

Tru's pastry queen finally gets the kitchen she deserves



Gale Gand, executive pastry chef and restaurateur, is at home in the new kitchen of the house she shares with her husband, Jimmy Seidita, and son, Giorgio. Everyone takes part in making the pastry treats called chouquettes.

Tribune photos by Jim Robinson

Just desserts

By Mary Daniels
Tribune staff reporter

She hated her kitchen. It was coming between her and her new husband, causing the only arguments in an otherwise cloudless marriage. It also deprived her of quality time with her 7-year-old son.

When you learn who "she" is — pastry chef Gale Gand, 47, the executive pastry chef and partner in the renowned Chicago restaurant, Tru, a cookbook author and television hostess — you will wonder why she would put up with the dysfunctional relationship she and her kitchen had.

Imagine the diva of desserts taking cookies out of a half-baked oven, 100 degrees off, by gripping the two sides of a door from which the handle had fallen. Cooking on a stove that had only two working burners. Rolling out dough on counters too high for someone who fakes being more than 5 feet tall. But most important to her, clashing elbows with her husband, Jimmy Seidita, in what should be Gand's pre-eminent domain.

"I needed more professional equipment, like the oven and the stove," she admits. "The style of what I cook needs a lot of BTUs and power to it. The kitchen that was in here before was an all-electric kitchen, so it was as bad as it could get."

She doesn't know why she put up with it for so long — six years. The existing kitchen was not the major draw in buying the 1970s contemporary wood house in north suburban River-



Gale Gand

woods. "It is the last house on a dead-end street in a wooded area," she explains. She grew up in adjacent Deerfield but had always wanted to live in Riverwoods, which is more wooded with bigger lots, and overall has a more free-wheeling, rural-like lifestyle, "where you could build forts, dogs could roam free and you could ride horses here."

She tried to make the existing kitchen work but knew it was time to act when she and her husband began to experience their only dimension: territoriality in the kitchen.

"I would get so claustrophobic and tense," she says. "I was in a relationship with a wonderful man. We are so alike, but when we got in the kitchen, we fought. When I found it was creating conflict between two people who love each other, I decided it has got to go."

PLEASE SEE GAND, PAGE 6



A vintage French butcher block, which Gand uncovered in the basement of the Ambassador East hotel, commands a special space in the new kitchen.

GREAT FINDS

Don't forget what Saturday is . . .

"She loves you. She loves you not."
"He loves you. He loves you not."

Your intended valentine surely will love these gifts meant to decorate the table and set the mood.

—Pamela Sherrod



Je t'aime

Le Magasin's Marguerite series of cups takes its coquettish inspiration from the "loves me, loves me not" phrase that's spoken when pulling a petal from the Marguerite flower. Collectively, the cups form the phrase "Je t'aime, un peu, beaucoup, passionnément, a la folie, pas du tout," which means "I love you, a little, a lot, passionately, like crazy, not at all." A single cup and saucer is \$95, a goblet, \$45; a set of two lunch cups and saucers is \$235. All at Le Magasin, 408 N. Clark St., 312-396-0030.



Tribune photo by Bob Fila

The age of romance

Silver candlesticks with a history and someone you want to create history with — sounds like a perfect match. These candlesticks, which date to the 1920s, are for the true romantic and antique lover. They are \$15 a pair and among the vintage and antique home-furnishing finds at Island Girl Salvage, 74 S. Evergreen Ave., Arlington Heights, 847-392-2726; or visit www.island-girlsalvage.com

And love is a special celebration with Simon Pearce's Heartland Champagne flutes, made in his glass-blowing workshop in Vermont. The glass is as smooth as silk, but underneath, there is a rough cross, Pearce's signature — made by the iron he uses to hold the glass as it is made. The flutes are \$65 each at Sawbridge Studios, 153 W. Ohio St., 312-828-0065, and 1015 Tower Ct., Winnetka, 847-441-2441. For more information, visit www.sawbridge.com.



