

SWERVE EATS + DRINKS *meet the maker*

the butter queen's decadent

desserts

Whether made of devilishly delicious dark chocolate or an angelic concoction of coconut and vanilla, Pam Fortier's baked goods are divinely tempting. *by Catherine Caldwell*

“Life is short. Eat dessert first.” Could there be a sweeter motto? Start with hazelnut meringues, I say, layered with citrusy lemon curd and lemon mousse. Or a wedge of dark chocolate cake baked with crispy almond crunch and topped with devilishly rich mocha-cream-cheese icing. Or a slice of my current favourite decadent dessert, an angelic concoction of buttery vanilla-cake layers filled with heavenly coconut cream, topped with another cream-cheese icing and finished with shredded coconut. I could go on, but I am a person of moderation. (Well, I try. Don't ask about the case of Maltesers in the basement.)

Pam Fortier also believes in moderation. Decadent Desserts' über-baker has a little “something” every afternoon at 3 or 4 o'clock. A mid-afternoon treat means Fortier can bake her cakes and eat them, too—the way she sees it, she doesn't get loaded down like she might after tucking into a post-meal dessert. And since she indulges a few hours before dinner, it strikes me that she's living the eat-dessert-first adage at its finest.

All these treats, and more, are available at the Beltline bakery Fortier has owned since 1997. The calm, graceful, and surprisingly slim blond was born in Big River, Sask. but left when she was six. “I'd had enough,” she deadpans. She moved with her parents to a few more places before landing as a young adult in boomtown Calgary, where she found a job plugging the manual switchboard at the former Crossroads Hotel, now a Radisson. (This ringy-dingy admission, Fortier muses, might date her, but she looks at least a decade less than her 49

years.) She eventually took the culinary program at SAIT, after which she worked in catering and baking. In the mid-'90s, Fortier returned to the classroom, this time focusing on pastries and desserts at Vancouver's Durrulle Culinary Arts school.

After returning to Calgary in 1996, she was baking out of The Cookbook Co.'s kitchen when its co-owner, Gail Norton, passed on a crumb of information: Bev Polsky, the owner of Decadent Desserts, was thinking of selling the business. Decadent Desserts has been a Calgary insti-



tution since sisters Bev and Jude Polsky opened their bakery on 17th Avenue S.W., eventually adding a second outlet on 16th Avenue S.W. (It has since been downsized to a single location on 10th Avenue S.W.)

Fortier met with Polsky, and within a few hours, a deal was baked and out of the oven. Fortier kept some of the bestsellers from the Polsky era, such as the Chocolate Overdose and the 14-Karat cakes, but she has introduced her own recipes, too, like the Concord Cake with its layers of chocolate meringue and dark Callebaut mousse (above), and my beloved Coconut Cake, which sells for \$38 to \$48 depending upon the size. She's even taught herself to make wedding cakes, tiered renditions that could entice a proposal out of the staunchest singleton.

Who knows what Fortier will think up next. Some might suggest something with Maltesers. But not me. I'm a person of moderation. ☺

Decadent Desserts, 831 10th Ave. S.W., 403-245-5535, decadentdesserts.ca.

PHOTO BY RANDY GIBSON

MMMM...BUTTER

Pam Fortier is serious about butter. She bakes shortbread year-round from a repertoire of 10 flavours, ranging from espresso and cherry-almond to orange and candied-ginger. I fed a bag of her brown-sugar-pecan cookies to some hiking pals last fall. They hustled down the mountain in record time, making a beeline for the bakery, which is located across the street from Mountain Equipment Co-op.