

BLACKENED REDFISH ARTISANAL CHOCOLATES EAST COAST WINE

# SAVUEUR

Savor a World of  Authentic Cuisine

SPECIAL ISSUE

## DELICIOUS IRELAND

*from Cork to Belfast,  
farm to fork, great  
bread to lobster to  
real Irish corned beef*

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# FARE

Delights and Remembrances from the World of Food, plus One Good Bottle, Agenda, and More

## AGENDA

MARCH

3-5

### APPLE & GRAPE HARVEST FESTIVAL

Stanthorpe, Australia

This year marks the ruby (40th) anniversary of a biennial gathering in the high-altitude town of Stanthorpe. The first day of the festival is dedicated to the apple, complete with apple-peeling and pie-making contests. Grapes are featured on Saturday, when Aussie celebrities kick off their shoes and join the Grape Crush—not a dip in soda but a raucous communal grape stomp. Information: 61/7/4681 4111.

MARCH

5

### GREAT LONG LUNCH

Napier, New Zealand

Once a year, the citizens of Napier, in the Hawke's Bay region of New Zealand, erect an 800-foot-long table on the grounds of the oceanfront Marine Parade so that 700 diners can enjoy one of New Zealand's largest sit-down meals. Lunch consists of dishes that showcase regional ingredients. Last year's menu included venison pastrami and a citrus and olive oil cake. But there's no dropping in; for a seat you have to buy a ticket. Information: 64/6/834 3916.



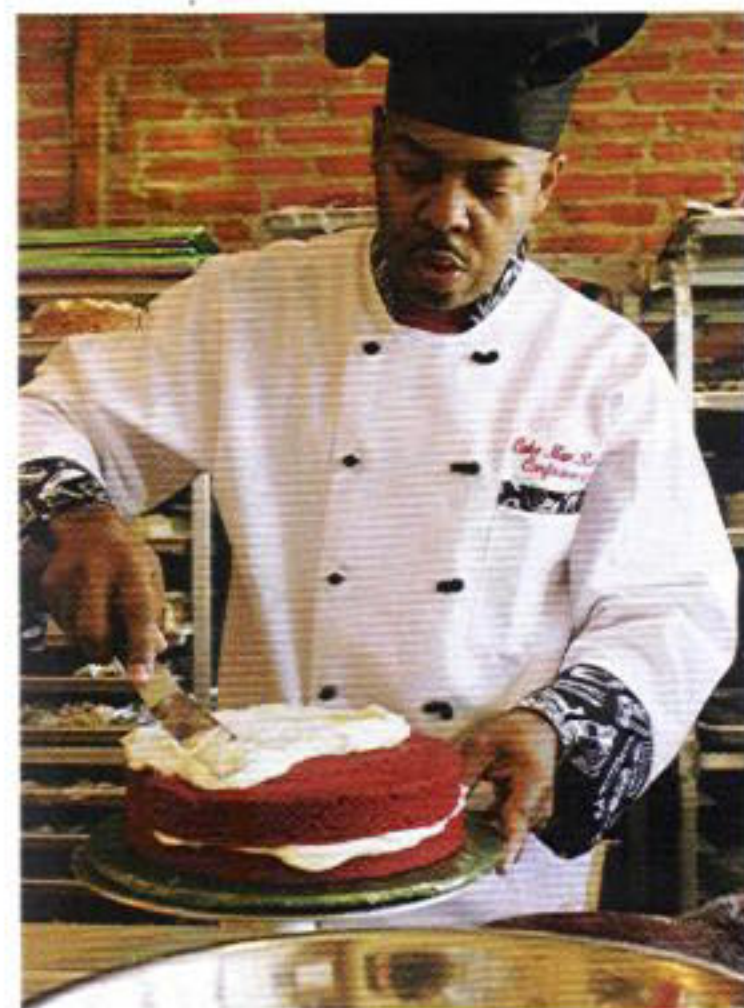
## Move Over, Cheesecake

*A Southern baker has made red velvet cake  
Brooklyn's favorite three-layer treat*

