

## What is a Contemporary Plated Dessert?

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I wanted to share the content of my recent demo, which took place at the For the Love of Chocolate (FTLOC) Pastry Forum in Chicago this past January. The event featured a series of eight seminars taught by international luminaries of the pastry industry, drawing chefs and students from all over the country.

My seminar, called 'Contemporary Plated Dessert', seems straight forward enough. But I posed the question: what does 'Contemporary Dessert' mean in 2020? So many styles exist at one time, so many recipes and variations. And for that matter, do the words 'classic' and 'modern' still have meaning in the pastry world?

In the visual arts community, the 'contemporary' tag refers to 'art of today.' The work of contemporary artists has a global influence, is culturally diverse, and technologically advanced. This art is a dynamic combination of materials, methods, concepts, and subjects, and continues the challenging of boundaries that was already well underway in the 20th century. This description seems appropriate enough, as our current chefs use all world cuisines as inspiration, have made advanced technology and tools commonplace, and use many different edible materials, concepts, and service pieces to support their artistic vision.

Let's examine some work. From the Top Ten Pastry Chef Awards, 2013, New York City – the dessert is 'Barolo Nebbiolo: toasted roses, chocolate, strawberries, tobacco.' Basically, the flavors of a juicy glass of Barolo brought to life in the components of a dessert. There is a sorbet, a cake, a cremeux, a tuile. So the forms are classic pastry, correct? And perhaps 'modern' if we can agree that the concept of flavor exchange is the hallmark of that style. Is this Barolo dessert a contemporary plated dessert? Based on our arts-inspired definition, I'd say, probably.

Next, let's look at 'Carrot, Passionfruit, White Chocolate' from 2008. The components are carrot-passion sorbetto swirled with white chocolate sorbetto. Served with carrot cake cream, white chocolate custard, carrot ginger ribbons and a mix of micro carrot tops and lemongrass. Although by form it does not resemble a classic dessert, it obviously takes many cues from carrot cake. In many ways, this dessert is compelling as an example of 'contemporary.' There are spice elements including ginger, cardamom, and coriander that are an update from classic carrot cake. Also, a fair amount of technology employed, from the marble-cut molded gelatos to the carrot ribbons, there is evolution from the classic.

For our third example, have a look at the 2013 StarChefs Rising Star Event dessert 'Yunnan Tea, Noisette Banana Cake, Honey Floss,' which takes its inspiration from a cup of tea. Having worked in luxury hotels like the Four Seasons and The Peninsula for many years, a lavish high tea is something our teams produced thousands of weekly. The banana cake and brownie are an homage to that. This dessert is black tea steeped in a white gelato base, producing a cold tea versus what is anticipated to be hot. The honey floss shows the movement and the amaretto foam completes the portrait. Is this tea-inspired dessert a contemporary plated dessert? Without a doubt, this dessert's materials, methods and concepts are rooted in there here and now.

I was recently quoted in an industry magazine saying, "American Chefs are not afraid of what is new or different, and our marketplace is constantly craving this. This is our greatest strength and our greatest weakness." I bring this up because this circumstance allows pastry chefs working in the States the greatest freedom to be contemporary. I would encourage all dessert professionals to use this freedom to push the envelope of creativity while making sure we satisfy our customers need for satisfaction, pleasure and storytelling.

All of the desserts we reviewed today would be considered contemporary by our definition. Contemporary dessert, however, is not just checks on a list, but an emotional and experiential expanse that allows pastry chefs to tell stories about our world through desserts.



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