



Pie! Pie! Pie!

BY CATHERINE WARMERDAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GABRIEL TEAGUE

Peach-cherry galette from Real Pie Company



What could possibly be better than a pie, that magical meeting of flaky crust and sweet (or savory) filling? As we enter pie season (aka the holidays), let us introduce you to some of the most delicious, delightful pies in the Sacramento region.

Few foods elicit as much nostalgia as pie. Practically everyone, whatever their family's culinary tradition, carries a tender memory of their favorite pie and, more than likely, the person who baked it. In my case, I can still recall the pies that my mother made with perfectly ripe O'Henry peaches from our orchard, crimping the delicate edges of the crust with ease.

Kira O'Donnell Babich of Real Pie Company rightfully calls pies the "warm fuzzies" of the dessert world. The pies from her childhood, baked by her grandmother, propelled her to make a career of making pie. "In my memory, there are always multiple pies crowding the kitchen counter, and her brood ate them—voraciously—throughout the day, for any reason," she recalls. "They were often made with the wild blackberries that surrounded their farm, and even then, I marveled at the fact you could pick these berries and a few hours later they would be transformed into a delicious pie. This was magical to me."

N'Gina Guyton, owner of South restaurant, understands the love language that is pie, and so do her customers. They clamor for South's made-from-scratch pies because they equate them with comfort. "Especially in these times right now when we're treading new ground for how to live, people want nostalgia. They want to go back to a happier time," says Guyton. "I grew up feeling secure in my parents' home, feeling taken care of, knowing everything is going to be all right. Emotionally, pie takes you back to being in that little bubble."

At a time when comfort is in high demand, we can take heart that Sacramento is home to a number of outstanding bakers who are turning out pies—both sweet and savory—that remind us how consoling and utterly delicious simple ingredients can be in the right hands. Here's to pie in all its forms—and to the people who make them.



Angela Harris

Midtown Bakery

Angela Harris isn't strictly a pie maker; she also sells delectable cakes and cookies at her small-batch, weekends-only bakery in Sacramento's midtown. But don't let the other offerings distract you from sampling her superb pies and tarts. Stand-out selections include chocolate custard, lemon with Italian meringue and a rich salted chocolate tart with a peanut butter cookie crust. "With everything I make, I want to make you feel good when you're eating it," says Harris, who started baking in elementary school under her mother's guidance. "It didn't really matter to me what type of dessert it was; I ate everything my mom baked." 2301 J St.; (916) 345-4025; midtown-bakery.com





Pie Flavored Pie

The name behind Estrella Gomez's business comes from her dessert-loving grandfather. "We'd ask him what kind of pie he wanted and he'd always say, 'Pie-flavored pie.'" In other words, any kind would do. Gomez specializes in mini pies, which she sells through Burly's Takeout, an offshoot of Burly Beverages, in uptown Sacramento. Banoffee is her best-seller, but flavors like tangerine cream with Nilla Wafer shortbread crust showcase her experimental side. Gomez also offers savory pies as well as vegan options. "Pies used to intimidate me, but now I prefer them to cakes," says Gomez. "You can really customize them, they're more portable than cakes and you don't have to worry about messing up the frosting." 2014 Del Paso Blvd.; (916) 333-3879; burlybeverages.com; IG: @pieflavoredpietruck



Estrella Gomez





Kira O'Donnell Babich



Real Pie Company

Kira O'Donnell Babich takes the art of pie making so seriously that her flaky all-butter crust is made in a temperature-controlled dough room, kept at 64 degrees year-round, so that, as she says, "we can keep that dough happy as we're working with it." Her cheerful shop, which she co-owns with husband Fred Babich, turns out an excellent assortment of fruit-forward pies, including peach and nectarine; apple galette; rhubarb-raspberry; Key lime; butterscotch banana cream; and Meyer lemon Shaker pie. The cazuela pie, uniting pumpkin, roasted sweet potatoes and coconut milk, is a holiday hit. "I love working with beautiful fruit and dough, and sharing baked goods," says Babich, "so this is the perfect career for me." 2425 24th St.; (916) 838-4007; realpiecompany.com

Roasted Pear and Cranberry Galette

"Gallettes are my personal go-to in November and December, when I want a dessert that's rustic, fruit-forward and looks lovely on a holiday table," says Kira O'Donnell Babich, owner of Real Pie Company. Here, Babich shares her recipe for a roasted pear and cranberry galette. "Roasting intensifies the pears' honeyed sweetness, which is a great foil for the bright tartness of cranberries. This is just a pretty, simple, delicious dessert that is perfect for the holidays."

