

Title:

Dazzling Birthday Cakes Look As Good As They Taste

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Summary:

What makes a birthday cake special? It's got to taste great, no doubt, but visual appeal makes a cake truly dazzle. In Portland, Oregon, Papa Haydn's is famous for incomparable birthday cakes that look as fabulous as they taste, so we asked co-owner Evelyn Franz to share a few of her secrets for cake decorating success.

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Article Body:

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Evelyn helped her sister and brother-in-law Heidi and Jeff Van Dyke, who founded Papa Haydn's in the late 1970s, create their legendary dessert menu. Since then, Papa Haydn's has become Portland's dessert destination, consistently winning awards and accolades from food lovers and restaurant critics alike.

With an MFA in sculpture and a lifelong love of baking, Evelyn guides her pastry staff in combining visual appeal with exceptional flavor and texture. "I think it's as important to pay attention to looks as it is to flavor," she says. "The looks can make a huge difference in terms of what you actually taste on your palate. I don't think it's a successful dessert unless it looks as good as it tastes."

If you want to try your hand at creating spectacular cakes for the birthdays, anniversaries and weddings in your life, consider these helpful hints from Evelyn.

Tie a yellow ribbon: An easy and elegant way to jazz up birthday cakes is by tying a colorful ribbon around the bottom of the cake. "You can use chiffon or just a French ribbon to really doll up any cake," says Evelyn. Just remember to remove the ribbon before serving.

More terrific toppers: Check out cake decorating stores for ideas, says Evelyn, who likes to adorn birthday cakes with dragees or candy pearls. Silk or edible flowers also make elegant cake toppers, turning an ordinary layer cake in to a birthday cake to remember.

Fabulously frosted: With a little practice, you can turn frosting into an intricate birthday cake design. By alternating vertical and horizontal ribbons of frosting, for example, you'll create a delicate woven pattern that dazzles the eye. Even simpler designs can be achieved by creating swirls or peaks with a spatula or the back of a spoon.

Wrap it up: For the more advanced pastry chef, wrapping a cake in a thin layer of another cake can add an elaborate touch that dazzles even after a birthday cake or anniversary cake is sliced. Papa Haydn features such delicacies as White Chocolate Mint Truffle Torte, wrapped in a patterned chocolate sponge cake, Hazelnut Mousse Torte, wrapped in a striped almond sponge cake, and Georgian Peanut Butter Mousse Cake, wrapped in a polka dot sponge cake and topped with ground peanuts. It takes some practice, but the effect is well worth the effort.

The fine art of chocolate: Evelyn and her crew are well-practiced in the art of decorating with chocolate, too. Simply spread a thin layer of melted chocolate on a cooled marble slab or baking sheet, then carefully make curls or ribbons with a metal spatula to decorate your special cakes. For birthday cakes, you can cut out rectangular banners of dark chocolate, write a "Happy Birthday" message with white chocolate or frosting, then place the banner upright on the cake for an edible birthday greeting. This, too, takes practice, but once you've mastered the technique, you'll be a cake decorating star.

Designing from the ground up: Another way to create dazzling birthday cakes is to layer different cakes and fillings for a variety of flavors and textures. "We'll do a cake that has meringue in it as well as chiffon and maybe a flourless chocolate cake," says Evelyn, "to give it a nice texture and a little crunch." Using cakes and fillings of different colors adds to the visual appeal as well as the taste.

If you approach cake baking and cake decorating as Evelyn Franz does - like a true artist - your birthday cakes, anniversary cakes and even wedding cakes will

dazzle your guests before, during and after they enjoy the delicious taste!