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## Valentine's Treats

By Susie Iventosch



Lafayette Store manager at the Teacake Bake Shop, Chi Hoang, right, and Kelly Tong, left, display the wide assortment of cupcakes and cookies available  
Photo Susie Iventosch

Tucked neatly into a corner at 35 Lafayette Circle in Lafayette, the inviting kitchen and store front of Teacake Bake Shop is open to satisfy even the most demanding sweet tooth. Here one can purchase, or special order, cupcakes and cookies for everyday ... or special occasions such as Valentine's Day, special anniversaries or birthdays!

The selection includes cookies such as Coffee Toffee Chocolate, Apricot Almond, Chai Latte White Chocolate, Tickle Me Pink (made with cranberries and white chocolate,) Lemon Pout and my personal favorite, Oatmeal Coconut Chocolate. Cupcake fantasies range from chocolate to vanilla with daily specials of key lime toasted coconut, honey tangerine, carrot and coffee bean in between, each with a complementary butter cream frosting.

Agnes and Tim Hsu, husband and wife proprietors, opened the first of the three Teacake Bake Shops in Emeryville in 2005 to bring full circle Agnes' academic training in nutrition and lifelong passion for baking. Ever since she was a little girl growing up on the outskirts of Paris, she enjoyed diving into buttery Parisian croissants, crusty baguettes and of course, pain au chocolate.

When she was two years old, her family left Vietnam to start a new life in Europe, where she and her three sisters settled into St. Charles, a boarding school run by strict nuns who expected high standards of personal performance of the girls. Here Agnes fell in love with French pastries and cuisine. And, because the

convent was self-sustaining, the nuns raised vegetables, chickens and rabbits to provide for the students. Though some might complain of hard work and a stark environment, Agnes credits her experience there for instilling in her a formidable work ethic and a love of scratch baking with the highest quality ingredients and a keen attention to detail.

In fact, when Agnes was five years old, she remembers her mother asking her what she wanted to be when she grew up, and Agnes replied, "I want to open a boulangerie (bakery.)"

Agnes and her family relocated from Paris to the United States in 1983, and Agnes earned a B.S. in Nutritional Sciences from UC Berkeley in 1997 and followed up with a Master's in Nutrition in 2000 from the University of Washington.

Due to have their first child any day now, Agnes and Tim will be nurturing both a newborn baby girl, and three Teacake Bake Shops.

When asked about future plans, Agnes says she'd love to expand the number of stores, but for the near term, given the current economy and the expectation of a new baby, she and Tim are keeping their focus on the three established stores in Lafayette, Emeryville and Corte Madera.

"The Lafayette area is a close-knit community and we've really enjoyed being a part of it," she said.

Store manager, Chi Hoang, says a lot of families frequent the store.

A lot of moms bring their kids into the Lafayette store to pick out a treat," she remarked. "Cupcakes seem to have a special appeal to them. I come from a big family of six kids, so it's really fun for me to see how excited they are when they come in."

In addition to the basic flavors, customers can enjoy daily cookie and cupcake specials as well as shortbread and two types of brownies. Agnes was kind enough to share with readers the recipe for her very special rich and moist brownie bites, made in miniature cupcake tins.

Cupcakes are \$3 each, and cookies are \$2. There is a special Valentine's assortment, packaged in a darling red and white box.

For more information or to place special orders, please call or visit the Lafayette store at 35 Lafayette Circle, phone, 283-9900, or visit

[www.teacakebakeshop.com](http://www.teacakebakeshop.com).

## Teacake Bake Shop Brownie Bites

\*I converted this from metric into U.S. measurements, so the result may be just slightly different from those you can purchase at the stores.

### Ingredients

1 1/8 cups granulated sugar

3 large eggs

2 teaspoons vanilla

(good vanilla such as Nielsen Massey Madagascar Bourbon vanilla)

1 cup all-purpose flour

1/4 cup Dutch process cocoa powder, sifted

1/2 teaspoon salt

5 ounces semisweet chocolate (Guittard or Callebaut quality)

2 ounces unsweetened chocolate (same type)

1/4 pound (1 stick) unsalted butter

### Directions

Melt chocolate and butter in microwave for a few minutes until melted. (Time may vary depending upon your microwave speed.) The chocolate and butter mixture should be warm to the touch, not hot, when added to the remaining ingredients, so cool slightly before using.

Place sugar in mixing bowl. Add eggs to sugar, one at a time, mixing on medium speed of electric mixer or by hand mixer for about 30 seconds after each, until light and fluffy. Mix in vanilla and scrape down sides of bowl. Mix dries together and set aside.

Add melted chocolate/butter to sugar/egg mixture on low-medium speed until well blended. Be careful to not over mix. Scrape down sides of bowl.

Add dries by hand and stir just until blended.

Grease or line mini-muffin tins with liners and scoop about 2 tablespoons of batter into each cup. Bake at 350 degrees for about 20-25 minutes. Tops should be shiny and inside of brownie bites should be moist and fudgy.



Photo Susie Iventosch

Reach the reporter at: [suziven@gmail.com](mailto:suziven@gmail.com)

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