

The Sweet Life



Sugar Marsh Cottage owner Dale Potts, right, with Sugar Marsh staff member Olesya Braun.

SUGAR MARSH COTTAGE DELIGHTS WITH CONFECTIONARY CREATIONS

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY BETHANY LEGGETT

It's early afternoon, and I stare at the platter of applewood bacon, toasted bread, and chunks of cheese perched on the corner table of Dale Potts' office. I'm ready to dive in, but Potts has stepped into the kitchen to retrieve the pièce de résistance for the meal: melted chocolate.

Returning to the sunlit room, she forms a tower of molten chocolate, crispy bacon, and crumbling Stilton cheese on buttered bread before handing over the plate with a soon-to-be-needed napkin. What may sound like a tastebud disaster transforms into a delicious, mouthwatering experience with layers hitting like waves on the tongue. Velvety rich notes of cocoa blend into the creaminess of the cheese that matches the saltiness of the bacon.

Lunchtime never tasted so sweet.

The owner of Sugar Marsh Cottage conceived the recipe after her husband, Charlie, came back from London raving about a chocolate sandwich he had eaten. She decided to add an American twist — bacon and cheese — and voilà. Now she uses the recipe to entertain, switching to French bread rounds for her d'oeuvres, to delight friends.

It's this sense of adventure that has led Potts to a successful career as a confectioner with a creative bent to her masterpieces. Delectable Sugar Marsh Cottage concoctions include sea salt caramel bon bons, merlot truffle with Chambord ganache, and bestselling shortbread cookies in the shape of a shell and dipped in a variety of flavors.

"At Sugar Marsh Cottage, we have imaginative style with exceptional taste. It's all about the extraordinary ways we can come up with something new with our artisan chocolates, toffees, and cookies," Potts says.

She opened the confectionary business in Atlanta before moving full-time to Darien in 2010, although the seaside town in McIntosh County has always been part of the Sugar Marsh story. "Darien was the inspiration for the the company's seashell design. We always knew we would land here at some point," Potts says.



Although cottage implies a small operation, Potts and her crew of seven employees run Sugar Marsh from a stately home that has been converted into a Southern baking haven on picturesque Franklin Street in Darien.

Expanded kitchens fill a large portion of the first floor that also includes a shop that's open to the public throughout the week. Still, the retail portion of the business is only about 25 percent of the overall structure. The wholesale contracts for

businesses up and down the Southeastern coast account for the major portion of Sugar Marsh Cottage's tasty inventory. And soon, Potts will expand digitally with an online e-commerce shop where the public can order from a set menu.

"It's a little intimidating, but we are prepared for it. It's exciting," she says.

Just this year, Potts created 21 new flavor combinations that she presented to The Breakers, where Sugar Marsh Cottage provides the sweets for the Palm Beach luxury hotel. New combinations include shortbread shells dipped in key lime glaze with strawberry drizzled on top; and champagne-flavored cookies dipped in chocolate and drizzled with strawberry. Potts will change up the flavors for fall, even adding a pumpkin spice option for a limited time.

"Customers expect freshness and new flavors," Potts says. And she delivers — but not without extensive research and development. "We can come up with a coating sometimes and put it on a cookie, and it gets totally lost. So we do extensive R and D because we want the pairings to be phenomenal."

Whether destined for the shop or a hotel room pillow, the daily demand is no small task and expected grow once the online marketplace goes live. Currently, Sugar Marsh Cottage goes through 100 pounds of chocolate in a week and 1,000 cookies a day.

Whether it's dark, milk, or white, there's a chocolate out there for everyone's tastes. And thanks to the talented hands of Dale Potts, I know mine just happens to come on a sandwich with bacon and cheese on top.

Applewood Bacon, Stilton, & Chocolate Sandwiches

This is a delicious brunch sandwich that will wow your guests. All of the distinctive flavors come together for a mouthwatering treat for the senses. If you want to expand the recipe for a larger party, substitute French bread rounds to make petite, open-faced hors d'oeuvres. And for those who don't like Stilton, blue cheese can be used instead.

INGREDIENTS

4 SLICES OF HAND-CUT CRUSTY WHITE BREAD

SOFT SALTED BUTTER FOR SPREADING

3 OZ. 64 PERCENT CACAO DARK CHOCOLATE

8 SLICES OF THICK CUT APPLEWOOD BACON

STILTON CHEESE, CRUMBLD

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Cook bacon in large frying pan until done, and set aside. Soften butter at room temperature for spreading. Break up chocolate into fairly small pieces and melt in microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring after each interval. Make sure chocolate is completely melted with no lumps remaining.

Lightly toast bread in oven on both sides. Then, butter the bread on one side. Place the melted chocolate on the unbuttered side and top with four pieces of bacon. Finish with a generous crumbling of Stilton cheese. Lay the remaining toasted buttered bread on top and press firmly. Enjoy!

