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My idea of fun: Crowning a chocolate champion

“Im a culinary instructor at Cabrillo and I would like to invite you to come and taste 24 chocolate finals.”

That was the e-mail I received from Anne Baldzikowski a couple of weeks ago. I responded immediately. These were the final projects for her chocolate class, and I was eager to try the results.



DONNA MAURILLO

Food for Thought

I was not disappointed. The kitchen was set with a mind-boggling display of brownies, mousse, tortes, truffles, tarts, and a lot more. The variety reflected the cross-section of students in the class. There were people who wanted to become pros, young men who wanted to impress the ladies, a woman who planned to open a cake shop, a student who had just been accepted into four medical schools, and even a guy who came down from Sonora for class each week.

It's a good thing Anne recommended that we pace ourselves. I can eat a lot of chocolate, but I found that I do have a limit. Two bites of each project were more than plenty! The buzz almost kept me awake all night. Everything was delicious, so it's hard to pick out just a few. But here's a sample.

Two students made cups by dipping small balloons into melted chocolate and letting it harden. One of them filled hers with white and chocolate mousse, then served it with raspberry coulis. The other one steeped chai spices in cream before filling her cups with chai mousse and truffles. It was an unusual and successful pairing.

Brownies covered the spectrum from raspberry-filled, to macadamia with a chocolate cream cheese topping, to mocha topped with ganache. There were cream puffs filled with custard made from soy milk – great for anyone with lactose problems. Molded white chocolate hearts were tinted and flavored with lavender. Yum!

A chocolate graham cracker pie crust was filled with French silk chocolate and topped with wide chocolate curls formed with a cheese cutter. There was a chocolate cake with a spider web of white chocolate on top. Set on that were two large chocolate sculptures – a spider and a fly. It was a humorous creation that would delight any 8-year-old boy. Another cake was made from thin layers of every kind of chocolate you can imagine – brownie, ganache, cake, three kinds of mousse, cheesecake, and several more. It was decorated with tiny chocolate curls and truffles.

Anne has more classes coming up each semester, plus weekend classes, including one in December on chocolate. Cabrillo offers degrees and certifications in culinary arts, and the college is well regarded. For more information, go to www.cabrillo-extension.org. Note that there is a hyphen in the address.

EASY LEMONADE

That reconstituted lemon juice is laughable. It doesn't even taste like lemons. But when I ran into Frances Cherman at Costco recently, she directed me to a display of fresh organic lemon juice, Italian Volcano. It's \$4 a bottle, but it's worth every cent. Use it in recipes calling for fresh-squeezed juice. Or do as Francie does. She pours two or three ounces of juice into a large glass, fills it with chilled water, and adds some Splenda or sugar to taste. It makes a delicious, quick lemonade.

For variety, use club soda, or crush a mint leaf in the bottom of the glass before pouring in the liquids.