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# Lancaster pastry chef teaches sugar sculpting to top Swedish team

ERIN NEGLEY | Staff Writer

Susan Notter recently returned from a trip to Sweden, where she taught pastry chefs techniques for two high-level competitions. In this video she demonstrates how to make a sugar pumpkin sculpture.

How's this for a test?

Sculpt a block of chocolate plus a block of ice into works of art, and make a towering sugar showpiece. Whip up three more chocolate desserts, three frozen fruit desserts and 12 identical plated desserts, too.

Make them beautiful, artful and, of course, delicious.

You have 10 hours and a team of three.

Sounds impossible.

But contestants in the Coupe du Monde de la Pâtisserie will do all that in hopes of being named the top pastry chefs in the world.

To prepare for the competition, a group of Swedish chefs called on a Lancaster pastry instructor for help in sculpting 3-foot-high sugar showpieces and for a second opinion on desserts such as Mango Passion Chocolate Coconut Layered Cake.

Susan Notter, pastry arts program director at Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts in Lancaster, also showed the young chefs how to turn sugar into a delicate geisha figure.

“It was a fantastic week,” said Tony Olsson, president of Team Sweden.

Once Notter's student, Olsson invited his teacher to Stockholm in August because her sugar sculptures have so much life and she knows what it takes to win competitions, he said.

For Notter, the experience was a chance to visit a new country, share her knowledge and learn about Scandinavian desserts and Stockholm's pastry shops.

“It’s good to get outside of your comfort zone every once in a while,” Notter said.



Pastry Arts & Design magazine has called Notter one of the top 10 pastry chefs in the U.S., and she has placed in international competitions and appeared on the Food Network.

The native of England joined the local culinary school, a division of YTI Career Institute, five years ago. At the campus on Hempland Road, students learn how to make everything from seasonal pumpkin desserts to elaborate treats featured at international competitions.

Notter has coached students who went on to compete in pastry contests in Canada and Europe.

“It’s great when you see a show and they’re being successful, and you’ve had a little bit of input in that,” Notter said. “It’s very rewarding. You have like an ownership, in a sense.”

The chefs who gathered for the weeklong classes in Sweden are training for two competitions: the [Nordic Pastry Cup](#) in October, and the regional contest in January for the next [Coup du Monde](#).

The last Nordic cup saw teams from Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark vying for the title, with Team Sweden winning. The Coupe du Monde has teams from around the world, including Sweden, competing for a spot in the finals.



Notter started her class by making a sugar showpiece that's nearly 3 feet tall. Then she helped the chefs make their own versions.

She showed them how to cast sugar to provide stability; how to blow sugar shapes, such as spheres and fruit; and how to pull sugar ribbons that can become things such as flowers. Notter compares working with sugar to working with glass.

Each of these simple techniques can be combined together to make much more complicated designs.

“(Sugar) has a lot of strength,” she said. “You just have to know how to work with it.”

Notter created a foot-high Japanese geisha, a sculpture that incorporates a lot of different approaches.

While the focus was on sugar, the chefs also asked for feedback on their desserts. For example, the passion fruit glaze on a layer cake was gummy, so she shared a recipe for a softer glaze.

She also shared tips on teamwork and what judges want.

“The judges have got to be able to read from the piece what it is, because you're not going to be there to tell them,” Notter said. “So you've got to be very clear.”



Outside the Chocolate Factory classroom, Notter explored pastry shops throughout Stockholm. She found many small shops run by chefs in their 30s and 40s. They were filled with a wide variety of pastries and served coffee. Many offered classes to the public.

Most offered princess cake, a traditional Swedish layer cake composed of sponge cake, whipped cream and jam covered with green marzipan.

Students at the [School of Culinary Arts](#) in Lancaster might soon make their own princess cakes.

In the meantime, the chefs in Sweden have a lot of practice ahead, after being inspired by Notter, Olsson said.

Notter hopes the lessons will help the chefs feel more comfortable about competing.

“It’s always getting over that first step, being a little afraid about how things work or how to manipulate, techniques,” she said. “So I think they have a good base, and they can build on that.”

Susan Notter, head of the pastry arts program at Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts, demonstrates how to make a pumpkin out of sugar.