Say it with pewter

"Anything is possible" especially when presenting a sweetheart with your heart and maybe a little something to go with it. Hand-crafted in pewter, this 4½-by-3-by-1-inch box features an engraved lid with the Italian words "tutto è possibile." The English translation "anything is possible" is inside the lid. The box, which sells for \$95, is part of the Match pewter collection at Barneys New York, 25 E. Oak St., 312-587-1700.

GAND: Pastry chef finally gets just desserts

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Gand must be one of the busiest people on the planet. Her curriculum vitae is several pages of tiny type long. It lists stellar reviews and accolades, awards for culinary excellence, books, travels, appearances on television, including as hostess of "Sweet Dreams" on cable's Food Network (which airs 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. Wednesdays), and more.

Her latest and fourth book, "Gale Gand's Short and Sweet: Quick Desserts with Eight Ingredients or Less" (co-authored with Julia Moskin; Clarkson Potter, 160 pages, \$27.50) is now in bookstores.

Make it disappear

With all those pots and pans to juggle, she says, "I was hoping someone else would take care of it for me," she says of the need to make the old kitchen disappear.

"If I could get someone to film it, I would do it, rather than wait another six years," she adds. It would stay on track time wise because film crews have a deadline, it would stay on budget and it would also execute the dramatic transformation that needed to happen."

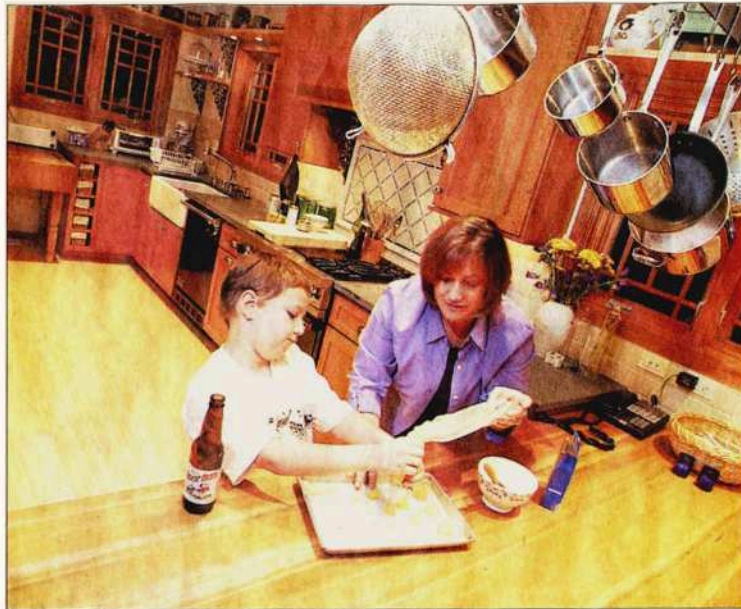
She was ready to dump everything in the old kitchen. She just wanted to make sure the new one could incorporate two objects that are dear to her.

One is a small ceramic wall-hung French salt cellar from the '30s given to her by her ex-husband Rick Tramonto, "which didn't fit anywhere in this white particleboard kitchen I had." The other is a 100-year-old French butcher block she had unearthed from a stack of trays in the basement of the Pump Room when she worked there as pastry chef. (She paid \$100 for it and broke two toes transporting it home in her Nissan Sentra.)

"I needed a kitchen to go with my butcher block and this salt cellar. That was the catalyst: the fighting and the salt cellar," she says.

She approached the cable network HGTV about doing a feature on her kitchen. (A show on the remodeling will air on HGTV in late spring.) HGTV recommended David McNulty, a Certified Kitchen Designer and registered interior designer, as someone who could do the job and meet her requisites.

McNulty, of Kitchen & Bath Creations in Park Ridge, calls the offending original kitchen "a nightmare. It was U-shaped, with an old broken-down microwave, a desk that was nev-



"I didn't want a kitchen that looked or felt new," says Gale Gand, here making pastries with son, Giorgio. "I wanted one that looked aged, with a French farmhouse feeling to it — not for show, but a working kitchen."

er used, and it had carpet flooring. It was awful, just no flow," he says.

First off, he morphed the U-shape into a rectangle of two conjoined work triangles.

