yolk and heavy cream. Brush lattice strips with egg wash. Bake until meringue puffs and darkens slightly, 30 minutes. (If meringue colors too quickly, reduce oven to 375 degrees, rotate tart and continue to bake.) Let cool to room temperature before slicing. Pie can be stored at room temperature up to 2 days.



Christina Holmes for The Wall Street Journal, Food Styling by Heather Medrom, Prop Styling by Cindy DiPrima (4)