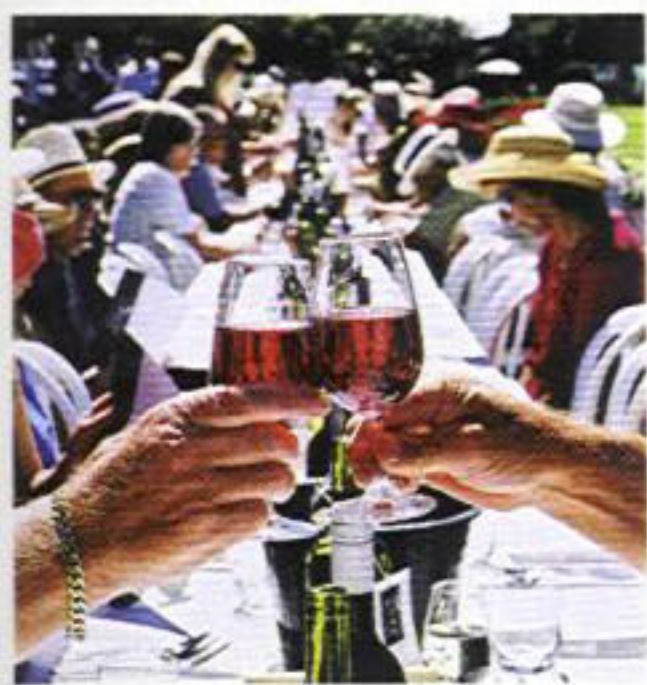
**O**N A RAINY THURSDAY evening in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn, 15 people are lined up outside the Cake Man Raven Confectionery for take-away slices of red velvet cake. "It's been that kind of day," one customer jokes. "It's either cake or booze." Luckily, she gets at least one of the things she needs: a moist, ruby-colored hunk, layered with cream cheese frosting and coated with crushed pecans.

Behind the counter, Raven Patrick De'Sean Dennis III—a.k.a. the Cake Man Raven—is quietly instructing a new employee on the finer points of packing orders to go. "The people want cake at nine A.M., as soon as the doors open," says Dennis, 37, who's dressed in baggy pants, Timberland boots, and a baseball cap. "They don't want no muffin." Demand is so high for the red velvet that he's had to limit customers to four pieces each. His menu lists an assortment of desserts—including coconut pineapple cake and pecan pie—but the best seller, by far, is red velvet cake.

Dennis learned to bake from his grandmother Evelyn, as a child growing up in Lynchburgh, South Carolina. He made his first sale—two coconut pies to his school's secretary—at the age of 13. Even



Raven Patrick De'Sean Dennis III, owner of Cake Man Raven, in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, above; above left, Dennis's famous red velvet cake.



MARCH

11

**KONA BREWERS FESTIVAL***Kailua-Kona, Hawaii*

On the shore of Kailua Bay, on the Big Island of Hawaii, beer lovers gather to try more than 60 brews, including samples from many of Hawaii's brewpubs and microbreweries. Chefs serve food from beachside stands, using the beverages for inspiration. Past entrées have included golden ale steamed clams and porter-marinated grilled pork loin. The sudsoaked event winds down with a performance by fire dancers. Information: 808/331-3033.

MARCH

16-18

**IN VINO***Belgrade, Serbia*

At this festival, visitors can taste wines made from international and indigenous Balkan grape varieties alike. Samples from about 200 Serbian and Montenegrin vintners will be available for imbibing, as will wines from neighboring Hungary, Bulgaria, and Croatia and from as far away as Australia and Spain. Workshops will illuminate local customs, like the traditional consumption of bermet, a Serbian wine infused with herbs and spices and served with chocolate. Information: 381/11/455 986.

MARCH

17-19

**CATFISH FESTIVAL***Washington, Louisiana*

During the annual Catfish Festival in Washington, a small town in central Louisiana, catfish from nearby ponds, rivers, and freshwater bayous are stewed and sautéed for



various Creole and Cajun specialties like courtbouillon—a fish stew made with a spicy red gravy. While nibbling on fried catfish, visitors may also view a Civil War reenactment and the crowning of a catfish queen. Information: 337/826-7336.

though he aspired to enter the family business—"I was supposed to be a mortician," he says—Dennis continued to bake throughout high school. Eventually he earned a nickname: Cake Boy. After high school, Dennis went to Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island, but after one semester moved to nearby Johnson & Wales, where he received an academic scholarship to study culinary arts.

