



MACAROON MADNESS!

Forget cupcakes. The colorful French sandwich cookies are sweeping the city

By SHEILA McCLEAR

WHEN Macaron Parlour's booth first appeared at the Hester Street Fair nearly a year ago, customers were wary of the small, round, brightly colored cookies with filling sold there. "They were like, 'Why are they so tiny, and why are they so expensive?'" says Simon Tung, who co-founded the business with friend Christina Ha.



Bisous Ciao displays its rainbow of treats "almost like . . . jewelry," says owner Tanya Ngangan.

Caitlin Thorne Hersey

But they started giving out one sample macaroon for free to nonbelievers, and "nine of out 10 times, they came back." Now, the Macaron Parlour duo cranks out about 1,000 a week from a Lower East Side rental kitchen.

Tung and Ha were onto something — macaroons are the latest It treat for people seeking a sugar fix.

Cupcakes? So over. Once the fashionable finger food of a certain type of New York girl — the kind who worshipped at the altar of Carrie Bradshaw — they've been eclipsed by the macaroon, the new dessert choice of the moment. (Bon Appetit even recently crowned it "the new cupcake.")

The French spell it "macaron," but Americans have to do things their own way, of course, in both spelling and style. The French confection, made of egg whites, almond flour and sugar, looks like a tiny, fancy cookie. Newcomers, entranced by the rainbow of colors in which macaroons are offered, are jumping into the business and getting creative with flavoring.

New macaroon sellers have been popping up all over the city, in addition to the traditional French patisseries. And many flee far from the traditional flavors of France, which include strawberry and pistachio. Macaron Parlour, by contrast, offers red velvet and candied-bacon macaroons (made with maple cream cheese and a brown sugar shell).

"We put the American palate to it so that people who didn't know what they were could associate them with things they were familiar with," Tung says.

The fashion crowd loves them, perhaps because they look so chic, and partly due to their exposure to fine pastries on trips to Europe. Despite a strict guest list of only 100 people, Alexander Wang's much-discussed Fashion Week party last month, served up \$10,000 worth of macaroons. Designer Jason Wu recently took macaroon-making lessons from renowned pastry chef François Payard.

Pascal Goupil, owner of Maison du Macaron on West 23rd Street, has been making macaroons here since 1998, but says they've only taken off in the past two years or so. Now, he sells about 8,000 per week. His flavors, which vary daily, include Tahitian vanilla, rose lychee and the delicious Pink Champagne, which has a frothy rose shell flecked with gold.

Then there's Danny Macaroons — a k a Danny Cohen — who began baking after his Internet sports-media tech start-up struck out.

Instead of French macaroons, he makes the kind Americans are most familiar with — the chewy coconut clusters. Sharing the name but not the recipe, it can be confusing.

"They just have coconut, egg whites and condensed milk," Macaroons explains. His flavors include chocolate-dipped, roasted almond and salted caramel, with carrot cake and rice pudding varieties coming soon.

He's a one-man macaroon merchant, and does all the baking, shopping and delivering himself. He brings the treats via subway and bus to places such as Bar 5F at Bergdorf Goodman and Gimme Coffee.

"I'm either really smart or really stupid," he laughs. "Let's put it this way: I get about five hours of sleep a night."

Celine Cannone and her husband, Arnaud, opened their first Macaron Cafe in 2007 in



European expat Sophie Darsot enjoys a sweet taste of home at Macaron Cafe's Upper East Side location.

N.Y. Post: Tamara Beckwith

the Garment District. Now, they have a new booming online business and a second location on Madison Avenue (which opened last year), and are considering opening a third store. Cannone just published a mini recipe book called "Macarons: Authentic French Cookie Recipes From the Macaron Cafe."

"I've come here almost every day for lunch for the last three or four months," says Sophie Darsot, 30, a transplant from Europe who works close to the UES location at Barney's.

"I try everything on the menu, all the macaroon flavors."

The 6-month-old Bisous Ciao on the Lower East Side elevates the macaroon to art exhibit. The shop's spare, gallery-like space is empty, save for a glass display of the rainbow confections. "I wanted to keep it minimal to focus solely on the macaroons, almost like you're

in a jewelry store," says chef and co-owner Tanya Ngangan, who studied pastry-making in Paris.

No one in America knows macaroons better than Payard, who owns the François Chocolate Bar on the Plaza hotel's lower level, and FBP, a full-scale bakery in SoHo.

"We make every size," says Payard, whose shops sell super-size macaroons for \$4.

"We have big ones for [the SoHo] shop and smaller ones for the shop uptown for \$2.25. Americans, when they think about a bakery, they think 'large cookie.' The small ones are more for the ladies uptown."

Wolfgang Puck declared Payard's coffee-flavored macaroon one of "the best things I ever ate" on the Food Network show, "The Best Thing I Ever Ate."

Payard will celebrate the second annual Macaron Day NYC on Sunday — France has long had one.

"The idea is to make Americans understand what macaroons are," says Payard. "For me, it's much better than the cupcake. They're something more delicate and fragile."

On that day, 16 New York bakeries — handpicked by Payard — will give away a minimum of 500 macaroons and contribute a percentage of sales to charity City Harvest.

"I think of it as a game — trick-or-treat for adults," he says. "The idea is not . . . to tell you who makes the best macaroon. It's to make people aware of these beautiful cookies."



“ THE IDEA IS TO MAKE AMERICANS UNDERSTAND WHAT MACAROONS ARE. FOR ME, IT'S MUCH BETTER THAN A CUPCAKE . . . MORE DELICATE AND FRAGILE.”

— French pastry chef François Payard