

Issue Date: October 2007 Issue

The Best of Cleveland 2007 Food & Drink

Cake decorators, bagels, fish fry, dichotomy popcorn, coffeehouse, diner, four-star carryout, cupcakes, coffee, new franchise, dip, chicken dish and man-made buffet.

The Editors

editorial@clevelandmagazine.com

CAKE DECORATORS

Eggs, flour, sugar, a spike of rum. In lesser hands, such a list might yield a sad little 9-by-13-inch dessert and a tipsy baker. But under the art-school-trained eyes of cake designers **Lauren Bozich and Marianne Carroll**, simple ingredients become the stuff of whimsy: delicious Louis Vuitton bags, LeBron's 22nd birthday cake (complete with a crown covered in edible 24-karat gold), fantasy wedding displays of buttercream art. The two women are the team in the kitchen at The White Flower Cake Shoppe, which has barely been open six months. But the duo has already cultivated legions of enthusiasts in their decade of working together, and they're winning more by the day. We figured they'd balk at our request for an authentic (and tasty) replica of the Terminal Tower. But they took the assignment with zeal, and created a 3-foot-tall cake that's almost too realistic to eat. www.whiteflowercake.com; 2101 Richmond Road, Beachwood; (216) 373-3623



BAGELS

Once in a while, we taste something that reminds us of how it's supposed to be done: homemade frosting, church lady pierogis, the espresso that transports us to France. **Bialy's Bagels** do it to us every time — one bite and we're ruined on all the other places for weeks. The bagels are boiled and baked to perfection: a bit crusty, a bit chewy, but not overboard in any way. If that were it, we'd be content. But it's not. The true genius of Bialy's is everything else. The price is right (65 cents, a good 20 cents below any other place we've found), the menu is right (just bagels — no sandwiches, no paninis, no salads) and the service is right (cash only, get your own cream cheese from the cooler). Thanks guys, for keeping it real. 2267 Warrensville Center Road, Cleveland; (216) 371-1088

FISH FRY

Step through the door at **Seven Seas Seafood** and you know this is a fish market: a whiff of fresh catch in the cool air and a long glass-and-stainless-steel case packed with a bed of ice for walleye, sea scallops, salmon and jumbo scampi as big as your fist. There's even an entire cooler devoted to lobster tails. Buy a pound of lake perch (or tilapia for the kids) and the helpful staff will pull it from the cooler, hand batter it and deep fry the filets to perfection — all for just an extra \$1. Grab a pint of housemade coleslaw, maybe some chowder and a pound of fries, and you've got a fresh and easy fish fry. Or get everything you need (pots, kettles, bags, bowls and, yes, topneck or cherrystone clams) for a fall clambake. 15725 Lorain Ave., Cleveland; (216) 941-1359

DICHOTOMY POPCORN

Campbell's Sweets & Popcorn Shop layers caramel and cheese together on each individual popcorn kernel, the best way we've found to create Chicago-style popcorn — or, as we know it in Cleveland, dichotomy popcorn. While other shops just mix separate kernels of caramel and cheese together and call it a day, Campbell's, located at the back of the West Side Market to the right of the giant clock, has the contrasting flavors down to a science. The melding of flavors produced by the Campbell variety gives munchers a mouthful of popcorn that's sinfully sweet-yet-cheesy, to satisfy both your cravings in each bite. www.campbellsweets.com; 1979 W. 25th St., Cleveland; (216) 280-5012



COFFEEHOUSE

Dewey's Coffee House radiates with the creativity of Diane Armstrong, an interior designer and its co-proprietor. Just inside the door, antique leaded windows frame a half-vestibule. The wood floors are stamped with florid patterns resembling henna tattoos. The vibrant color scheme, full of bright mustards, greens, browns and reds, evokes an edginess that balances the cozy feel of the fireplace and couches in one corner. Though some solitary laptop-toters set up shop, attracted by the free Wi-Fi, Dewey's harkens back to the classic European notion of a coffeehouse as a "gathering house" (as its slogan says). Its wide windows and patio embrace one of Cleveland's friendliest mini-communities, Shaker Square. Stop by for coffee or for lunch — the menu includes Bialy's Bagels (see above) — or cross the square, pick up a bottle of wine at Shaker Square Beverage, and come back. If you bring your own vino, a barista will pour it for a "hospitality fee." 13201 Shaker Square, Cleveland; (216) 991-1101



DINER

Maybe it was just our moms, but snarky, fun waitresses remind us of home. Hence our masochistic affection for **J.T.'s Diner** in Willoughby. The 12-table restaurant serves standard diner fare at cheap prices. The bill for two eggs, hash browns that are the perfect combination of crispy on the outside but soft on the inside, two slices of toast, two strips of bacon and coffee, rings up at \$3.71 (including tax). But breakfast is secondary to the experience, where the waitresses wear shirts with the phrase "Eat and Get Out Dork!" on their backs. They mean it, too. Often the first words you hear after getting your coffee cup filled are "Time's up!" Be ready to order right then, or prepare to take some ribbing. 1126 Lost Nation Road, Willoughby; (440) 975-8840

FOUR-STAR CARRYOUT

We entered **Duet Fine Catered and Prepared Foods** unaware of the finds inside, just interested in getting a decent caterer for an upcoming baby shower. We walked out with dinner, a bottle of the mellowest olive oil we've tasted this side of the Atlantic and a huge crush on Pamela Waterman and her partner Brad Schmid (formerly of Lockkeepers and Park City Diner, respectively) for creating not only a great source for catering, but the best take-home selection of prepared food we've found anywhere. Pop in for slices of pork with tangy barbecue sauce and a tri-color orzo salad, or cornbread-stuffed chicken and mashed potatoes. They'll give you simple reheating instructions, and before you know it, you're serving and eating world-class chefs' fare at home. Save room for dessert: The individually sized cinnamon mini-Bundt cakes are insanely good. www.duetcatering.com; 2252 Wooster Road, Rocky River; (440) 333-2220

