











ARTISAN *Portrait*

DR. WINNETTE MCINTOSH AMBROSE

Pastry Chef, Engineer & Entrepreneur

The story of Dr. Winnette McIntosh Ambrose starts in Trinidad and Tobago then runs through MIT, the Sorbonne and Johns Hopkins. Interspersed with international travel, the study of chemical engineering and language, the result is the unique intersection of flavors found at her chic bakeries on Capitol Hill.

While studying in Paris, Ambrose discovered a passion for pastries. "I was captivated by the beauty and craft," she says. "The attention to detail that is required to execute French pastries at a high level, the precision, tapped into my engineer's mind, the aesthetics, the presentation. I'm a bit of a dichotomous person by nature—I'm an engineer but love the arts—so to me, French pastry epitomizes that. The tech and precision but with an artist's touch and creativity is the perfect marriage."

She experimented with recipes. "I would think of ways to incorporate flavors familiar to me but not seen in pastries, doing my own spins," she says. In 2010, while patenting medical devices by day, she opened a bakery called The Sweet Lobby. Soon after, she won Food Network's "Cupcake Wars" and business skyrocketed. By the time she won Food Network's "Chopped" eight years later, she'd opened Souk, meaning "market" in Arabic.

"The look and feel and mission are inspired by my travels throughout Southeast Asia, parts of the Middle East and Africa, and the idea to [use] French technique but with a bit of global flair," she says. "We really love putting a global twist on things. We have a honey pistachio kouign-amann, which is like a baklava and a croissant had a baby. That's an example of how we bring our own flavor and spin to things and incorporate my background from the Caribbean, a culture well known for its use of generous spices and one that is itself a bit of a melting pot."

In a tribute to her grandmother's cassava pone, for instance, Ambrose offers a version incorporating a French presentation. "I do a molded version, with fresh ginger and a rum glaze," she says.

She focuses on the craft, the community and the culture. "We are about providing a hospitality experience second to none, from the minute you place an order or walk through the door," she says. Ambrose is also proud of her mentoring; some of her bakers have been with her 12 years. "It's about the people and how transformative opportunity can be." ~

WORDS BY BETH RASIN | PHOTOS BY KRYSTA NORMAN