

Pastries Plus

MKE is home to several bakeries that salute traditional holiday pastry recipes.

BY LAURA BENGIS

Tradition: It's a word we hear frequently around the holidays as families engage in celebrations rooted in their ancestral — and local — histories.

Like most Milwaukee traditions, Christmas traditions evolved from a mix of English, German and Scandinavian influences. Food continues to be a steadfast part of holiday traditions for many local homes, as well as some of Milwaukee's cherished bakeries, pâtisseries and shops.

Here are the origins of some of Milwaukee's favorite holiday dessert traditions and tips for where to find these treats locally.

COOKIES

Throughout history, baking has always been a holiday-centric activity. Ingredients like sugar, lard and butter were traditionally expensive, so many families could only afford to buy them around the holidays, according to history.com. They'd be sure to use up everything they purchased to produce a volume of baked goods to enjoy with friends and family. The earliest evidence of the Christmas cookie tradition actually dates back to the Middle Ages when chefs began using spices like nutmeg, cinnamon and black pepper. Cookies had historically been an accessible dessert option because they didn't need to be refrigerated, so they could be kept for long periods of time or given away as gifts. Today, baking cookies continues to be a favorite pastime among many kitchens in Milwaukee.

PASTRIES AND CAKES

Perhaps the most well-known holiday cake is the Yule log, which originated in Norway. According to Florence Richomme of "My Parisian Kitchen," families would place a large log on the fireplace to burn all night and protect the house for winter solstice (the longest night of the year). As migrations to cities made houses and fireplaces smaller, a symbolic hollowed-out log on the table replaced the tradition.

In the late 1800s, a representative Yule log swiss roll cake emerged out of the many French baking innovations at that time and has remained a holiday staple in many households. Additional French baking staples like the macaron, mousse, brioche, and ganache opened up a world of opportunity for pastries for many special occasions, including the holidays.

Where to find holiday cookies locally:

Greige Pâtisserie.

Holiday specials at Greige will include peppermint mocha cookies, almond crescents, red velvet cookies, holiday shortbreads and cranberry orange bars. To share in the cookie decorating tradition, Greige offers plain holiday cutout cookies by the dozen and a decorating kit with red, green and white buttercream frosting, assorted sprinkles, pastry bags and popsicle kits. "It was an elaborate affair for us from the start," says Jess Reinhardtson, owner and lead pastry chef. "At Christmas, we had two sets of family friends who would come over with their kids. It'd be just mass frosting and sprinkles and cookies everywhere." [408 W. Florida St., \(414\) 252-0143, greigemke.com](http://408.W.Florida.St.,(414)252-0143,greigemke.com)



Photo courtesy of Greige Pâtisserie

Troubadour Bakery.

Sold at local Colectivo Coffee locations, the bakery will offer buttery snowflake shortbread cookies from Dec. 14-18 and holiday iced gingerbread friends from Dec. 19-24. "We hope our homemade Colectivo offerings provide some holiday nostalgia, tasting like recipes right out of Grandma's cookbook," says Marissa Worzella, Colectivo's communications and strategic partnership director. [2301 S. Kinnickinnic Ave., \(414\) 273-3747, troubadourbakery.com](http://2301.S.Kinnickinnic.Ave.,(414)273-3747,troubadourbakery.com)

Where to find holiday pastries locally:

Le Macaron.

In addition to its 20+ year-round offerings, Le Macaron features a gingerbread macaron and a champagne macaron with gold leaf accents in December. Traditional Yule logs ornamented with holiday décor are also available. "We offer something small-sized focusing on high-quality chocolate or fruit, so when you eat dessert, it really brings something special at the end of the meal," says President Philippe Guyony. [Locations at The Corners of Brookfield and Mayfair Mall Wauwatosa, \(414\) 427-4910, lemacaronbrookfield.com](http://Locations at The Corners of Brookfield and Mayfair Mall Wauwatosa, (414) 427-4910, lemacaronbrookfield.com)

Le Rêve Pâtisserie & Café.

