

Sweet NOSTALGIA

Cotton candy might be all about great memories, but it's also a satisfying profit maker.

BY LAUREN KRAMER



DESSERT sweet nostalgia

There's something wonderfully nostalgic about cotton candy. It brings back memories of festivals and amusement parks, of candy-hungry children clasp sticks laden with the airy, sticky treat.

Today, chefs are finding that cotton candy is an easy, inexpensive way to bring diners to their tables—and keep them coming back.

FREE STUFF

At BOKX 109 American Prime at Hotel Indigo, Newton, Mass., executive chef Jarrod Moiles delivers a free bowl of cotton candy to each table at the end of the meal. "It's something to refresh the palate before you walk out the door," says Moiles, whose cotton candy flavors include orange, vanilla, sour apple, blue raspberry and strawberry. "We thought it was a fun thing to offer, and a way to end your dinner with something sweet that also leaves you with a fond memory of your childhood."

The restaurant has been serving cotton candy since it opened in 2009 and bought an Econo Floss cotton candy machine for \$800. To make the sweet treat, Moiles adds flavor and food coloring to sugar and dries it in a dehydrator for four hours.

"Apart from the cost of the machine and its maintenance, the cotton candy is really inexpensive," he says. "The sugar is pennies—it's basically 2 tablespoons of sugar per bowl, so you're talking about a cost of 13 cents. We find this to be an affordable way for us to give something back to diners who are spending their time and money in our American steakhouse. It's something simple, but it puts a smile on their faces at the end of the meal."

A large bowl of cotton candy is placed in the center of a dining party's table, and "everyone just digs in with their fingers. It's very interactive," Moiles says. "And it definitely brings people back to the restaurant."

When children are checking into Hotel Indigo with their parents, he often brings each of them a stick of cotton candy. The sticky treat is packaged for guests taking a picnic lunch on the road, and the cotton candy machine occasionally makes an appearance outside the kitchen at the hotel's special events.



NO. 1 DESSERT

For Victor Casanova, chef de cuisine at Culina, Modern Italian, at the Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills, cotton candy is a winning ingredient on top of his best-selling dessert: affogato with vanilla bean gelato, espresso and pinoli cookies. "Affogato is a traditional Italian dessert with an espresso and vanilla bean base," he says. "To give it added height, we put plain cotton candy on top."

Culina uses a mini cotton candy machine in the kitchen, and the affogato dessert is assembled tableside, where the waiter arrives with a glass of vanilla ice cream topped with cotton candy. Espresso is added, melting the cotton candy, which makes the mixture sizzle.

"The cotton candy is fluffy, light and white, and once we pour on the espresso, it disappears immediately, melting in the glass with the ice cream," Casanova says.

MAPLE COTTON CANDY

At Towne Stove and Spirits, Boston, culinary director Lydia Shire has topped a brown sugar angel food cake with maple cotton candy, using New England maple sugar in the sweet treat. Today, she offers maple cotton candy on its own, at \$6 per wand.

OPPOSITE: Hamid Salimian's cotton candy tree is created on a grapevine branch and powdered with freeze-dried raspberry and strawberry. It includes chocolate truffles, pear jelly, chocolate soil, tomato/beet candy and pistachio tea cake.

ABOVE: At Bar Centro, The Bazaar by José Andrés, at SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills, this "magic" mojito is served in an individual shaker and strained over cotton candy.