1 refrigerated pie dough disc, approximately 1 pound (use your favorite recipe)

Flour for rolling dough

½ cup granulated sugar

½ cup brown sugar

½ teaspoon cinnamon

3 tablespoons cornstarch

1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries

4 small or 3 large ripe pears, peeled, cored and cut into eighths

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

¼ teaspoon orange zest

Melted butter for brushing the galette

Granulated sugar for sprinkling on galette

Remove pie dough disc from refrigerator. Dust a flat kitchen surface with flour and carefully roll out disc into a ⅛-inch-thick circle. Place on a sheet pan (on parchment paper, if possible) and refrigerate.

In a small bowl, mix together white and brown sugars, cinnamon and cornstarch. Set aside.

In a large bowl, toss cranberries with pear slices, lemon juice and orange zest. Add sugar mixture to fruit and mix well. Let sit for 10 minutes, then mix once more before proceeding.

Retrieve sheet pan with dough circle from refrigerator and place on countertop. With your fingers or a slotted spoon, remove fruit from bowl, leaving any liquid in bowl. Place fruit in a mound in center of dough circle. Flatten/arrange fruit so you have a 3½-inch dough "border" around the fruit.

Working quickly, begin raising the dough over the fruit by grasping the edges of the dough, lifting up and "pleating" the dough as you lay it gently back over the mounded fruit. Be careful not to tear, stretch or poke holes in the dough as you work. Continue until all dough lies snugly over the fruit and about 30–40% percent of the fruit peeks through the new circle created by the dough pleats.

With a pastry brush, liberally brush melted butter over the exposed dough surface. Then generously sprinkle granulated sugar over the buttered dough. Finally, carefully pour all the reserved fruit liquid over the fruit in the galette, trying to avoid getting any on the buttered/sugared dough.

Place galette (still on sheet pan) in freezer. (Do not cover with plastic wrap.) This step is not critical, but it will help galette maintain its shape and help prevent against leakage when galette is baking. (It also allows you to make the galette up to 3 days before you want to bake it.)

When ready to bake, place sheet pan with galette into preheated 375-degree oven. If you have a pizza stone, use it! It will help the bottom crisp up nicely. Bake until crust is deep, dark golden brown and fruit juices are bubbling, approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Remove from oven and let cool at least 30–40 minutes before slicing. Serves 8 easily.



KIRA'S PRO PIE-MAKING TIPS

MAKE IT A GROUP EFFORT

"Old-school, by-hand pie making is labor-intensive—but that's why the results are so incomparably delicious. I would suggest that people turn pie making into a team effort (someone makes the dough, someone else cuts the fruit). What a great family project!"

PRE-MAKE THE DOUGH

"When you have a lazy Sunday afternoon, make a big batch of pie dough, divide it, roll it out in circular pieces and freeze. Then when you decide to make a pie or galette, the dough is all ready for you."

PRE-MAKE THE FILLING

"If you have a big pile of beautiful ripe fruit (maybe you bought too much at the farmers market), turn it into pie filling, divide into individual aluminum pie tins and freeze. When you want to make a pie, you just slip that fruit-filling 'puck' into a prepared pie bottom."

FREEZE AND BAKE

"You can also make an entire fruit pie and simply freeze it. When you're ready to bake, move it directly into the oven—no need to defrost it."

FEAR NOT

"Jumping into pie making may seem daunting, but you can do it! Don't be afraid of the process—the results are so marvelous. And teach your kids to bake! The art of pie making really needs to endure in this chaotic and crazy world we live in—think of the comfort and joy that pie brings to people."