This year, Le Rêve will offer almond meringue macarons filled with peppermint buttercream and spiced gingerbread ganache and the noel: layers of Tahitian vanilla mousse, hazelnut feuilletine, cinnamon sponge and caramel creamux. Take-and-bake bakery items such as its classic croissants, pain au chocolate, danish, cinnamon rolls, chocolate chip cookies and chocolate walnut toffee cookies will also be available for pickup. "What makes a dessert classic is that it's not a trend but can span a few generations. When we hear 'This reminds me of the time...' from guests, it makes us happy as professional chefs," says chef/owner Andy Schneider. [7610 Harwood Ave, Wauwatosa, \(414\) 778-3333, lerevecafe.com](http://7610.Harwood.Ave,Wauwatosa,(414)778-3333,lerevecafe.com)

Amalinda.

Guests who dine with Amalinda in December will each receive a flourless chocolate soufflé cake topped with peppermint bark. The week of Hanukkah, Amalinda will offer a Sephardic menu finished with a miniature cinnamon babka. "The babka was always at my grandmother's house," says Gregory Leon, James Beard-nominated chef and owner of Amalinda. "The restaurant's name is a combination of my parents' names, so I like to pay homage to my family. This is my way to pay homage to my grandma." [315 E. Wisconsin Ave., \(414\) 369-3683, amalinda.com](http://315.E.Wisconsin.Ave.,(414)369-3683,amalinda.com)



Photo courtesy of Le Macaron



BREAD

Milwaukee's German heritage is represented in many holiday spreads by the Christmas stollen. What's Cooking America says stollen originated in Germany in the 1400s as a less flavorful bread accessible at a time when butter and milk weren't widely available. The Pope's lifting of the "butter ban" at that time gave birth to the stollen as we know it today. While there are many different types of stollen, perhaps the most well-known is the Dresden stollen — characterized by following a traditional recipe with a specific ratio of ingredients like flour, butter, yeast, sugar, cardamom, lemon and raisins.

Where to find stollen locally:

Rocket Baby Bakery.

Rocket Baby continues its tradition of making Dresden stollen with almonds and rum-soaked candied lemon and orange peel. Another dinner pairing option available is a rosemary focaccia with dabs of a tart homemade cranberry sauce. "When we could find it, we'd have stollen all the time. It's always something our family enjoyed," says bread team lead Hans Billerbeck. 6822 W. North Ave., Wauwatosa, (414) 502-7323, rocketbabybakery.com

CANDY CANES

The legend of the candy cane's origin comes from the Cologne Cathedral in Germany in 1670, according to history.com. A German choirmaster bent pulled sugar sticks into shepherd's hooks and distributed them to young singers to help them stay quiet during the Living Creche ceremony. Today, more than 1.76 billion candy canes are made every year, making them one of the most popular Christmas candies. In addition to store-bought options, Milwaukee is home to a local candy shop that makes these treats from scratch.

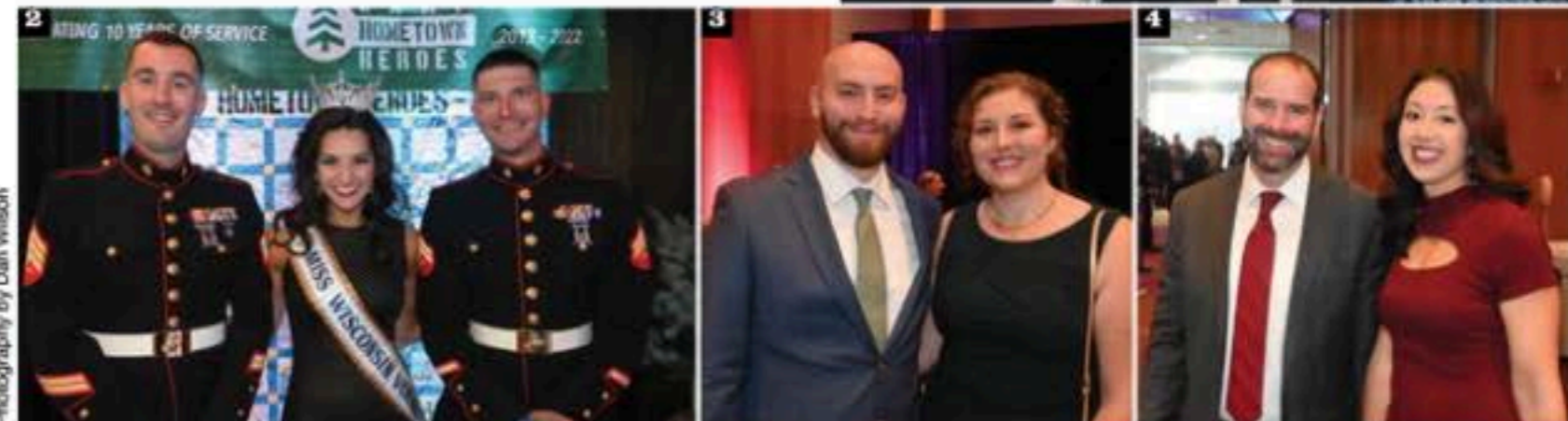
Where to find handmade candy canes locally:

