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**PINEAPPLE UPSIDE
 DOWN CAKE WITH
 SPANISH COFFEE FROM
 RED AGAVE**

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

A BITTER-SWEET SYMPHONY

Coffee plus dessert equals bliss BY KENDALL FIELDS

What’s better than a slice of moist, fudgy chocolate cake? Or what about a ramekin of silky crème brûlée? Both desserts need something bitter to balance out all of that sweetness and accentuate their flavors — and coffee is the perfect partner. Each dessert alone is delicious, but pairing it with a coffee drink will elevate it to ecstasy. When it comes down to it, coffee and dessert make for an unbeatable pair.

Brian Hebb, who owns Red Agave and Cowfish, says there must be “something evolutionary to it — bitter flavors, creamy flavors and sugar go together nicely.

“Everybody is so used to having dessert and coffee,” Hebb says, “but the combinations that sing are those that really pick up the flavors of the dessert.”

Hebb says the most obvious dish to pick from the delicious dessert selections at Red Agave is the flourless chocolate molten tort with an espresso crème anglaise, since the chefs have already incorporated coffee into the dessert itself.

If you are looking to try something more unusual, he says a trickier dish to pair with a coffee drink is the pineapple upside down cake topped with a caramel sea salt ice cream. Hebb would pair the cake with the espresso Alexander, made with Crater Lake’s Cofia, a hazelnut espresso vodka.

The fruitiness of the pineapple and the creaminess of the ice cream are balanced perfectly by the bitterness of the coffee drink. “But if you are having that,” Hebb cautions, “you probably want to share.”

At Sweet Life Patisserie, coffee and fruit is also a must-try pairing. Sam Greenspan, a friendly newbie working the counter, recommends the classic tiramisu and coffee — but with a citrusy twist. Greenspan selects a slice of Sweet Life’s heavenly tiramisu paired with a Borgia. The tiramisu is light and fluffy, drizzled with a dark chocolate sauce. The sponge cake is soaked in rum and espresso and is just soggy enough to melt on the tongue. And the tiramisu rum-cream is light and decadent. The Borgia is a frothy and bitter drink similar to a mocha, with equal parts espresso and hot chocolate topped with whipped cream and bits of orange zest. Paired with the foamy Borgia and that zing from the orange zest, the tiramisu becomes much more complex and delicious.

“They are perfect complements,” Greenspan says, “because the chocolate is still present, but light and flavorful. And the tiny bit of rum complements the fruit in the coffee.”

Right next door to Sweet Life, Nib also boasts some delightful dessert and coffee pairings. Co-owner of the modern eatery Tiffany Petry shared two playful examples of coffee and dessert combinations.

The first is a chocolate almond paste cake with espresso caramel topped with kumquat sorbet and garnished with a strawberry-kumquat salad and cocoa nibs, along with a coffee orange almandine. The iced coffee, with Kahlua, amaretto, orange liqueur and chocolate shavings, is the true counterpart of the kumquat dessert — “the iced coffee mimics the dessert to bring out the flavor,” Petry says.

Her other recommendation is Murcia Curado cheese topped with a date puree and butterscotch sauce eaten with a strong French press coffee. The Spanish goat cheese along with the sweet sauce and the full-bodied coffee is a prime example of how any dessert is made better by a coffee drink. Petry says that bitter and sweet are two flavors that really balance each other.



**CHOCOLATE GATEAU AND MINT LATTE
 FROM EUGENE CITY BAKERY**

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

McKenzie Davie, who worked her way up from barista to baker at Eugene City Bakery, agrees that it is “the combination of the sweet and bitter that is amazing.” Of the many desserts and gourmet coffee drinks to choose from at the bakery, two that stand out are a white chocolate crème brûlée paired with a candied ginger mocha and a chocolate gateau with a frosted mint iced latte. In the first combination, the creaminess of the crème brûlée is matched impeccably with the punch of the ginger and the bitterness of the coffee. In the second pairing of the chocolate gateau (which just so happens to be gluten-free) with the frosted mint iced latte, a subtle mint flavor cuts through the rich, dense, fudge-like cake and is reminiscent of mint chocolate chip ice cream. It is a perfect and refreshing treat on a hot summer’s day.

Whatever the pairing is, Hebb says coffee drinks mimic digestifs and are natural to have at the end of a very satisfying meal to alleviate the too-full feeling. And dessert just so happens to follow. ■