Crumb Pies

You could say Mary Jaques got into baking pies for the money. Using apples from her sister's backyard trees, she baked apple crumb pies to fundraise for her son's seventh-grade field trip. The response was so overwhelming that she raised enough dough to join him in the Big Apple. In 2015, Jaques launched her pie wagon, bringing her fresh fruit pies to farmers markets and community events around the region. Her pies are also stocked at Market 5-One-5 in downtown Sacramento. "It's hard for me to call myself a baker because I don't bake bread or croissants," says Jaques, but her devoted customers beg to differ. crumpies.com; IG: [@crumpies](https://www.instagram.com/crumpies)





South

Dessert is no mere afterthought at this modern Southern restaurant in downtown Sac. It's helmed by N'Gina Guyton, who grew up eating legendary pies made with love by her mom and aunts. "They were very big about not giving away their recipes until they passed," she says, "so it's an honor to continue their tradition." Standards like pecan pie and sweet potato pie share the menu with seasonal hand pies. South's terrific pies are the handiwork of pastry chef Karina Funes, whom Guyton describes as "very light with the hand. She understands that you can't overmanipulate the crust. Our customers who love our pies do not play. If it's off by a little bit, they will let us know," says Guyton. "Karina makes sure the pies are consistent and guests are happy." 2005 11th St.; (916) 382-9722; weheartfriedchicken.com



Karina Funes and N'Gina Guyton





St. Rey Bakery

Kelly Haarmeyer, who has been baking for five decades and completed stints at various bakeries, including Rick's Dessert Diner and Real Pie Company, launched this cottage-baking gig in her retirement. Her malted lime pie includes a filling made with malted milk powder and cardamom and topped with a soft pillow of toasted meringue. The crust gets its artisanal foundation from homemade graham crackers. "I don't like to buy things in a box," explains Haarmeyer. Come holiday time, she bakes a pear brandy mince pie from a recipe she tweaked for a couple of years. "I'm always looking at bakeries all over the country and experimenting with their recipes," she explains. IG: @st_rey_bakery



Kelly Haarmeyer



Oliver Ridgeway with beef shank pie

Camden Spit & Larder

Chef-owner Oliver Ridgeway's native England is the inspiration behind the impressive meat pies at this swank downtown restaurant. "I wanted to honor where I'm from and embrace what British cuisine has to offer," says Ridgeway. The beef shank pie sports a towering bone baked into its center—a not-so-subtle hint at the ingredients within. Ridgeway also offers a version made with slow-braised lamb shank from Superior Farms as well as a rotating selection of hearty pasties with fillings such as chicken, Gruyere, mushroom and spinach; curried lamb; and potato and onion with smoked cheddar. 555 Capitol Mall; (916) 619-8897; camdenspitanlarder.com



I Love Pie Bakeshop

A longtime fan of artisan baking, Diana Shockley dreamed of one day owning a bakery, perhaps after retiring from her career in project management. Her dream was fast-tracked when friends went gaga for the pies she served at her annual pie party. The accolades gave Shockley the confidence to sell her goods at a farmers market in Carmichael, where her pies immediately sold out. The salted caramel Dutch apple pie, made with a brown-butter oat streusel and house-made caramel, is a perennial favorite, but creative flavors like blueberry-basil with goat cheese crumbles or the Harry Potter-inspired butterbeer prove there are no limits to what a pie can be. 4949 Marconi Ave., Carmichael; (916) 969-7791; ilovepiebakeshop.com



Diana Shockley



Say Pies!

Fair Oaks resident Lindsay Foley traces her love of pie crust back to when she started baking pies for her family at age 12. "Sometimes I would make just the crust by itself with cinnamon sugar," she says. While working at a bakery in college, Foley fell in love with the people-pleasing part of the food industry. Years later, she transitioned to cottage baking, where she wows customers with her signature salted caramel apple pie. Foley transforms her home kitchen into an efficient assembly line when production ramps up. "I enjoy the whole process of seeing the pies come together," she says. Over the holidays, she mostly sells frozen pies to folks who prefer to bake their own. *saypies.com*; IG: @saypies



Lindsay Foley

Gimme a Hand!

Perhaps the only thing better than a slice of pie is a pie that you can hold in your hand. Here are five of the area's best hand pie makers, all influenced by traditions from around the globe.



