

{ The Oscars: Who Should Win }

by Steve Erickson

Los Angeles

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NO GLUTEN, NO DAIRY, BUT TONS OF TASTE

SANDEE HIER WAS “MRS. DUNCAN Hines,” she says, until her husband and three of their four children turned out to be sensitive to gluten, the protein in many grains that can trigger intestinal and neurological complications. In 2007, she opened the Sensitive Bake, a Culver City shop dedicated to gluten- and dairy-free breads and sweets.

Who comes to your shop? We get people who have MS, lupus, IBS [irritable bowel syndrome], celiac disease [a disorder in which gluten is toxic]. Many people with digestive disorders and nerve disorders go off gluten and casein—the protein in cow’s milk—and it’s popular to put autistic children on a gluten- and casein-free diet.

What sorts of substitutes do you use for wheat flour? We use rice flour and some starches to lighten it up—tapioca starch,

potato starch, and occasionally cornstarch, but a lot of people are sensitive to corn, too.

What replaces the gluten to keep your bread and bagels acting like bread and bagels? One item will have egg, one will have a little soy; a lot of things have almond meal. If someone’s allergic to nuts, we’ll say, “Here, have this, made with egg.” If they’re allergic to eggs, we’ll say, “Have this, made with soy.” People usually don’t come in with just a gluten allergy. It’s usually gluten in conjunction with something else.

What’s the biggest seller? Everyone loves the brownies, and bread sticks are really popular, even with wheat eaters. But for gluten people—forget the brownies. They’ll say, “Bread! I haven’t had bread in five years!” Tears roll down their face. ♥

VANILLA BAKE SHOP

THE CUPCAKE situation has gotten out of hand. Long queues, bitter rivalries, impassioned discussions about icing-to-cake ratios, the inexplicable veneration of red velvet (it’s dye, for crying out loud). Still, it’s hard not to get a little giddy when beholding this tiny affair’s meticulously organized rows of mini- and full-size cupcakes: Meyer lemon and raspberry, toasted coconut. Mom’s Birthday Cake (moist yellow cake, milk chocolate icing). Their little heads shimmer, pastel sugar crystals refracting infinitesimal shards of light from swirled frosting domes. Along with mod layer cakes that seem latte finished—not a scintilla of icing breaking formation—VBS makes edf’n renditions of icebox desserts (key lime or pumpkin pie, thamis), Dirt Cake) packed into shooter cups harboring itty-bitty spoons. » 512 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, 310-438-6644 or vanillabakeshop.com