



Let them eat cake

By: **DEIDRE WENGEN** (Tue, Apr/08/2008)

It just wouldn't be a successful matrimonial celebration without a lavishly decorated, decadently delicious, romantically-stuffed-in-your-new-spouse's-face wedding cake. And if there is one thing that Robert Bennett, Executive Chef and Director of Operations for [American Harvest Baking](#), knows—it's cake. Chef Bennett joined AHB in 2005 after years of working as a renowned pastry chef at Le Bec-Fin followed by successful ownership of the high-end dessert shop, Miel Patisserie in Cherry Hill, New Jersey and Center City, Philadelphia. Now, Bennett presides over the creative processes of AHB's [Classic Cake](#), ensuring that brides-to-be get something that looks beautiful and tastes even better.

Shortly after graduating from the prestigious New England Culinary Institute, Chef Bennett rose to sugar-coated stardom when he was asked to construct a cake to feed 44,000 people at President Reagan's second inauguration in January 1985. Held together with butter cream, rum syrup and apricot jam, the enormous cake was topped with an exact and edible replica of the U.S. Capitol made completely out of sugar and designed to scale by a professional architect. The culinary marvel acted as the centerpiece for the ceremony and took Bennett and his team nine straight days to complete. "It seemed impossible at the moment, but I just dove in and did it," he said. "It was a great honor."

While Bennett may crave the challenge of large-scale, elaborate desserts (he once baked a cake for Boeing that stood over 15 feet tall), he also finds fulfillment in the highly personalized experience of crafting wedding cakes for happily-engaged couples. Throughout his lifetime, Chef Bennett has created thousands of specialty wedding cakes, including his own, which was elaborately decorated with blown-sugar doves.

Bennett works with several different materials such as butter creams, chiffons and rolled fondant to create stunning, mouth-watering masterpieces. "We work in a lot of different types of sugar," he said. "On one cake, we made it look like there were champagne bubbles all over it. They were really fine balls of blown sugar. It's like doing blown glass." Bennett has even created several cakes to look like stacks of luggage for people who are passionate about traveling. "It is a complex process, but we have a saying that if you don't use it you lose it," he said. "It's nice to get challenges all the time and keep our hands busy doing the sugar work or intricate chocolate work."

Although the decoration and look of a cake is important to Bennett, he considers taste the most crucial component of the composition. "It's almost kind of a common thing that people don't eat the wedding cake," he said. "So many cake decorators have wonderful eyes and beautiful cakes, but they just don't taste good. We make [our cakes] delicious first and then beautiful second."

During tastings, Bennett encourages couples to try several different flavors and pick the ones that appeal to them. "Get a cake that you want to eat," he said. "It's your wedding day—don't think of your guests. So many people are worried that certain guests aren't going to like this or

like that, and they spend all of their time and energy trying to make [others] happy.”

Clients who seek Bennett’s expertise are treated to one-on-one consultations. “We put it together exactly the way they want,” he said. “We sit down with the bride and the groom, or sometimes the bride’s mother comes along, or even the entire family comes along, and we do a tasting of all the components that we offer. Then we’ll sculpt it from there.”

Bennett works with brides and couples at all stages of the planning process. “Sometimes people come with a whole folder of ideas and pictures and then we take it from there,” he said, “but [others] just come in and have no idea what they want, which is fine too.”

Bennett suggests that couples call within the first couple weeks of their engagement so that he has ample time to consult with them and produce exactly what they want. Wedding cakes from Classic Cake usually average between \$5 and \$10 per person depending on the details. And as far as details are concerned—almost anything goes. “Nothing surprises me,” said Bennett. With skillful precision, this pastry chef extraordinaire can even construct the traditional French wedding cake called croquembouche, a communal tower of crackly cream-puffs coated with sugar.

Classic Cake and American Harvest Baking are currently in the process of constructing an entirely new baking facility where Chef Bennett will continue his craft of creating elegant and savory sweets for future brides and grooms. “We’re always looking for new ideas,” he said. “I see other pastry chefs work, and we feed off of each other. Hopefully I inspire some people too.”

[Classic Cake](#)

Original Factory Location

**2010 Springdale Road
Cherry Hill, NJ 08003
856 751-5448**

Washington Township

**100 Hurffville-Cross Keys Rd.
Sewell, NJ 08080
856 262-7400**

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