

EATING & DRINKING

Still-Life With Gelato

Creamy and crunchy, sweet and tart, the deftly composed coppetta is what you might get if the sundae went to art school in Italy

BY GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

YOU MIGHT not think of gelato as a lower-fat option. But talk to New York City pastry chef Meredith Kurtzman, and you learn all sorts of things. Italian-style gelato, she explained, contains a fraction of the cream used in American-style ice cream and way more milk. “Fat coats your tongue and obfuscates flavor,” she said. For a pastry chef fixated on expressing the character of her ingredients, this is a pretty big deal.

Ms. Kurtzman started churning gelato at Esca, an Italian restau-

rant in Manhattan, and went on to gain wide acclaim for her frozen desserts (and a cult following for her olive-oil gelato) during her 12-year run as the founding pastry chef at Otto, Mario Batali’s Greenwich Village pizzeria. Her contributions to the craft continue—she’s now working as a consultant to ice cream companies and plotting a cookbook—as does the dessert program she created at Otto, based on house-made gelati, sorbetti and the sundaes they star in, which Ms. Kurtzman dubbed coppette.

“Coppetta just means little cup,” said Ms. Kurtzman, in her unassuming way. But really, in her hands, it’s a dessert composed with remarkable finesse. “You want it crunchy and creamy. Ideally you want it hot and cold, but that’s not always possible,” she said. “You want different textures. The flavors always have to balance out. Sweet has to be counteracted by acid or bitter.” One of Ms. Kurtzman’s coppette, the Meringata, illustrates this principle particularly well. A sort of deconstructed lemon-meringue pie, it brings together lemon sorbet (acidic and cool), lemon curd (sweet and creamy), torched meringue (warm), blueberry compote (juicy) and crumbled pie crust (crunchy). The cumulative effect? Sheer delight.

In preparation for her role at Otto, Ms. Kurtzman went to Italy to hone her gelato-making skills. She brought back lessons on what to do—and what not to. “Most places in Italy start with a white base and toss in different flavor compounds,” said Ms. Kurtzman. “I wanted to do it the from-scratch way.” That meant, for instance, steeping mint leaves in milk to build a surpassingly minty gelato from the base up. She’s also been known to pinch every nectarine at the Union Square Greenmarket to find the best ones for sorbet. Though coppette are Ms. Kurtzman’s invention, her commitment to finding the best ingredients and letting them shine is very Italian. “I always want you to know what you’re eating,” she said. “Otherwise what’s the point?”

For the crunch element, Ms. Kurtzman recommends toppings ranging from streusel to pretzels to granola. The richness could come from the gelato, and/or from a creamy topping, like crème fraîche or whipped cream. Sauces can certainly include favorites like chocolate or caramel, but Ms. Kurtzman recommends experimenting with



Coconut Gelato Coppetta With Lime Granita, Macerated Strawberries and Mint

ACTIVE TIME: 1½ hours TOTAL TIME: 9 hours (includes freezing) SERVES: 8

For the coconut gelato:
1 quart whole milk
½ cups unsweetened dried coconut
10 large egg yolks
¾ cup sugar
½ cup heavy cream
½ teaspoon salt

1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
For the lime granita:
1 cup water
½ cup sugar
Zest of 2 limes
½ cup lime juice, from 3 to 4 limes

For the macerated strawberries:
1 pint strawberries, washed and sliced into bite size pieces
2 tablespoons sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
A few leaves basil or mint, sliced into thin ribbons, for serving (optional)

1. Make coconut gelato: Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Spread coconut over a metal baking sheet and roast until barely colored, 10-15 minutes. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, bring milk and cream to a bare simmer, then remove from heat. When coconut is finished roasting, use a spatula to nudge it into hot milk and let steep 30 minutes (and no longer). Pass milk through a fine-mesh strainer and discard coconut.

2. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, heat strained milk with ½ cup sugar, stirring until steamy. Remove from heat. In a heatproof bowl, whisk egg yolks and remaining sugar. Gradually ladle hot milk into eggs, whisking to combine, until you’ve added about half the milk. Return custard to saucepan and heat gently over medium-low heat, stirring with a spatula until mixture is steaming but not boiling.

3. Quickly strain hot custard into a heatproof container, then stir in salt and condensed milk. Place container over a bowl of ice water, and stir

to cool down quickly. Cover cooled custard and chill in refrigerator at least 4 hours, preferably overnight.

4. Freeze gelato in an ice-cream maker according to manufacturer’s instructions. Cover with plastic wrap and chill in freezer at least 1 hour.

5. Make lime granita: In a saucepan, heat water and sugar until sugar dissolves and liquid is clear. Stir in lime zest and cool syrup in refrigerator. Once cool, strain out zest and discard. Stir lime juice into syrup. Pour lime mixture into a shallow 8-by-8-inch metal or glass pan and place in freezer. Use a fork to scrape liquid around pan every half hour, until mixture is flaky, evenly textured and icy, not rock hard or mushy. Keep it in freezer until ready to serve.

6. Macerate strawberries: 1 hour before serving, in a medium bowl, toss strawberries with sugar and salt. Chill in refrigerator.

7. To serve, scoop gelato into center of a chilled dish. Add a scoop of granita on one side and a dollop of macerated strawberries on another.



other tasty drizzles, like maple syrup or good olive oil.

Above all, produce inspires this chef. “Fruit is my favorite thing to work with,” she said. “Since I couldn’t make pies at Otto, I worked fruit into the coppette.” Ms. Kurtzman’s favorite method is to simply toss fresh fruit with a bit of sugar, a pinch of salt and maybe some citrus zest, liqueur, balsamic vinegar or fresh herbs. Sugar and salt draw out

fruits’ natural juices, she said, which in turn bathe the fruit in its own flavor. “You want to taste the fruit first,” said Ms. Kurtzman. “The other stuff is just an accent.”