In one triangle, Gand's husband and her son, Giorgio, can access the tall eggplant (purple-black) Viking refrigerator to get a drink or "be doing all the things they need to do to fix themselves a snack," Gand says. "They have their space on this side, and I have my space on my side."

Old and new ingredients

McNulty installed soapstone-topped work counters where Gand and son Gio (short for Giorgio) roll dough together.

"The whole kitchen is tailored to the fact I'm short, so we could bake together and make pasta together," Gand says.

McNulty put in counters that are 35 inches high in one spot and 33 inches in another to accommodate the sovereign of sweets. (Typical counter height is 36 inches.)

McNulty made sure to incorporate her two favorite objects, while new ingredients include rows of shelving on which to display prized collectibles such as her grandmother's cameo canister set (a wedding present), and Gand's prized antique toy ovens, including two Easy-Bake toy ovens.

Custom quarter-sawn oak cabinets with vintage-looking hardware contrast with a blond

bamboo floor. (Gand and her husband, both naturalists, chose bamboo because it is a renewable resource.)

Bathed in light

A pass-through from kitchen to dining room was enlarged for entertaining's sake. Mullioned Pella Prairie-style casement windows allow natural light to bathe the chiffon-colored walls and the vanilla-colored "subway" tiles, handmade by a California artisan (purchased at The Fine Line store in River North).

"I didn't want a kitchen that looked or felt new," Gand says. "I wanted one that looked aged, with a French farmhouse feeling to it — not for show, but a working kitchen. I have this contemporary cutting-edge restaurant," she says, referring to Tru, "but I like cherries on my china."

"This kitchen has a soul."

And it is definitely sweetening the marital relationship.

Her husband, who, as an environmental grant officer for The Joyce Foundation, gives grants to environmental projects (mostly clean water projects), "is saving the polar bears, the Great Lakes," she says. "His is very noble work. My bit for the environment is to make his life easier. I wanted to create a home where he is fed emotionally and physically. This kitchen is nourishing us."

Classic French treat a la Gand

This pastry recipe from Gale Gand is like a classic pate a choux or cream puff dough, but with double the sugar and a touch of orange



Tribune photo by Bonnie Traflet

flower water. The tops are egg washed and then sprinkled with distinctive French coarse white sugar and baked (the sugar can be purchased from baking shops or online at www.wilton.com, or granulated sugar can be substituted). Chouxquettes are left unfilled and may be eaten in the morning or as an after-school snack.

Chouxquettes

Cooking time: 40 minutes
Preparation time: 30 minutes
Yield: 72 servings (1-inch pieces)

- 1 cup water
- 1 stick (1/2 cup) unsalted butter
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 cup flour
- 5 eggs
- 1 teaspoon orange flower water or 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon French coarse sugar (white) or granulated sugar for garnish

1. Heat oven to 425 degrees. Heat water, butter, salt and sugar to boil in medium pot over medium-high heat. Remove from heat. Add flour all once, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until flour is incorporated, about 30 to 60 seconds. Return pan to heat; cook, stirring to evaporate some of moisture, about 30 seconds.

2. Transfer mixture to bowl of mixer fitted with paddle attachment. Add 3 eggs, 1 at a time, stopping after each addition to scrape down sides of bowl. Mix at medium speed until dough is smooth and glossy and eggs are completely incorporated. (Dough should be thick, but fall slowly from beaters. If dough still clings to beaters, add fourth egg and mix until incorporated.) Stir in orange flower water or vanilla.

3. Pipe dough onto parchment-lined baking sheet, in 1-inch kisses, using pastry bag fitted with large plain tip. Whisk remaining egg with 1/2 teaspoon water. Brush surface of dough with egg wash (you might not use all of egg wash). Sprinkle with French coarse sugar or granulated sugar. Bake 15 minutes; reduce heat to 375 degrees. Bake until puffed up, light golden brown and there is no more yellow pastry color showing, about 20 minutes more. Let cool on baking sheet.

Nutritional information per serving:

47 calories; 59% of calories from fat; 3 g fat; 2 g saturated fat; 30 mg cholesterol; 4 g carbohydrates; 1 g protein; 41 mg sodium; 0 g fiber

Nutritional by Julie Shield