

For Guilt-Free Desserts, Makeovers From the CIA

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Wednesday, June 13, 2007; F01

Ending a meal with a luscious treat is one of life's great pleasures.

From creme brulee and chocolate torte to pecan pie and tiramisu, such sweet concoctions cleanse the palate, satisfy the appetite and signal a meal's curtain call to the brain. Trouble is, of course, their calories and fat can rival those in the meal itself, so they are often served with a heaping portion of guilt.

Imagine my delight, then, when a healthy-dessert workshop was among the many tempting offerings at a recent Culinary Institute of America conference held at the CIA's St. Helena campus in [California](#). Co-sponsored by the [Harvard Medical School](#), "Healthy Kitchens, Healthy Lives" is the brainchild of physician and ardent amateur chef David Eisenberg. He believes that if doctors know how to cook healthful food, perhaps they will encourage their patients to do the same.

So on a Saturday morning in what was once the Christian Brothers winery in [Napa Valley](#), I donned a CIA apron and toque to learn more about making lighter desserts from instructor Stephen Durfee. He is a former pastry chef at Thomas Keller's French Laundry, which routinely makes the list of top restaurants in the country. It sweetened the deal that Mark Furstenberg, founder of Marvelous Market and Bread Line in the District and a speaker at the conference, had told me Durfee is a wonderful teacher.

My 20 or so fellow students and I crowded around a very fit-looking Durfee at one of the sleek, free-standing stainless-steel workstations that would have filled my kitchen and dining room at home. We spent two hours learning a few of Durfee's secrets and making four desserts (okay, with a little help from two CIA students, who served as our sous chefs).

Durfee's twist on dessert makes a lot of sense: Rather than serve cheesecake with a little fruit on top, why not serve mostly fruit with a little cheesecake?

Being the gifted pastry chef he is, Durfee has used that philosophy to re-craft some favorites such as shortbread and poached pears into healthy versions. Well, make that healthier. As we discovered, none of these is exactly low-calorie. But they do call for reduced amounts of sugar and butter, though with no sugar substitutes or fake fats. In their place, Durfee uses unsweetened juice and smaller amounts of healthier fat, such as macadamia nut oil.

So the poached pears are served with a vanilla creme that's made mostly from low-fat yogurt with just half a cup of heavy cream to flavor a dozen servings. Unsweetened pomegranate juice replaces sugar. In a different dessert, almond milk makes a refreshing sherbet, and he tricks the palate by adding chocolate shavings as a topping instead of using huge amounts of chocolate.

What else do these treats offer? Complex flavors and textures that won't leave you feeling deprived yet still deliver some good nutrition.

In Sangria, a dessert inspired by the refreshing Spanish drink, you'll get nearly a serving of fruit, garnished with slender, sweetened meringue swizzle sticks to boot. It's a way to have your dessert and eat it, too.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/12/AR2007061200412.html>

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