After he graduated with a degree in hotel and restaurant

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

"Stories, like whiskey, must be allowed to mature in a cask."

—SEÁN O'FAOLÁIN, *THE ATLANTIC*, DECEMBER 1956

management, Dennis moved to New York, where he spent nearly a decade baking cakes out of his Harlem apartment while holding down two jobs. One day, Dennis—by then known as Cake Man—was hired by a friend to bake a cake for Lena Horne's 75th birthday, and he decided to make her a red velvet. He based his version on the traditional recipe, using buttermilk, oil, and vinegar in the batter. Horne loved it, and the cake became Dennis's signature.

He moved to Brooklyn in 2000 to open his first store, where he could dedicate his time solely to baking. Today the operation turns out more

than 80 red velvet cakes a day (whole cakes start at \$35 and serve eight to ten; slices cost \$5 apiece). Custom cakes are also available. For Patti LaBelle, Mary J. Blige, and rapper 50 Cent, Dennis has made red velvet cakes shaped like high-heeled shoes, a Louis Vuitton purse, and a diamond-studded wristwatch, respectively.

Why has this one variety of cake become so popular? Well, Dennis speculates, it might be because some people think it's an aphrodisiac, but he can't be sure. Dennis himself prefers chocolate cupcakes. (For information on Cake Man Raven Confectionery, see *THE PANTRY*, page 88.) —Jaime Joyce

## FARE

## RECIPE

**Red Velvet Cake**

MAKES ONE 8" CAKE

Red velvet cake is said to have been invented in the 1950s at Oscar's in New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. An alternative story attributes its invention to the Deep South. Raven Dennis of Cake Man Raven Confectionery, whose recipe we've adapted, believes the latter, adding that it originated during the Civil War and that Southern ladies made it "to keep their husbands home".

**FOR THE CAKE:**

1 tbsp. butter  
2½ cups plus 12 tbsp. cake flour  
1½ cups sugar  
1 tsp. baking soda  
1 tsp. cocoa powder  
1 tsp. salt  
2 eggs  
1½ cups vegetable oil  
1 cup buttermilk

2 tbsp. (1 oz.) red food coloring  
1 tsp. vanilla extract  
1 tsp. white distilled vinegar

**FOR THE FROSTING:**

12 oz. cream cheese, softened  
12 oz. butter, softened  
1½ tsp. vanilla extract  
3 cups confectioners' sugar  
1½ cups chopped pecans

**1.** For the cake: Preheat oven to 350°. Grease three 8" round cake pans with butter. Dust with 2 tbsp. of the flour and set aside. Sift remaining flour, sugar, baking soda, cocoa, and salt into a bowl. Beat eggs, oil, buttermilk, food coloring, vanilla, and vinegar in a bowl with an electric mixer until combined. Add dry ingredients and beat until smooth, 1-2 minutes. Divide batter evenly between pans. Bake cakes, rotating halfway through, until a toothpick inserted in the center of each comes out clean, 25-30 minutes. Let cakes cool for 5 minutes, then invert each onto a plate, then invert again onto a rack. Let cakes cool.

**2.** For the frosting: Beat cream cheese, butter, and vanilla in a bowl with an electric mixer until well combined. Add sugar and beat until frosting is light and fluffy, 5-7 minutes.

**3.** Put 1 cake layer on a cake plate; spread one-quarter of frosting on top. Set another layer on top and repeat frosting. Set remaining layer on top and frost top and sides with the remaining frosting. Press pecans into sides of cake.

**ONE GOOD BOTTLE**

The Napa Valley's estimable Louis M. Martini Winery, now part of the Gallo portfolio, has always had a good reputation for its red wines—most notably its Napa cabernets and zinfandels. It has that territory so well staked out, in fact, that the **LOUIS M. MARTINI ALEXANDER VALLEY CABERNET SAUVIGNON**

**RESERVE 2001 (\$35)** caught us by surprise. It's just a delicious wine, with leather in the nose (not boot leather but the scent of a suede-lined leather cuff link box) and a rich, velvety texture and plenty of concentrated, faintly chocolatey black cherry fruit. (See *THE PANTRY*, page 88, for a source.) —THE EDITORS

