

PEACE, LOVE & ICE CREAM

By CLAUDIA ALARCON



Food historians tell us that the Chinese are generally credited for creating the first ice creams, possibly as early as 3000 BC. Although Marco Polo is popularly cited for introducing it to Italy, the claim is questionable. However, ice cream as we know it is said to have been invented in Italy in the 17th century, spreading through Europe via France. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first print occurrence of the word “iced cream” was in 1688, while the term “ice cream” appears by 1744. Before refrigeration, only wealthy people had access to ice in the summer, which made ice cream a rare treat. It was not until the late 19th century that ice cream was consumed by Americans across all socio-economic levels. In Italy, ice cream is known as gelato. Gelato uses more milk than cream, so it has less fat. It is churned at a much slower speed, which introduces less air into the base, giving it a dense, milky texture that’s less creamy than the fat-heavy American-style ice creams.

Lucky for us in Central Texas, there is a surge in small, artisanal producers in both Austin and San Antonio. Partners Anthony Sobotik and Chad Palmatier opened Lick Honest Ice Creams in Austin in the fall of 2011, crafting small batches of artisan ice cream made from Texas-sourced ingredients. “Our focus is always to celebrate the flavors, seasons, and culture of Texas through our ice creams,” says Sobotik, who is the ice cream maker. “I draw my inspiration from foods I grew up eating and what our local farmers are growing for the season. Texas Sheet Cake and Dewberry Corn Cobbler are great examples of desserts I grew up enjoying and baking that have found new life as ice cream flavors. Flavors like Persimmons and Sage, Roasted Beets and Fresh Mint, and Cilantro Lime are directly tied to what our farmers grow at different times of the year. And there are flavors that are inspired by the flavors and culture of Texas as well as the season; Loquat Margarita is a fine example.”

Sobotik and Palmatier describe their ice creams as “honest,” made with fresh ingredients and no additives, preservatives or high-fructose corn syrup. They source all milk and cream from Mill-King Creamery, and get their produce, honey, cheese and liquors locally. The popularity of these amazing treats grew quickly, prompting them to start packaging pints for retail sale as well as opening a store in San Antonio’s Pearl in August of 2014. “Our manufacturing and sources haven’t been affected at



all,” says Sobotik. “We still churn all our ice cream in three to five gallon batches, pack every pint by hand and make every component added to our ice creams from scratch in our own kitchen.” More scoop shops are on the horizon, including one across the street from The Thinkery in the Mueller development in Austin, scheduled for spring of 2017.

In 2002, Austinite Matthew Lee said “to heck with tech,” quitting his six figure salary to pursue his true passion: gelato making. “I decided to take a chance and go for it. If it failed, I’d go back to the corporate world that I didn’t enjoy,” says Lee. “Life

is too short. So I went to Italy to learn how to make real gelato. There are people in the States that can teach you how to make gelato, but I wanted to learn from the true masters. If you want to learn how to make Texas BBQ you don’t go to NYC. So I begged and pleaded with the famous operators in Florence, and the rest is history.” Lee opened Tèò in 2003, using the nickname he received from his gelato trainers in Italy as the store’s name.

Tèò crafts award-winning gelati and sorbetti in his Austin “laboratory” (“I’m a bit of a mad scientist with experimentations,” says Lee). He placed as the top American gelato maestro in North America and was voted Top 5 out of 24 at the Gelato World Finals in Rimini, Italy. More recently, Tèò was named Grand Champion of H-E-B’s Quest for Texas’ Best, and his handcrafted Texas Pecan Pie gelato, made from Texas pecans and Garrison Brother’s Bourbon, won the People’s Choice award at the Gelato World Tour in Chicago in May 2016.

Tèò offers classics like Pistachio, Hazelnut, Bacio and Chocolate, but Lee loves to make off beat flavors that are creative and delicious: Eggs and Bacon, Goat Cheese and Cherry, Cap’n Crunch®, and Rosemary Olive Oil are good examples. “I learned that everyone has their own recipes, but there are two common themes for all the masters: make your own base, and shun artificial flavors and instant powders,” says Lee. “While they are easier, cheaper, quicker for making gelato, they cannot make up for the flavor, texture and sensation that real ingredients offer. We have over 500 recipes, and because we make our own base, there’s rarely a flavor we can’t make.”

The latest newcomer to Austin is already a sensation among frozen treat enthusiasts. Owned by certified gelato crafters Alice and Nicola Morello, Venezia is an adorable gelateria that showcases at least 15 freshly made, handcrafted flavors daily, including vegan and gluten-free options. The Morellos, who received their education at the prestigious International School of Gelato in Rimini, moved to Austin in November 2015 with the sole purpose of opening a gourmet Italian gelato shop. Their English is still a little rusty, but they make up for it with huge charm and an infectious enthusiasm for sharing the traditions of their country. They carefully select ingredients with a traceable origin from a variety of local and Italian sources, using no artificial colors, additional fat or added hormones. In fact, some flavors have up to 65 percent lower fat than traditional ice cream, but their incredible texture makes them every bit as decadent.

Venezia focuses on traditional flavors like Stracciatella, Pistachio, Lemon and Amarena (cream with puckery cherry preserves), but they also make “American” flavors like Pecan, Cheesecake and Black (Oreo) Cookie, and originals like Milk Chocolate topped with passion fruit preserves and a layer of chocolate ganache. The Morellos also make adorable frozen treats they call Mr. Ring: donut-shaped gelato pops coated with decorative icing that come in different flavors and are available to customize.

San Antonio institution



Brindles Awesome Ice Creams has changed ownership a couple of times during its 16 year history. The newest owners are Jeff White, Executive Chef of Boiler House, and his fiancée Chef Jennifer Stipp. The couple is planning on giving the shop a small makeover to brighten things up a bit, but not change it so much that it looks like a different shop. “Many of our customers have been coming here for the 16 years it has been open and are used to a certain feel. We don’t want to change that,” says Stipp.

Of course, some of the most popular flavors will also stay. Azteca (dark chocolate, cinnamon and Mexican vanilla) Brindled (fudge, butterscotch and praline pecans) and Stracciatella (gelato with fine shavings of chocolate) will probably never leave. “They are asked for every day,” says Stipp. “But we have many things in the works right now. We recently did a Texas Peach and now have a Summer Berry in the case. We source locally grown berries, cook them down into a beautiful syrup and slowly fold into our base.”

While both chefs own the shop, Chef White is busy with his own culinary pursuits. “This is really my baby, an early wedding gift you could say,” says Stipp. “Although we do find the time to brainstorm on new ideas for his menu and mine, we still manage to keep things separate. I think that helps keep our creative minds going.” ♦

LICK HONEST ICE CREAMS

(Photography by Annie Ray)

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