

Spinning MAGIC

SUGAR WORK WEAVES ITS WAY
INTO ELEGANT DESSERTS

by **Seánan Forbes**

Forget those thick, poured-sugar hockey pucks of the 1990s and the intricate isomalt sculptures of confectionary competitions. In 21st-century kitchens, sugar work is light and edible, and it's adding more than beauty to desserts.

The potential is almost limitless. As author, chef and CIA professor Peter Greweling says, if you dissolve sugar in water and then cook almost all the water out of it, you have “the equivalent of organic glass”—and anything you can do with glass, you can do with sugar: pour, pull, stretch, blow, color and spin.

If you're new to working with sugar, “Set aside time; take baby steps,” advises Craig Harzewski, pastry chef at Chicago's Brindille. He uses sugar work to add texture and visual impact to his *chocolate fantasie* (\$13, recipe, p. 94), for which he fills a fine, blown-sugar container with chocolate cake, *soufflé glacé*, foam with chartreuse and cocoa nibs.

Inspiration for Brindille's intricate dessert came three years ago. “I was watching Paco Tor-reblanca,” Harzewski says. “He did *œufs à la neige* in this little terrarium, and it was precious and delicate.”

Harzewski took the idea in a different direction. “I don't go for the manicured desserts. I have a gnarly, punk rock edginess to me.” Pulling together that earthy edge and sugar work, Harzewski created his own kind of terrarium, filled with “tons of chocolate cake, *soufflé glacé*,

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foam with chartreuse and cocoa nibs.” The clear-glass look of the blown sugar didn't satisfy Harzewski, so he added cocoa powder to the sugar to lend a hint of color and reduce the transparency. “As you pull [sugar],” Greweling notes, “it begins to become more opaque, which is a nice effect, because it reflects more light. Leave it unpulled, and it's completely transparent” (recipe, plateonline.com).

For small touches, Greweling suggests making “a delicate flower, if it's spring-time; for a fall dessert, you could make a tiny apple ... add texture, color and a finishing touch.” For something big, “Add color, pour it and make a tray to serve chocolates on. “Another way to use sugar is to caramelize it,” Greweling says. For example, with a *tarte tatin*, you caramelize sugar and bake the apples in that caramel in a crust (recipe, plateonline.com). After you turn it out, he suggests adding spun sugar to the top, giving

“that golden reflection of light in filigree

threads, but also that textural contrast” (recipe, plateonline.com).

When you're making spun sugar, Greweling advises, “Take it off [the heat] when it is much lighter in color than you ultimately want to use it.” After it cooks, you'll shock the pan in cold water, then let the sugar cool to a honey-like consistency. “That takes a while,” he notes. “As it's cooling, it's getting darker and darker. If you remove sugar from the heat at the target hue, then it's going to be far too dark when it's cool.”

There are tricks that make sugar work easier. If you're using a formula that's around 25 percent glucose syrup to sugar, Greweling says, you can warm it as you work with it. “I've made pots of it and kept them on a warmer during service, and I was making filigree sugar for desserts to order,” he says.

“Pulled sugar is just hard candy,” Greweling says. Maybe so, but it's hard candy that will improve your desserts, and it doesn't get sweeter than that.

Seánan Forbes has a seasonal weakness for pumpkin *crème brûlée* under a spun sugar dome.



Chocolate fantasie, \$13,
Pastry Chef Craig Harzewski,
Brindille, Chicago.
RECIPE, p. 94.