Sunny Atherley's **DUBPLATE KITCHEN** is one of the few local spots where diners can find Jamaican patties: flaky hand pies bursting with aromatic fillings like beef, chicken curry and jerk chicken. 3419 El Camino Ave.; (916) 339-6978; dubplatekitchencuisine.com



Seasonal ingredients are the star at **DELTA HAND PIES**, where owners Jeremy White and Duane Wilson deliver favorites like pear, prosciutto and fontina as well as a spicy Japanese curry with sweet potato and squash. deltahandpies.com



Owner Bobbie Mier is the matriarch behind **THE PASTY SHACK**, a Sacramento institution where Cornish pasties reign supreme. The Thanksgiving pasty with turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy and stuffing is a holiday meal all by itself. 4746 J St.; (916) 454-9630; the-pasty-shack.webnode.com



The pocket pies at Areej Khan and Michael Spencer's **A PART CAFE** celebrate classic Middle Eastern flavors. The irresistible selection includes spinach-cheese; beef-tahini; shakshuka-cheese; apple-cardamom; and cinnamon roll with labneh glaze. 217 Vernon St., Roseville; (916) 474-4154; apartofroseville.com



Ulises Lespade opened **CHE'S URBAN EATS** to bring empanadas from his native Buenos Aires to Sacramento's masses. Made with dough imported from Argentina, Che's offerings include beef, chorizo, veggie, and ham and cheese—all served with a bright house-made chimichurri. 1715 R St.; (916) 462-1445; chesurbaneats.com





The Pie Witch

A baker since childhood, Amber Wyatt has been known to enchant people with her unique assortment of pies, which include showstoppers like chocolate Kahlúa cream; eggnog custard; ricotta lemon thyme; Mexican hot chocolate; and rum pumpkin chiffon, which is “light and airy, not dense like a regular pumpkin pie,” says Wyatt. The part-time cottage baker sells through her website and at select pop-up events. Her mini hand pies in flavors like blueberry, cherry, peach and apple (served with a side of homemade caramel for dipping) are perfect party fare. Baking pies is Wyatt’s way of relaxing. “I find when I bake cakes it kind of stresses me out, but pies are much more mellowing.” thepiewitch.com; IG: [@the.pie.witch](https://www.instagram.com/the.pie.witch)

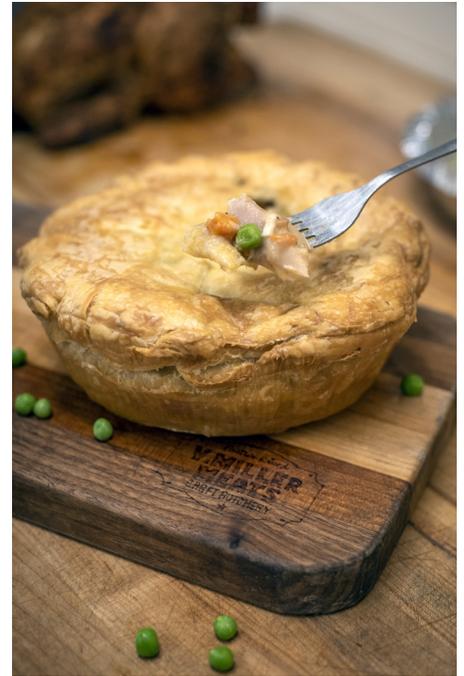




Eric Veldman Miller

V. Miller Meats

The pot pies at this East Sac craft butcher shop came about when the chicken dinners didn't sell well one week and the butchers needed to make good use of the leftovers. Spice-rubbed chicken is roasted together with potatoes, then mixed with carrots, celery, onions and green peas in a satisfying gravy concocted from house-made bone broth and tucked between two layers of puff pastry. "It's familiar and it's comforting," says owner Eric Veldman Miller. "We don't stray far from the old standard Swanson's pot pies that you can find in the freezer section, but we use way better ingredients." 4801 Folsom Blvd.; (916) 400-4127; vmillermeats.com



Amy Fan

Whiskful Kitchen

Self-taught cottage baker Amy Fan specializes in inventive hand pies with rom-com-inspired names like There's Something About Cherry and When Chocolate Met Marshmallow. Although she didn't eat pies for dessert in her childhood ("being from an Asian family, we would have Chinese-style desserts or some sort of fruit," she explains), they nevertheless became an obsession. Some of Fan's pies celebrate Asian flavors, including her popular matcha hand pie and a special pineapple bao pie filled with Chinese custard. "Pies bring so much joy to people," says Fan. "That's why I love making them." whiskfulkitchen.com; IG: [@thewhiskfulkitchen](https://www.instagram.com/thewhiskfulkitchen)

