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Thomas Ham

CUNY New York City College of Technology

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Puff Pastry Through Time: Its Evolution and Applications

Thomas Ham

New York City College of Technology; Honors Scholars Program



Abstract

Puff pastry is a plain laminated dough that is revered to be a versatile ingredient that can easily elevate any dish. At first, this flaky pastry was baked as only cake. Puff pastry has evolved greatly since its creation in 1645. From sweet desserts to savory entrees, puff pastry is ever-present in the industry. Puff pastry is served on its own with minimal flavorings (palmiers), a component of dessert items (napoleons / mille-feuille) or main entrees (beef wellington) enhancing the flavor and texture of the finished dish. The way we eat has drastically changed in recent years, and thus recipes have followed suit. Puff pastry has evolved from an elite recipe that was “prepared [...] in a locked room” (Block 2001) to a casual snack that can quickly satiate morning cravings (Decker 2021). Although there are still iterations of puff pastry that are highly intricate and fanciful, like the galette de rois, this ingredient is currently used as a quick base for other products such as fruit turnovers and cakes.

Introduction

Puff pastry has greatly affected both the baking and culinary worlds. Over the years, talented bakers and culinarians found various uses for this flaky dough and continue to experiment with it. Puff Pastry is a laminated dough that consists of thin layers of butter and dough. When baked, a light and flaky texture is produced. Although seemingly simple, this pastry is labor-intensive. On its own, puff pastry is plain, so it serves as a blank canvas for a medley of different flavor combinations and can serve as a non-intrusive presentation element. In baking, puff pastry is used to make many different desserts like palmiers, napoleons, mille-feuille, and Galette des Rois. In savory cooking, it is most commonly found in Beef Wellington, cheese straws/other small appetizers, and small fixtures for presentation. In my research I intend to examine potential uses of puff pastry by analyzing past and current trends.

Method

I conducted non-empirical qualitative research on puff pastry and its applications. To understand how puff pastry may be used in the future, I mainly focused on its current trends. First, I took a brief glimpse into the history of puff pastry to learn what has already come into trend and how it changed the way that we eat this pastry today. Second, I researched popular bakeshops that specialize in puff pastry. Two notable establishments include Sweet Rehab and Mille-Feuille. I reviewed their menus and found any commonalities. Third, I researched consumer data and reviewed other industry-related literature to learn about current trends. These trends range from recipe development to eating habits, and popular flavor combinations. Finally, I prototyped a new product from the trends that I found in my research to get a full grasp on the evolution of puff pastry.

Discussion of History

Created by Chef Claudius Gele in 1645, puff pastry was strictly used to make elegant cakes and pastries. Famous pastry chefs such as Chefs Marie-Antoine Carême made elaborate creations of rich pastry that impressed even high noblemen. Such creations include Mille-Feuille and Tarte Tatin which became staples of French pastry work. Other cultures and influential pastry chefs adopted puff pastry into their recipes and different regional variants arose. The British Cornish pasty is one of these notable creations because it utilized puff pastry in a savory setting rather than the typical dessert setting. (Gazzard 2021)

Discussion of the Current Market

From an analysis of popular bakeshops such as Sweet Rehab and Mille-Feuille, a trend towards small snack breakfast-style items was found. Each of these pastry shops are bakery/café-style, so they provide a morning time snack or even a pleasant tea time brunch. Additionally, these pastry shops’ most popular items were their puff pastry with simple flavor combinations such as Honey Pistachio Mille Feuille and Chausson aux pommes (French Apple Turnovers).

Discussion of Current and Future Trends

The Covid-19 Pandemic affected our eating habits. During these unprecedented times, there was a shift towards our “familiar favorites”. Nostalgic flavors such as “chocolate, vanilla, [browned butter, and salted caramel] maintain their lead” in what consumers find most intriguing. These flavors remixed in new combinations are what is being created today. What is left is “new iterations of s’mores, cannoli, [and] churro.” (Decker 2021) This shift is evident in the “Most Popular Puff Pastry Home Recipes” (Figure 1; Tastewise 2021) with “Puff Pastry Cinnamon Rolls” at the top with “Apple Strudel Puff Pastry” and “Nutella Puff Pastry Pizza” following shortly thereafter.

Prototyping from Current Trend

Using the current trends, and CityTech’s puff pastry recipe, I prototyped an original recipe for “Puff Pastry Cinnamon Rolls with Maple Crumb Strussel and Vanilla Glaze”



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Most Popular Puff Pastry Home Recipes

#1 Puff Pastry Cinnamon Roll	#6 Bacon, Egg, & Cheese Puff Pastry
#2 Crispy Veggie Puff Pastry Pie	#7 Puff Pastry Fig Flatbread
#3 Puff Pastry (Plain)	#8 Nutella Puff Pastry Pizza
#4 Apple Strudel Puff Pastry	#9 Puff Pastry Pizza with Fresh Mozzarella
#5 Puff Pastry Donuts	

Figure 1: The Most Popular Home Recipes including Puff Pastry for 2021 (Tastewise 2022)

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