



# Let us eat cake

BY KRISTINE NICKEL / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK SICKLES

Celebrations and cakes go hand in hand. There are wedding cakes, birthday cakes, graduation cakes, diaper cakes (the newest in baby-shower must-haves), fruitcakes, the list goes on and on. And talk about trends. Can you believe that two of the hottest shows on cable television, “Ace of Cakes” and “Cake Boss,” are centered on the travails of cake bakers. It’s enough to make you dust off the flour sifter.

Not too long ago, celebration cakes were mostly about the decorations. Bouquets of roses accentuated with rosettes, a mortar board with “class of ‘69” in piped-on script and “lordy, lordy guess who’s 40” in black icing make up some of my best cake memories. The cake itself was usually vanilla or chocolate. Then came Martha Stewart, and almost overnight cakes became unconventionally delicious and beautiful in new shapes, sizes and configurations, not to mention flavors and textures.

The latest trend in cakes falls into the everything-old-is-new-again category; cupcakes have moved from juvenile birthday parties to weddings and every other significant event in between. Style visited with three bakers to bring you up-to-date in cake trends: Cupcakes a Go-Go, Beautiful Cakes by Ron, and the go-to bakery for thousands of Floridians — Publix. Each had delicious stories to tell.

## Wedding cakes

Ron Zammit, owner of Beautiful Cakes by Ron, is a Sarasota native who loves to work with his hands. He’s been making Sarasota brides happy for almost 25 years. In addition to wedding cakes, Ron will fashion almost any kind of cake you can imagine, for all types of occasions. Wedding cakes are, excuse the expression, no piece of cake. “Soup to nuts, a typical wedding cake takes around 12 hours to prepare,” says Ron. “The trend is away from traditional design. Today brides want the cake to taste as good as it looks and fit in with their overall wedding theme.”

That might call for different colors of frosting, including hues of light blue, a pale pink or even pastel



**Ron Zammit, right, owner of Beautiful Cakes by Ron, and his son, Nathan.**

green. Another trend is to use two tones of the same color, such as a white buttercream frosting with champagne-hued scrollwork. Colors are usually set by the color theme of the wedding.

Shapes also have evolved away from the towers structured like Roman columns of the past. Today, tiers of squares, octagons and even hexagons take their place beside the favored round tiers.

As for adornments, forget the plastic bride and groom. "It's all about flowers," says Ron. And that means both real and sugar flowers, which in many cases will complement the bride's bouquet. Another strong trend is to go very clean and classic, perhaps imitating the detail of the bride's dress as scrollwork on the cake.

Wedding cakes have to be knock-your-garter-off delicious, too. Ron often uses layers of fruit filling with a subtle flavoring in the cake, such as amaretto with raspberry.

#### **Everyday cakes**

The everyday cake trend has become so strong that Ron is moving his bakery into a space with a retail storefront. "People want to buy cakes on impulse. And, the demand for cupcakes is unbelievable. We needed a retail space."

Indeed. Retail bakeries, such as Publix, see the wedding trends filtering down into other celebration cakes. "The biggest trend is chocolate cake with fresh fruit," says Shannon Patten, a Publix spokesperson. "The traditional vanilla cake is still popular, but customers are asking to have fruit fillings, such as fresh strawberries or peaches, or even cannoli cream, added to their favorite flavor."

About 11 percent of Publix cake sales are for wedding cakes, and their bakers are up to the challenge. "In our bakery departments," says Patten, "Publix associates start as a decorator apprentice or baker apprentice and work in conjunction with experienced decorators and bakers." On-the-job training is a big part of being able to meet the growing demands for personalized celebration cakes. "The smallest cake we offer is a 5-inch cake, which costs \$8.99," says Patten. "We can make a cake as large as a semi truck if that's what the customer wants, though."



**OPPOSITE PAGE AND ABOVE: A French vanilla wedding cake with fresh raspberry filling. A confetti cake with rich, white buttercream filling. Both from Beautiful Cakes by Ron.**