

Pastry Planet

Patisserie sets up shop on Saturdays at Flat Planet in Eastern Market

Cecilia Mercante could have set up shop in a neighborhood where patisseries are familiar places. Instead, the French pastry chef, who is a graduate of the Institut National de Boulangerie-Pâtisserie in Rouen, Normandy, preferred to offer her chocolate éclairs, rustic apple and blueberry tarts, and golden-crust quiches where they were least expected: the melting pot of Detroit's Eastern Market.

A table set up on a cold sidewalk in front of a wine shop was her first location. That's where Bob Cerrito of Russell Street Deli and Flat Planet Pizza found her in December three years ago.

He offered the transplanted Frenchwoman warm space indoors at Flat Planet, put out a little sign — “the French pastry chef is here” — and the pizza place became a pastry shop, but only on Saturday mornings when the market buzzed with activity.

Cecilia, her 15-year-old daughter Morgane, and Cecilia's fiancé, Dan Kiskis, arrive at Flat Planet at 2457 Russell St. at 9 on Saturday mornings in preparation for the 9:30 opening, setting out the wares in baskets atop a counter.

They are exquisite little confections, including cookies with fillings of her homemade apple or sweet potato jam, classic crème caramel, lemon tarts, and chocolate mousse made from her grandmother's recipe — which she says is better than the one she was taught at INBP.

Morgane sits at a table working as the cashier for



her mother. The three stay until the pastries are gone.

Mercante, who calls her business Le Normandie, has developed a following, and there is rarely anything left by 2 p.m.

Pastry making was not her original occupation. She was a lawyer in Paris until she was stopped in her fast tracks by a serious illness, which made her reassess her priorities.

When she recovered, she spent a year studying to become a pastry chef. She says she wanted to be happy and to make other people happy, something her law career didn't accomplish.

When her now-former husband brought the family from France to Michigan for a job in the auto industry in 2004, she decided to introduce a new audience to her skills.

Although the marriage ended, Cecilia's love for the United States remains strong. “This is my home now,” she says.

Mercante can be reached at cecilia.pastrychef@sbcglobal.net. — Molly Abraham

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