

Kitchen's potato chip pie is a 'family' recipe

The dessert is a mainstay on the restaurant's menu after nearly a decade of servings.

By Scott Eren 4 hrs ago 0



Potato chip pie, a longtime dessert staple at The Kitchen, was invented by Chad Horton, executive pastry chef at Fine Dining Restaurant Group.

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It can be easy to forget, but before the internet access explosion during the first decade of this millennium, restaurant menus and recipes were hard to come by. Industry folks who worked pre-2000 are never short on stories of how trips to New York or Paris involved gathering physical copies of menus, as well as some film photos of a dish here and there.

The booty was then shared among cooks, who tried to decipher how a dish came together based on sparse and poetic menu descriptions. That was before celebrity chefs and before seemingly every restaurant published a cookbook. They were simpler times, or the culinary dark ages, depending on your perspective.

Toward the tail end of that period Chad Horton, the Fine Dining Restaurant Group's executive pastry chef, created one of his longest-running desserts, the potato chip pie. For the unfamiliar, Horton works from a central commissary making desserts for multiple Fine Dining properties. He's also the mastermind behind those ever-popular Cream and Sugar mini ice cream sandwiches. In a nutshell, Horton is Jackson's sugar man.

A little over a decade ago the valley's pastry chef community was abuzz with the ascendancy of Christina Tosi, the restaurant administrator turned pastry chef at the Momofuku restaurant group and its sister bakery, Milk Bar. No dish is more associated with either restaurant than her legendary crack pie, a gooey, butter pie with a cookie-like crust.

“People were talking about crack pie, and I had heard a couple descriptions and I figured I could make something similar based off what my friends had told me” Horton said.

Like the inspiration crack pie, Horton’s potato chip pie started at “family dinner,” where it was enjoyed by waiters and cooks at The Kitchen before they started service.

“The first test blew up all over the oven, but what was left was delicious,” Horton said.

“The chef was cooking delicate lattice potato chips at the time, and the salty crunch of the chips was perfect with the sweet richness of the pie filling.”

Horton refined the recipe so that the filling is no longer volatile. He also tweaked the crust to make it more like an oatmeal cookie. Now the dessert is served under a scoop of Horton’s salted caramel ice cream and, of course, a couple of beautiful potato chips. The thoughtful interplay of creamy and crunchy and sweet and salty makes for a dessert designed to please both the heart and the mind.

Though dinner offerings change more frequently at The Kitchen than perhaps any other restaurant in town, the potato chip pie has stubbornly remained on the menu. They can’t get rid of it, lest customers revolt. But then again, why would anyone want to?

Popping into a restaurant alone for dessert isn’t commonplace, but you can’t go wrong sneaking into The Kitchen for a nightcap of pie and coffee, and, if you’re feeling adventurous, a little whiskey on the side.

The goal of the pie, Horton said, is to be drawn back to childhood memories.

“High-end desserts are intriguing, but the nostalgic stuff is so much more interesting. I want desserts to remind me of time spent in my grandma’s kitchen.”