

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

The New Paris Confections

BY JAY CHESHIES

LAST JUNE AT an awards ceremony in Spain devoted to the "World's 50 Best Restaurants," Frenchman Cédric Grolet accepted the title of World's Best Pastry Chef. The 33-year-old, a native of Auvergne west of Lyon, heads the pastry department at Paris's Le Meurice hotel, overseeing a team of 30. As the summer progressed, Mr. Grolet watched his social-media profile blow up, his following on Instagram (@cedricgrolet) surging past a million. "For a pastry chef it's tremendous," he said, during a recent tour of the hotel's jewel-box boutique that began selling his creations-to-go a year ago.

Mr. Grolet is best known for his hand-molded fruits, delicate facsimiles of peaches, apples, grapefruits and pears coated in crisp shells of white chocolate ganache with centers made of fruit compotes and gelsées. Another popular pastry, his glossy Rubik's Cube cake, features many-flavored cubes. Posting every new confection on social media has helped make him an internet sensation. "Every day I get offers through Instagram," he said, "offers to travel, to speak, to open shops around the world."

Mr. Grolet, who is on the road frequently, is the most prominent member of a new generation of marketing-savvy young pastry chefs in the French capital. All under 40, they've been shaking up the city's sugary scene, using social media to raise their international profiles. These young chefs have greatly broadened the reach of some of the city's most rarefied hotels, restaurants and pastry shops, with a flood of fans now coveting their work from afar.

At the Hôtel Ritz Paris, pastry chef François Perret, 38, treats his 115,000 or so Instagram followers to reinventions of classic French treats. Mr. Perret's take on Proust's beloved madeleine is the size of a plate, yet as light as a pillow. Its burnished exterior conceals not conventional butter cake but layers of whipped cream, toasted almonds and chestnut honey. "I wanted to make a truly imposing madeleine," he said.

Fauchon, the gourmet food shop founded in 1886 on the Place de la Madeleine, has a long tradition of identifying future dessert stars, with macaron maestro Pierre Hermé and New York's Cronut king, Dominique Ansel, among its alumni. Last year the company brought in 30-year-old François Daubinet to oversee its pastry department. A rebellious veteran of Hôtel Plaza Athénée, he

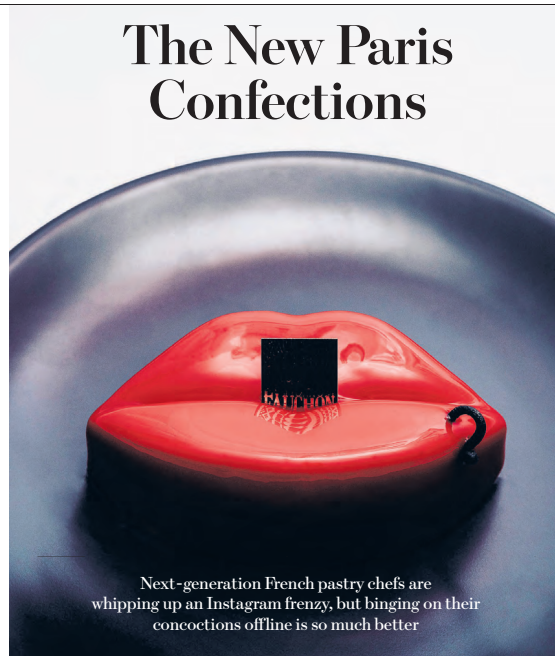


'I wanted to make a truly imposing madeleine,' said François Perret.

hides sleeves of tribal tattoos under his chef's whites. Mr. Daubinet recently introduced a peach éclair infused with a dash of Japanese plum vinegar. His take on Fauchon's signature pastry, the Bisou Bisou, a mousse-filled confection shaped like a voluptuous mouth, has a hint of hot chile pepper in its strawberry center and a chocolate piercing in its lower lip. "I wanted to bring a bit more rock 'n' roll to the house," said Mr. Daubinet. The dessert debuted last fall at the new Fauchon Hotel that opened across from the flagship boutique.