Niemann's Candies and Ice Cream.

Niemann's homemade, hand-pulled candy canes come in peppermint, spearmint, lemon, cinnamon, and molasses flavors. They also offer hard candies in the same flavors, with almond butter toffee and holiday assorted chocolates. "I've always loved the hands-on cooking process of small-batch candy," says owner Jim Niemann. "We're a generational business, so there are many local Tosa people that grew up with our candies and remember the aroma of the hard candies traveling through the village." 7475 Harwood Ave., Wauwatosa, (414) 774-4964, niemannscandies.com MKE

GRAND SLAM CHARITY JAM

More than 600 guests attended Kapco's Grand Slam Charity Jam, held Oct. 15 at the Wisconsin Center's Grand Ballroom in downtown Milwaukee. The event netted \$240,000 for Camp Hometown Heroes, Camp Reunite and Turning Rivers — all charities dedicated to helping children who face trauma. In 2022, Kapco celebrated five summers of service at Camp Reunite and 10 summers of service at Camp Hometown Heroes. Special recognition was given to Camp Director Andrew Gappa and Director of Outreach Deb Paschke, who have been with the team since the beginning. Ten-year volunteers Barb and Rick Cherone (a two-time Purple Heart recipient), Brian Linscott and Sue Turowski were also recognized. Entertainment was headlined by Jim Belushi and the Board of Comedy, along with The Docksidiers band.



1. Dave Scherer, Cedarburg, Neil Willenson, Boyside & Mary Scherer, Cedarburg 2. Bryn Braidigan, Milwaukee, Angelica Niemann, Mequon & Nick Hoysek, Milwaukee 3. Tommy Losch & Elizabeth Carlson, Milwaukee 4. Vince & Melissa Piquette, Greendale

PIES

Pie's roots trace back to medieval England (then called "pyes"), but they didn't always include the mousses and sweetened fruits we're used to now: the original pie was filled with minced meat such as beef, lamb, duck or pigeon, according to the American Pie Council. Not until the 1800s were the more familiar sweet fillings regularly used in pies. Pie traveled to America with English settlers, who adapted traditional recipes to available cooking techniques and ingredients such as berries and fruits, according to Time Magazine's "History of Pie." Pie's versatility allows modern pie makers to incorporate both traditional offerings and experiment with creative holiday flavors.

Where to find holiday pies locally:

Hatched MKE.

Among many seasonal offerings, Hatched's popular holiday favorites include champagne chess (house-made champagne syrup filling topped with a sugared cranberry rosemary wreath), egg nog custard and peppermint chocolate topped with crushed peppermint sticks. "Pie is very familial and comforting to me," says co-owner Allison Cebulla. "I love taking care of people, and this is my way of nurturing and being a mom to everyone." 655 N. Brookfield Rd., Brookfield, (414) 465-9176, hatchedmke.com



SALA
Modern Sicilian Dining

Presenting new and traditional family recipes honoring classic styles served with a contemporary flourish.

2613 East Hampshire St., Milwaukee
(414) 964-2611 | saladining.com | f @ t

all that sparkles!

Custom Jewelry Heirlooms to Share for Generations

Steven Paul DESIGNS
Custom Jewelry

700 A Genesee St., Delafield
262-646-3310
stevenpauldesigns.com | f @ p