CUPCAKES

Forty-five minutes before closing time, the door is already locked. The sign says "All sold out." On the front steps, a 3-year-old girl starts to cry. A woman comes to unlock the door to **Main Street Cupcakes**, and gestures toward an almost empty case. "We bake once a day," she explains. "People come in and buy dozens at a time." There are four cupcakes left, so the little girl chooses the espresso-laced Machiato because it looks the most like chocolate. She shares it with her mom. Some cupcakes, such as Half-Baked Chocolate, are filled with cookie dough, cream and other savory surprises. You can find cupcakes in almost any bakery, but the ones in this little blue shop are the products of "Northeast Ohio's first cupcake-only boutique bakery." These are designer cupcakes — they'll even create a signature one for you. The cake is distinctive but mild and even the espresso-flavored Machiato is sweet enough for the girl, who usually just eats the frosting. Days later, the memory of that Machiato lingers, as does the little girl's request every time she is driven down Main Street, "Mommy, can we go to the cupcake shop?" www.mainstreetcupcakes.com; 238 N. Main St., Hudson; (330) 342-0833



COFFEE

It's an inspired invention, combining all the delicious nostalgia of a malt with modern times' urgent need for coffee: Civilization's **Iced Malted Mocha**. The Tremont coffee house has created a beverage with a sublime marriage of flavors. The milky sweetness of malt is a natural match for the chocolate and coffee flavors of a mocha. Best of all, the coffee is made from City Roast beans, which operates out of a warehouse on West 11th, half a block away from Civ. It doesn't get much fresher than that. 2366 W. 11th St., Cleveland; (216) 621-3838

NEW FRANCHISE

We Northeast Ohioans love ice cream in all its incarnations, but for the bravest souls, it's the so-called ice cream of the future that really gets us excited. And around these parts, you'd be hard-pressed to find **Dippin' Dots** come Christmastime — until now. The amusement park favorite finally has a heated home at the Shoppes of Solon North. The location offers more than 20 flavors of the tiny beads of ice cream (stored at 45 degrees below zero), so you can escape to the tropics in February with Tropical Tie-dye or get your coffee-flavor fix any time of year with Java Delight. The store also has yogurt dots, sherbet dots and no-sugar-added flavors. The dots are cold, but you can always warm up on one of the Dance, Dance Revolution machines in the party room. www.dippindots.com; 28300 Miles Road, Solon; (440) 498-0141



DIP

Spread hummus on a pita, and you've got a quick meal full of earthy flavors. But chef Zack Bruell at Table 45 has taken a simple spread to dazzling heights with his **goat cheese hummus**. The tartness of tahini, nuttiness of chickpea and smooth zing of chevre combine into a balanced, tangy dip. Served with fresh-out-of-the-tandoori-oven naan that is soft and light and just a touch crisp, the hummus undergoes a transformation. The warm flatbread mingles and melts with the cheese in the dip, creating an ethereal, smooth texture — full of flavor — that you just won't get out of a plastic tub. It's already caused us heated debates over the last smidgen in the serving dish. www.tbl45.com; 9801 Carnegie Ave., Cleveland; (216) 707-4045



CHICKEN DISH

Four saucy little chicken thighs, plump little darlings resting on a bed of jasmine rice, impertinently soak everything in their path with a garlicky, thick, sweet glaze. We stare down at them, contemplative. Dark meat? Really? But yes, we have been assured by our server, this is the kind of dish that makes everyone forget their hang-ups. This decadent, so-good-it's-indecident meal is Johnny Mango's **Bangkok BBQ Chicken**, a menu option for the evening crowd, and for good reason: The kind of noises you'll make as you dig into the juicy slips of chicken that have finally been given the treatment they deserve, well, those aren't the kind of noises one should make around children. It's an X-rated dish, folks. Are you up to it? www.jmango.com; 3120 Bridge Ave., Cleveland; (216) 575-1919



Readers Poll: Best Local Celebrity Dinner Companion (Female)
Elaine Cicora

Being a food critic is a tough job, but somebody has to do it. And at Cleveland Scene, that job belongs to Elaine Cicora. But it's not the eating that's difficult; it's choosing a favorite. "It's so hard to narrow it down to one dish. There are a lot of wonderful dishes out there," she says. But if she had to pick just one? "It's a little out of left field, but I would go with the **pho Tai chin** from Superior Pho," she says. "It's filled with steak and brisket. You add in bean sprouts, basil and thyme. A bottle of hot sauce next to you — it's wonderful."

MAN-MADE BUFFET

The strip mall is one of mankind's least inspiring creations — but to the perceiving eye, these blips on the highway landscape can sometimes reveal a subculture all their own. For the true connoisseur, nothing less than **Rockside Corners** in Independence will do. It's the Las Vegas buffet of strip malls. This corner pocket of concrete and industrial brick doesn't have just one ace in the hole, it's got a dozen. So next time you've got a house full of weekend guests, come here. While the vegans are eating at Aladdin's, the picky eaters are chomping Augie's Pizza and the grandparents are kvetching at Heide's Brooklyn Deli, you can drown your stress in a Budapest Blonde martini. Or a beer at the Winking Lizard. Or a bowl of ice cream at Coldstone Creamery. Or ... well, we'll let you discover the rest. 6901 Rockside Road, Independence