



Stephen Domanowski rolls dough for Christmas cookies at Wixey Bakery.

Bakeries:

a feast for the senses

By DANIEL NEMAN
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It's the aroma that hits you first. When you walk into a bakery, you smell it all: freshly baked dough, sweet frosting, and cinnamon. Surely, this is the scent of Heaven.

It's butter and yeast and flour and cream, it's ginger and cloves and raisins, all mixed together in an endless variety of combinations. And all laid out tantalizingly in brightly lit cases, row after row of sweet delight.

Bakeries are shops of temptation. Perhaps I'll have just one cookie. One cookie couldn't hurt — and look! Here's one in the shape of Santa Claus. All right, just two cookies, but no more. Maybe a few gingerbread men, because everyone knows gingerbread men don't really count. Those cupcakes shaped like Frosty are simply too irresistible; maybe I'll buy a couple now and eat them later. And if I don't get a stollen today, I'll never get one. And that cinnamon wreath cake? That looks divine. I'd better pick one up now before they sell out.

Baking involves a specific kind of alchemy, a blending of flour, yeast, salt, butter, and a bountiful assortment of other ingredients cooked to perfection in a precise amount of heat.

Precision is vital in baking, said Mike Armstrong, owner of Michael's Café and Bakery on Toledo's east side. In working with bread dough, the yeast has to be just warm enough; too cool and it won't rise fast enough; too warm and it will rise too quickly, altering the bread's ultimate texture and taste; too hot and it will not rise at all. But the bakers have a little leeway in time — a loaf of bread left in the oven a couple of minutes too long will still be good.

But overbaking is fatal for pastries, he said. "If you're baking cookies and you go three minutes too long, your cookies go from nice and chewy to burnt," he said.

Precision is important for professionals, but even more important is knowing exactly what you are doing. Bakers know that humidity affects flour, that dry days require more liquid in the dough than humid ones. To correct for these changes, Mr. Armstrong said, "you do a little bit of the old school. You go by feel and you make adjustments."

It's the aroma that hits you first. But at a bakery, what matters most are the science and expertise behind it.

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Richard Wiedmann makes springerle cookies at Wixey Bakery.

Cheesecake on a stick from the Hollywood Casino kitchen.



Andrea Simonetti prepares sourdough rolls in the Hollywood Casino kitchen.

Hollywood Casino's cinnamon wreath cake.



Peppermint Bark from the Hollywood Casino.



Caleb King cuts Russian Tea cookies at Wixey.

Christmas tree cupcakes from the Hollywood Casino.