If you’re feeling ambitious, you can make an entire coppetta, gelato and all, from scratch. Above is Ms. Kurtzman’s recipe for coconut gelato and lime granita with a strawberry-mint topping. Or, you can produce a perfectly complex and

delicious coppetta using store-bought ingredients. In the recipe at left, Ms. Kurtzman recommends marrying vanilla gelato with cherries and amaretti cookies.

Finally, consider the manner in which you convey the coppetta to your mouth. “You want to combine a bit of each thing in each spoonful,” said Ms. Kurtzman. “The fun of a coppetta is that you can put it all together in one bite.”



Cherry Coppetta With Vanilla Gelato and Amaretti Cookies

This coppetta made using store-bought ingredients requires little time to assemble. Macerate cherries with balsamic vinegar for a tart-savory flavor, or use brandy for an elegant, boozy dessert. Or, swap in jarred amarena cherries from Italy, preserved in a delicious syrup that doubles as a sauce.

ACTIVE TIME: 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME: 40 minutes
SERVES: 8

½ pound or 2 cups sweet cherries, pitted and halved
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar, kirsch or brandy
¼ cup sugar
1 pinch salt
16 amaretti cookies, coarsely chopped into spoonable pieces
1 quart vanilla gelato

1. In a medium bowl, toss cherries with balsamic vinegar, kirsch or brandy, sugar and salt. Let sit 30 minutes.

2. Place cookies in the bottom of a pre-chilled serving dish, scoop gelato on top, festoon with cherries and drizzle macerating liquid over top.

HALF FULL



1. Cambridge Brewing Banryu Ichi, 14% ABV
Brewed with sake’s uniquely high-octane yeast strains, this barleywine has a frilly, floral, cantaloupe-and-vanilla aroma masking a tough and toothsome caramel core.

2. Dogfish Head Bitches Brew, 9.0% ABV
A mix of traditional African mead and English stout, this slow-burning sipper grooves with chocolate and charcoal.

3. Unity Vibration Triple Goddess KPA, 7.0% ABV
KPA starts with fizzy, funky kombucha, then turns lambic-like with sour yeast in an open fermentation tank and finishes with an IPA’s worth of hops.

4. Jester King SPON Albariño & Blanc du Bois, 6.7% ABV
A truly Texan hybrid beer fermented with wild yeast and local white-wine grapes, dry and gritty as the soil, with a sweet, purple-candy glow

5. Allagash Victor, 7.4% ABV
Cabernet Franc grapes in Pilsner grain play red-fruit melodies over a spiced and snappy beat: candied ginger with a side of raspberries.

6. Firestone Walker ZinSkin, 7.0% ABV
Aged on grapes for three weeks, then fermented in barrels for a full year, ZinSkin emerges surprisingly light and sprightly: a summer brew to sip among the vines.

CRACK OPEN A WILD ONE

Refreshing new beer-wine hybrids—among other Frankenbrews—bring in the funk

SUMMER IS ABOUT wild combinations: sandals with a suit, books on the beach. ’Tis the season of ice cubes in your wine glass and iced tea in your lemonade—and now, in your beer glass, a new breed of hybrid brews. These cross-genre blends of beer, wine, booze and soda bring playful irreverence to summer refreshment.

Experimenting with wild yeasts and natural fermentation, brewers have found common ground with winemakers. Once the staff at Texas’s Jester King Brewery saw neighboring Hill Country wineries using the same natural-fermentation tricks they did—barrels, open tanks, local microbes—borrowing fruit from them seemed a logical next step.

Jester King SPON Albariño & Blanc du Bois is a Belgian-style lambic beer refermented with wine grapes. “We had to develop our palate,” said Jester King founder Jeffrey Stuffs, “learn to identify what flavors are good, what’s bad, what just needs time.” One early experiment with Blanc du Bois grapes gave off “this funky, overripe-fruit smell,” Mr. Stuffs said, “but then we drank some Sauvignon Blanc made with those grapes and tasted the same flavor. That gave us confidence we weren’t off course.”

All these beer blends are born of exploration, made by brewers chasing exotic yeasts once limited to cider, mead and even sake.

Unity Brewing Co. ferments a gluten-free beer using the bacteria and yeast normally found in kombucha. Cambridge Brewing uses sake’s unique mix of yeast and koji (a mold). To produce its Bitches Brew, Dogfish Head studied the traditional honey fermentation that makes ancient African t’ej wine.

Before the advent of modern brewing, with its clearly delineated styles and designated yeast strains, brewers worked with a splash of this, a pinch of that and a hefty helping of respectful resignation to the mysteries of fermentation. There’s an element of improvisation to these new brews, and that’s what makes them fun. “In the early days, we were crushing grapes with baseball bats,” said Allagash brewmaster Jason Perkins.

They’ve grown up, somewhat. Dogfish Head plans to release its Bitches Brew in canned six packs this year—big news for a beer once available only as a centerpiece-size shareable bottle. Will that workaday packaging detract from its distinctiveness? Allagash’s Mr. Perkins believes these beers deserve attention, not affectation. “When I’m drinking wine, it’s usually out of grandma’s juice glasses,” he said. And he drinks these beers from nothing more pompous than a short, wide-mouth glass to direct and disperse their aromas. “I’m practical,” he said. “We’re brewers at heart.” —William Bostwick