

No Limit on creative cakes

by Rebecca Lauck Cleary

An old wives' tale says that if an unmarried girl tucks a piece of wedding cake under her pillow, she will dream that night of the man she will marry. These days, the cake is more than just white cake with white icing.

University of Mississippi assistant art professor Cory Lewis knows all about dreamy wedding cakes. With a background in ceramics, Lewis left Oxford for New York in 1997 to attend the Institute for Culinary Education. While there, she interned with a top cake designer in Manhattan.

"It was like being on 'Ace of Cakes' every day," Lewis said. "I once made a 40th birthday cake to look like a meatball hoagie made out of chocolate. It was a crazy business, but lots of fun."

Her extensive art background came in handy when it came to cake decorating.

"All of the skills I used in clay were easily transferrable to put me ahead of the game," Lewis said.

After New York, she headed to Key West, Fla., and Carmel, Calif. – both locations known as destination wedding spots. She specialized in cakes in each place before returning to Oxford in 2003. Now, besides making wedding cakes, Lewis also teaches basic design and color theory at Ole Miss and served as the food stylist and design consultant for the Yoknapatawpha Arts Council's *Square Table* cookbook.

She said today's cakes are more than just "automatic icing slathered on the side with a plastic bride and groom."

Cakes have a lot more individuality, and they can be any flavor – lemon, raspberry or passion fruit, for example – and any color imaginable.

"It gives the couple a personal signature to their reception," she said. "My job is to bring their vision into reality and make that moment last a lifetime."

Lewis said one of her most memorable cakes was for a couple in Key West who were both marine biologists specializing in hammerhead sharks. "I made a three-foot long exact replica of a hammerhead shark. It even freaked out the photographer it was so real."

Lewis says Fashion Week in New York City provides her inspiration for design forecasts. "I look to the runway to see what colors are coming out. Purple was big last year; and right now it's purple, but they're calling it lapis lazuli. There are a lot of colors in the bouquets as well for spring and summer," she said.

Linkie Marais also is experienced in the world of creative cakes. As a pastry chef at the University of Mississippi, she said one of the most creative wedding cakes she has made looked like a set of pillows stacked on one another, complete with gum paste tassels hanging off the edges.



Top right: Under the handmade sugar orchids and tropical foliage, this coconut cake by Lewis is layered with white chocolate butter cream icing and chopped crystallized ginger. Bottom: A bride and groom requested this cake, made by Evelyn Criswell of Birmingham, Ala., because it replicates the Lyceum at the University of Mississippi, where they met and generations of their families went to college.



Above: This ivory fondant-covered cake by Cory Lewis is inspired by the bride's dress, and the six-dozen handcrafted sugar roses on top replicate her bouquet. Right: Chocolate, banana-pecan, strawberry and almond layers make up this cake, created by Linkie Marais. The design and pink color scheme resemble the wedding invitations.



Marais carved and hand-painted this chocolate cake with chocolate butter cream filling and frosting. The columns, balconies and ferns on the City Grocery replica are made of gum paste.



This vanilla cake with butter cream frosting by Linkie Marais was covered with fondant colored to resemble a Skittles bag and then carved and hand painted.

Marais has also made a cake replica of City Grocery. "It was a groom's cake, and they wanted something to represent Oxford. It was seven layers tall with the columns, windows, stairs and railing and even ferns hanging from the balcony," she said.

Another of Marais's cakes really was a taste of the rainbow, made for a groom who loved candy. "I hand-painted the cake to look like an open Skittles bag, with real Skittles pouring out of it," she said.

Marais moved to Mississippi in 1999 from South Africa. She then went through the culinary program at the Mississippi University for Women and discovered her passion for pastries.

Marais said that while creating an "art showcase" instead of just a regular wedding cake is more difficult, she loves every moment of it.

"It makes my job harder, but I love the challenge. It's more fun to do something different," she said. *Lo*

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