

PIPED DREAMS

Non-traditional fillings allow for fun mashups. | By Jody Shee



Amid America's ongoing love affair with doughnuts, chefs are leaving traditional jelly filling to Dunkin'. Instead, flavor layering and the savory sensibilities of croquettes and dumplings have arrived to doughnuts and doughnut holes.

"Right now, non-traditional things in general are really popular, fun and different," says Andy Rodriguez. He and his wife Amanda Pizarro founded Miami's The Salty Donut. "For the longest time, we were eating more predictably. But there's been a change and progression toward eating things that make us uncomfortable or are from cultures we've never experienced. It's the mashing of two styles or cultures that people wouldn't have done before."

While on a trip to Israel, where Pizarro was inducted into the Forbes 30 Under 30 class of 2018 in food and drink, the couple experienced "extraordinary tahini and halva," Rodriguez says. Thus, upon their return, they partnered with a tahini producer to develop a doughnut filling of tahini pastry cream to fill the hole in a doughnut ring and developed their own halva to crumble on top, finishing with black sesame brittle.

Brioche is the current darling of doughnut dough among culinarians. It's the standard at The Salty Donut for its softer dense and fluffy bread-like nuances, Rodriguez says. The egg and butter flavors pair well with fillings and glazes. One features an espresso cream with lavender honey glaze, and for a touch of spring, it includes dried candied spring flowers on top.

Also popular in spring at The Salty Donut is the Easter egg doughnut. For that, they had a custom cutter made to shape the brioche dough like an egg. They scoop out the dough and fill it with passion fruit and key lime ganache, which is yellow, then dip the whole thing in a standard vanilla bean glaze. Atop the ganache on each doughnut is a white chocolate egg-shaped disc with a hole in the middle so the yellow ganache shows through, creating the appearance of egg yolk.

Picking flavors

Flavor profiles often come from the chef's background and from the local market, says Gemma Matsuyama, pastry chef at n/naka in Los Angeles. While she is focused on her Japanese heritage right now, she sees a trend with all things Asian and Middle Eastern. As she develops doughnuts, she's playing around with whole grain flours, rice flour and various sugars imported from Japan. One of her doughnut riffs is mochi with a red bean filling including vanilla and butter. She relies on kokuto sugar

Above: Honey Lemon Curd and Chrysanthemum Meringue Doughnuts at Stubborn Seed, Miami Beach, Florida.

Opposite, from left: The Easter egg doughnut at The Salty Donut is typically filled with passion fruit and key lime ganache; This tahini and halva doughnut finished with black sesame brittle from The Salty Donut was inspired by a trip to Israel.



for sweetening. While red bean filling is typical Asian, it is not typically sweet. She meets guests halfway in that regard. “You have to come to any food with an open heart,” she says. Meanwhile, she experiments with the amount of sugar surrounding the red bean paste.

More mainstream, but in keeping with French and Italian trends, Matsuyama suggests a crême brûlée doughnut filled with vanilla custard and finished with a caramel glaze. In early summer, she makes a chamomile and poached apricot doughnut filling—creating a chamomile cream incorporating apricots she poaches in a Lillet Blanc syrup.

One of the greatest challenges is determining the dough-to-filling ratio. “You have to ask what kind of flour you will use and how sweet and dense it will be to decide how much filling it will handle,” she says. “You don’t want it to ooze all over your hand, but find the maximum capacity it will handle.”

For Dallas Wynne, executive pastry chef at Stubborn Seed in Miami Beach, Florida, it’s important to remember that a doughnut might sit out a while and must be able to pass the time without the filling seeping out. She advises, “Don’t fill it if the doughnut is extremely hot and you have a temperamental filling.” For example, she makes queso doughnuts with brioche dough. The doughnut must be completely cool before filling it with cheddar queso. Afterwards, she adds a



little melted shaved Parmesan on top and sprinkles with coarse pretzel salt.

Vishu Nath, executive chef at Cleveland, Ohio’s Urban Farmer, brought his pastry background with him to the culinary side of the house. “There are many delicacies and techniques that can convert from pastry to savory,” he says. “From the concept of a croquette to a stuffed dumpling, virtually anything can be transformed into a doughnut-style concept using various elements.”

He has made doughnut holes filled with beef tartare topped with cured egg yolk, fried capers and parsley. He has also filled doughnut holes with a foie gras mousse.

For those who are game to experiment, he suggests playing around with different frying fats, like lard or beef fat. Also, consider using palm sugar, honey or isomalt for fun toppings.

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