Divine Inspirations

A swatch of carpeting, stacked light fixtures, bold buttresses inspiration can come from anywhere. With that in mind, we asked four Chicago cake artists to put their skills to the test for confections stirred by our favorite hotel décor. The result? How sweet it is.

| By Lisa Shames | Photography by Jim White |



Design Within Reach

To some, the trial-and-error process that goes along with creating a truly special wedding cake can be tough. Not so for Bittersweet owner/pastry chef Judy Contino, who considers the interaction her team has with brides to be the best part of the creative process. To transform the Sofitel Chicago Water Tower into an edible work of art, Contino and her lead cake decorator, Mindy Gohr, worked together on the four-tiered masterpiece: The hotel's buttressed windows take shape courtesy of thin strips of sugar; the cityscape seen outside gets lovingly abstracted by scattered blocks of fondant; and, at its base, squares in maroon and gray pick up their bold coloring from the hotel's carpet. And even though the cake's an homage to strong architecture (the hotel was designed by French architect Jean-Paul Viguier in 2002), Contino felt it needed a personal touch, hence the cone-shaped toppers complete with petit bow tie and bouquet. "The toppers add that needed bit of romance." 1114 W. Belmont Ave., 773.929.1100, bittersweetpastry.com.

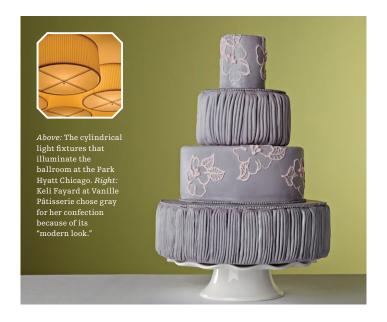


The Sofitel's buttressed windows take shape courtesy of thin strips of sugar; the cityscape seen outside gets lovingly abstracted by scattered blocks of fondant; and at its base, squares of soft gold and gray pick up the bold coloring from the carpet.



Let There Be Light!

Back in the '80s when he was an electronic engineer, Peter Rios never imagined his math skills would come in handy one day designing wedding cakes. But knowing about angles and dimensions definitely helped the award-winning pastry chef—Rios worked at the Fairmont, Art Institute of Chicago and Sofitel before opening his own Wicker Park shop—when creating this geometric wonder. With the W Chicago-City Center as his muse, Rios modeled the shape of his cake after a stacked-cube lamp that sits by the ballroom. Then, to incorporate some of the building's baroque details (it was once the historic Midland Hotel before it was restored in 2001), he embellished each tier with a soft "lace" fondant and worked in a Greek-style column at the center. "The column allows the cake to float and not appear too heavy." 1736 W. Division St., 773.278.0366, alliance-bakery.com.



Sent From Above

Designing wedding cakes inspired by interior design elements is nothing new for Keli Fayard, who, along with her husband and fellow baker Dimitri (the two met while working at NYC's Payard Pâtisserie), owns Lincoln Park's Vanille Pâtisserie. So when assigned the Park Hyatt Chicago's chic light fixtures as a starting point, Fayard wasn't fazed. Rather, she immediately envisioned a bit of rouching on a wedding gown and got to baking. The pleated look finds its way onto two of the cake's tiers, each one studded with tiny fondant pearls for texture. For the remaining layers, Fayard keeps things simple with a pale pink outline of hibiscus flowers. As for the color—a pearl-dusted gray—she predicts it could be the "It" color for 2010. Says Fayard, "Gray goes well with everything and has a modern look without being overdone." 2229 N. Clybourn Ave., 773.868.4574, vanillepatisserie.com. 🏻