

Almond kringle is king of pastries

Elite Bakery offers the flaky Danish treat that's been a tradition in Europe since the 1800s

BY SHELLEY FRALIC, VANCOUVER SUN MAY 4, 2011



Paul Larsen uses his father's old country recipe to make these pastries that are filled with almond custard. They are best enjoyed warm from the oven. Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, PNG, Vancouver Sun

Paul Larsen can't be sure, but he thinks he might be the only commercial baker left in Metro Vancouver who still makes almond kringle, and if you've ever tasted almond kringle then you'd know that is not only a travesty of culinary justice but a sad state of affairs for every sweet tooth who doesn't get to wake up every morning in Denmark.

That said, Larsen is chuffed that the big "almond kringle" sign in the window of his little Elite Bakery on Rumble Street has attracted some attention, and that one of the old country recipes his late father Mark brought over from Denmark in the late 1960s is getting its due, turning up in our series on The Secret Treats of Metro Vancouver.

Larsen is 40 and took over the Burnaby bakery when his father died in 1997, and today bakes about four dozen kringles a week, along with an assortment of tarts, Copenhagens, almond strips, apple strudels, Danish rye bread and a traditional Danish wedding cake called kransekage, a towering almond concoction that is shipped to customers as far away as California and Ontario.

But it's the kringle that's king here, a pie-plate-sized oval of flaky Danish pastry into which is folded a mixture of butter, marzipan and almond custard, all of it tarted up with a hint of apple flavour, sprinkled with toasted almonds and oven baked.

"It's not a lot of ingredients," says Larsen, in typical baker's understatement, and he's right, but it's utterly divine, soft and sweet and crunchy at the same time, and while you're eating it, preferably warm from the oven and with flakes fluttering all over your clothes, he will tell you that the kringle is a traditional European dessert that traces its heritage to the 1800s and a pantry mainstay that Scandinavians commonly called Vienna bread.

"It's an exotic pastry, that's for sure. It has a light flaky texture that you can't find in a doughnut or a cake," says Larsen, and at \$6.50 for one sharing-friendly kringle, it's proven to be a hit not just with Vancouver-area Danes looking for a taste of home, but with the teens who wander in at lunch hour from the high school across the street.

Larsen adds that many kringle devotees often opt for the \$25 version, which measures about two feet by 18 inches [61 cm by 41 cm], a mega treat that would satisfy, at least momentarily, even the most insatiable of sweet teeth.

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