



Chera Amlag, Hood Famous Bakeshop



Celebrating a one-year anniversary at a brick and mortar bakery is a big deal for a business that started with cheesecake brought to a neighborhood potluck.

If you had asked Chera Amlag, owner of Hood Famous Bakeshop in Seattle, if she thought her love of baking would turn into a business, she would have laughed.

“I’m not a professionally trained pastry chef, and never wanted to try to be one,” Amlag admits.

What she is, instead, is someone very much in love with baking, who is only interested in making desserts that are approachable and comforting, and made with quality ingredients.

Mission accomplished.

After that fateful potluck, people kept asking for that “hood famous” cheesecake, which convinced Amlag to try and make a go of it for paying customers. She began selling her brilliantly colored creations at popups and bake sales across Seattle, and at dinner parties she and her chef/musician husband, Geo, started hosting, called Food and Sh#t.

Soon, people were calling in orders for her unique purple cheesecakes, many of them not knowing their stunning hue came from ube extract and jam Amlag orders from the Philippines. Ube isn’t something most western palates (or eyes) are familiar with, so she got quite a bit of media attention, and her cakes became a nice entry point for conversations about the diversity of Filipino desserts.

Amlag also makes cheesecake in flavors like white chocolate guava, champorado, halo halo with homemade haupia, coconut pandan and calamansi mango. She changes her desserts to suit

her mood and the season, and is currently making buko pie, calamansi bars, marshmallows, and truly addictive ube cookies, which are tender and intensely buttery — like a mashup of marzipan and shortbread someone colored pastel purple.

When asked when her love of baking started, Amlag recalls weekend family picnics where her mom would bring a pot of adobo and she would bring the desserts.

“My parents didn’t like us having junk food, so we didn’t have a lot of sweets,” Amlag recalls. “I didn’t have a pantry I could grab Twinkies out of, so I’d get one of my mom’s cookbooks and make something.”

Admittedly, her gift didn’t start out so sweet.

“In second grade, I made peanut butter cookies and didn’t know about measurements, and put half a cup of salt instead of a half teaspoon,” she laughs. “I learned quickly what a teaspoon was.”

She also learned quickly about the nature of business in both its successes and failures.

“I had my moments where I wasn’t sure if it was for me or if I could do this,” she says. “I made a lot of mistakes and did a lot of learning on the job, but we have a great community and family who supported us.”

It is, perhaps, the idea that others can help you reach heights you never knew you could reach that has most influenced her career. And it’s probably why Amlag often uses her shop to host local Pinay bakers for popups, giving others the same chance she was given to succeed.

“Food has been such a great avenue for education,” Amlag says. “Filipino food deserves a place on the culinary table, and being able to share our culture and cuisine is what makes me want to continue doing what I do. It’s about more than just the food. If it was just about cheesecake I wouldn’t be doing this.”

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