Season's eatings

Chefs seize opportunity to offer twists on classic holiday desserts **BY BRET THORN**

Offering nostalgic food with a twist — tugging on customers' heartstrings while giving them something new — has been a successful strategy of many restaurateurs in recent years.

The holidays, full of culinary traditions, are ripe for this kind of play, especially when it comes to desserts.

Yule logs — cakes rolled to look like they come from the forest floor — are particularly popular this season.

Shiho Yoshikawa, chef and owner of two-unit ice cream shop Sweet Rose Creamery in Los Angeles, makes the classic Yule log into an ice cream cake. She spreads coffee ice cream and chocolate ice cream on a flat chocolate cake, rolls it, and tops it with crispy almond bark. As an added flourish, she garnishes the cake with mushroom-shaped meringues. A cake that serves eight is priced at $45.

Timothy Fischer, executive chef of Crystal Tavern in Hamburg, N.J., also makes a frozen Yule log — a pumpkin cake with rum-spiked eggnog ice cream filling. He charges $9 per slice.

Susan Wallace, executive pastry chef of BlackSalt restaurant in Washington, is offering a chestnut Yule log this year. The dark chocolate cake is soaked in rum syrup, rolled with chestnut mousse, and topped with candied chestnuts and chocolate buttercream. A cake priced at $40 serves 10 to 12 people.

Wallace is also infusing her cheesecake with holiday spirits. Her Eggnog Cheesecake is flavored with rum and nutmeg, served in a gingersnap crust, and garnished with snowy white choc-

olate shavings. A pie that serves eight to 10 people is priced at $36.

Part of the allure of holiday desserts is the story behind them. Erin Reed, the new pastry chef of Brabo in Alexandria, Va., tells the story of her updated fruitcake.

It begins with Reed's grandmother and aunt, who inherited the family recipe in 1972 and decided to add some excitement to it by wrapping the still-warm cake in a brandy-soaked cheesecloth and letting it age for four weeks. Reed added her own

To add holiday flavor to its milk shakes, Ardent in Milwaukee blends sugar cookies into them, above. GBD in Washington makes a panettone doughnut, far right, inspired by an Italian Christmas dessert, and Los Angeles' Sweet Rose Creamery makes a Yule log ice cream cake, lower right.

embellishment with new fruit: golden raisins; currants; candied cherries, pineapple, citron and orange; and lemon zest.

Reed was planning to introduce the cake about two weeks before Christmas and is pricing it at around $25.

Andrea Upchurch, pastry chef of Blossom Café, Magnolias and Cypress, all in Charleston, S.C., is preparing her own version of a Scandinavian butter cookie called spritz. She is bringing the treats in line with current trends by adding seasonal ingredients such as orange liqueur, blood orange zest, cinnamon and persimmon preserves to the dough.
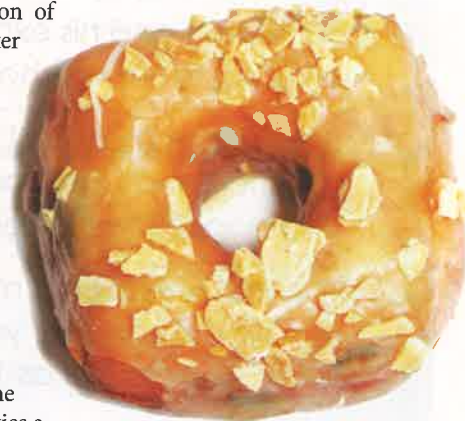
Upchurch said she plans to make the cookies a component of other holiday desserts, including a spiced ginger cake with cinnamon ice cream and citrus crème an-

glaise, and a persimmon ginger panna cotta with whipped vanilla mascarpone. Both desserts will be priced at $8.

Justin Carlisle, chef of the new Milwaukee restaurant Ardent, blends sugar cookies into a milk shake. He crumbles two sugar cookies into two cups of brown butter ice cream; adds a cup of milk and a tablespoon of coffee liqueur, cream of coconut, vanilla

vodka or salted caramel vodka; and blends until smooth. Though not currently on Ardent's menu, Carlisle said the dessert would be priced at $7.

Tiffany MacIsaac, executive pastry chef of GBD, which stands for "golden brown delicious" and serves fried chicken and doughnuts in Washington, is making a panettone doughnut for the holidays. The dessert, inspired by an Italian sweet bread eaten during the Christmas season, is a yeast doughnut with lemon zest, house-candied orange peel and raisins. The doughnut is fried and frosted with amaretto glaze and topped with toasted almond slivers. It is priced at $2.50. ■

bret.thorn@penton.com