Like many pastry chefs of his generation, Mr. Daubinet has greatly reduced the amount of sugar and fat in his sweets, reflecting a shift in French pastry toward lighter, less cloying treats. "We're in the process of educating consumer palates to eat less sweet, less salty, less fat, more natural," he said. "The pastry cream I learned to make when I started out had 200 grams of sugar in it. Today I put in less than 50."

While Mr. Daubinet is just getting started at Fauchon, he may eventually follow his predecessors' path, striking out on his own to build an eponymous brand. Mr. Grolet at Le Meurice is already moving



Next-generation French pastry chefs are whipping up an Instagram frenzy, but binging on their concoctions offline is so much better



OF MOUSSE AND MEN

Clockwise from top: Fauchon's signature Bisou Bisou, plumped up by pastry chef François Daubinet; mille-feuille at Yann Couvreur; Salon Proust at Ritz Paris; chef Yann Couvreur; Mr. Couvreur's eponymous shop in the Marais. Inset at left: François Perret's madeleine at Salon Proust.



APPLE OF HIS EYE Clockwise from above: Cédric Grolet; a few of Mr. Grolet's creations; éclairs at Fauchon.



Nicolas Haelewyn's Mont Blanc caramel pastries at Karamel.

in that direction. He became a free agent last year, switching from a salaried to a contract employee, freeing him up to work on personal projects like a long-dreamed-of chain of fruit-focused dessert shops. "I've begun looking at locations," he said, "in Paris, around the world. I'm dying to open up in New York." Until then, here's where to find Paris' new viral dessert stars:

Le Meurice

This luxury hotel across from the Tuileries garden offers pastry fiends many points of entry. Cédric Grolet's plated desserts are served in the three-Michelin-star restaurant run by Alain Ducasse as well as in the casual Le Dali, where the British-style afternoon tea service, a 65-euro proposition, often books up weeks in advance. Mr. Grolet's famous seasonal sculpted fruits are available to-go around the corner in the hotel's new patisserie, open Tuesday-Sunday from noon until the last pastry sells out. dorchestercollection.com

Hôtel Ritz Paris

Every venue at this venerable hotel offers its own distinct pastry menu under the direction of François Perret. They cover the full spectrum from an old-school tarte Tatin in the Ritz Bar to an edgy mélange of honey-cream, red onion, chocolate and pear in the two-Michelin-star La Table de l'Espadon. For afternoon tea, the Salon Proust offers a nostalgic selection of cookies and cakes that all reference French childhood treats. ritzparis.com

Fauchon

The flagship Fauchon boutique, the brand's only shop in Paris, sets the culinary agenda and supplies recipes for 70 outposts in 25 countries around the world. New pastries debut here under enfant terrible François Daubinet, who's updated house classics, like Fauchon's famous éclairs and fruit tarts, occasionally pushing new extreme flavor combinations. Last Easter he made a carrot, quinoa, and milk-chocolate desert. The shop supplies the macarons, cookies and other sweet treats for guest rooms at the new Fauchon hotel across the Place de la Madeleine. fauchon.com

Karamel

Nicolas Haelewyn, 33, spent 10 years at Ladurée—launching macaron parlors around the world for the last five as head of international expansion—before opening his own cozy caramel-themed shop in 2016 near the Eiffel Tower. The place is a caramel-lover's fever dream, from its sticky-sweet hazelnut-caramel cookies and caramel-cream stuffed éclairs to its zingy black-pepper caramels. Jars of spreadable caramel in flavors like coconut, passion fruit and honey make great packable gifts. karamelparis.com

Yann Couvreur Pâtisserie

Yann Couvreur, 35, parlayed the critical acclaim he earned running the pastry department at the Prince des Galles Hotel into a couple of star turns on French food TV. In 2016, he launched his first eponymous shop in northern Paris; two more followed, respectively, in the Galeries Lafayette department store and on a heavily trafficked street in the Marais. All three outposts offer dramatic riffs on classic French pastries—regularly posted to his 200,000 Instagram followers—like his strawberry-tarragon tart, "Caribbean" éclair stuffed with coconut custard, and assembled-to-order mashup of a buttery kouign-amann and brittle mille-feuille. yanncouvreur.com