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The Next Craze After Cupcakes And Cake Pops: Predicting 2016's Dessert Fads



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Cake pops from *THE DESSERTIST* on display. Cake pops have been popping into bakeries across the land. (Photo by Robin Marchant/Getty Images for NYCWFF)

In July, Lori Lorgeree, a 34-year-old single mom with three young boys, quit a full-time job in public accounting and started an online cake pop bakery called [TNS Pop Shop Chicago](#).

If you haven't heard of cake pops, you're probably living under a rock — maybe near the one I live under. I went through the last several years never noticing the cake pops that are sold at [Starbucks](#) [SBUX -3.13%](#) or realizing that there is a bestselling book, *Cake Pops*, by Angie Dudley, an Atlanta home baker who has a blog [Bakerella](#) and is credited with inventing cake pops. There have already been two national cake pop conferences, and cake pops have been appearing in bakeries across the country.

Cake pops, if you don't know, are basically balls of cake and frosting on a lollipop stick.

"I've thought about trying to do a food truck with them — just baked goods and coffee," Lorgeree says. But for now, she has been selling to consumers online and local restaurants and coffeehouses — and has been hustling to get her business going while supporting three sons, Tucker, Nixon and Scottie.

“I helped save a wedding by making 250 cake pops in less than 12 hours,” she says of one of her recent triumphs.

At first, I thought Lorgeree might be crazy to quit her full-time job and chase a food fad. But it’s probably not accurate to call pop cakes a fad. Cupcakes, after all, became huge in the early 2000’s, and while everyone thought of it as a fad destined to disappear, there are still plenty of cupcake-themed bakeries across the nation.

Cake pops probably will endure, too, says Samantha Mittler, a.k.a., [The Dessertist](#), a New York City pastry chef who is opening a bakery under the same name, and specializes in creating dessert that looks like art.

Cake pops, Mittler says, have become “a staple in the dessert world, which I think will stick around for some time.”

But that got me to thinking. What will be the dessert craze in 2016 that everyone will be raving about? I asked around and came away with some interesting and potentially delicious answers.

Éclairs. Who doesn’t like an éclair? Melina Kelson-Podolsky, a pastry chef at the Chicago culinary school [Kendall College](#) predicts that éclairs will soon have their 15 minutes of fame.

“Éclairs are gaining in popularity because the crisp and neutral pastry dough is a perfect foil for sweet or savory creamy fillings,” she says.

Kelson-Podolsky says that she has seen some really unusual éclairs popping up in elite pastry shops in New York City, with fillings like mango yogurt, salted caramel and goat cheese.

Kouign-Amann. Katherine See, the executive chef for the café bakery chain [Au Bon Pain](#), predicts that this pastry treat is going to be big.

Although it’s been around for centuries, it’s a French pastry that has been appearing in bakeries on the East coast, especially in cities like Philadelphia and Boston.

You pronounce the name “queen aman,” and in French, it means “butter cake,” if that tells you anything. But don’t worry. It isn’t like the treat is all buttery, fatty goodness. There’s plenty of sugar in it, too.

Shortbread. Hagop Hagopian, the executive chef at [The Clare](#), an upscale senior living community in downtown Chicago, thinks shortbread is due for its due.

“I think with the growing popularity of tea shops, shortbread desserts will be making a big comeback,” he says. “They go well with hot beverages and can be adapted to a variety of textures that appeal to all tastes. You can add a number of ingredients to change the taste and texture. I like to use honey and sea salt. You can also infuse it with ginger. It becomes buttery, crumbly and salty if you add fleur de sel, hand harvested sea salt.”

And maybe what's most important for just about any dessert to become a fad, he says that what's appealing about shortbread is "that you can have many combinations of flavors in a small, simple bite. And every chef can put their own spin on the already classic product."

Smaller but decadent desserts. Cake pops are part of this trend, of course. It's that whole idea that maybe a giant slab of cake isn't a great idea when a smaller piece would do.

Caitie Maharg, a chef at the [Iris Inn](#), a luxury bed and breakfast in Waynesboro, Virginia says that she thinks "mini-desserts" will take off in 2016. "For example, strawberry shortcake bites or mini pumpkins pies," she says.

Desserts you can get drunk to. OK, maybe that's a reach. Still, liquor-themed desserts are gaining in popularity, according to Richard Graeter, CEO of [Graeter's Ice Cream](#), a mostly-regional, beloved ice cream parlor chain headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is in my neck of the woods.

"For example, you're seeing small batch beer and liquor flavor profiles coming into desserts, such as stout and bourbon," Graeter says. "Additionally, you're seeing a lot of fusions from different categories, similarly with the liquor and beer flavor profiles."

But it isn't only the alcohol artisans getting in on the dessert action. "Even breakfast danishes and puddings are being reimagined," Graeter says. "We've seen reimagined dessert staples being influenced by both other sweet categories as well as seemingly separate categories, like the savory."

Healthier desserts. [Donatella Arpaia](#), who has been a judge on a couple shows on the Food Network, says that she has noticed "a rising trend toward healthy and gluten free desserts."

For instance, Arpaia says she says that avocado-based chocolate pudding and vegan cheesecake has been taking off. Um, yum?

"People are more aware of what goes into their food and ingredients will matter more than ever to consumers," Arpaia says.

Steve Lindner, CEO of [ZoneManhattan.com](#), a healthy meal delivery service, agrees. He says that people are going to see more gluten-free options in 2016.

“We have a great microwave gluten free cake that is very similar to a chocolate pudding cake served in most restaurants,” he says. “It’s outstanding.”

[Mary Beth Lawton Johnson](#) also sees a healthier dessert trend coming. Lawton Johnson is a chef who services the famed one percent and shuttles between Florida and California and is based out of Pebble Beach, California. She thinks that we’ll start seeing more desserts being offered like pumpkin seed coconut bars and white tea and kale ice cream.

“Really funky ice cream flavors and not the standard boring stuff,” Lawton Johnson says.

Perhaps it will happen soon. For instance, there’s already [LaLoo’s Goat Milk Ice Cream](#) on the market, for anyone interested.

In any case, healthier desserts can’t happen soon enough for her. Lawton Johnson is not a fan of the current crop of sweet treats. “If I have to see another cupcake fad, somebody just shoot me now,” she says. “I am sick of cake pops and over-the-top stuff.”

Dessert art. This has been a trend for awhile, if you consider, say, the popularity of TLC’s TV series, *Cake Boss*, and it’s the reason that Mittler started her business, The Dessertist. (Some of her creations can be found on Instagram, [here](#).)

“Gone are the days of, ‘Give me a three-tiered, classic white wedding cake,’” Mittler says. “More and more, customers are asking for something unique, different and artistic. I recently created a wedding cake for a couple who didn’t want to cut the cake at all. They wanted it to be more of an art piece that people could look at during dinner.”

Not having your cake and not eating it, too, would match up with the trend of more healthy desserts, of course, but Mittler says that she also had baked a plain sheet cake that the caterers cut in the kitchen and passed around to guests.

But back to cake pops. I asked Lorgeree if she was at all worried that cake pops might be a fad and one day not be popular.

“I haven’t really worried about it,” she said, while conceding that she would have to change the name of her business, which doesn’t yet have a website but a [Facebook](#) FB +0.00% page and can also be found on Instagram. “If they start to fade out I think I’ll learn to make the next ‘it thing.’”

If the food experts are right, in 2016 or the years ahead, it looks like she may have plenty of “it things” to choose from.