

Dessert anatomy: XIV pastry chef Jordan Kahn on mozzarella milk ice, ube purée and Yoo-Hoo



"If you were to read my desserts on a menu, your first inclination might be to say, 'I don't really understand what these are,'" says Jordan Kahn, pastry chef at [Michael Mina](#) venue [XIV](#). The restaurant opened this week with [much fanfare](#). But the real spectacle might be on the dessert plate.

"You have a preconceived notion of what an apple tart should be. You know when it's bad or good or amazing because you have had something to compare it to."

But when this -- BITTER CHOCOLATE CREAM, UBE, MOZZARELLA MILK ICE, ELDERFLOWER, VIOLET (pictured) -- comes to the table, all bets are off.

"You have no point of reference," says Kahn, who at 25 has an impressive resume, including turns at Per Se in New York, the French Laundry in Napa and Alinea in Chicago. Kahn also was pastry chef at the erstwhile, critically maligned (or misunderstood, depending) Varietal in New York. "When it arrives, hopefully it will be beautiful and surprisingly delicious. I'm not going to say it's better than serving an apple tart. But you have the opportunity to hit more levels -- surprise and wonder and excitement and intrigue. That's kind of the point."

For this dessert, "I knew I wanted to play with these colors -- a very vivid purple, a black, a white, a silver.... I was sitting in my room and listening to Chopin's nocturnes. It just made me think of these notes in terms of color. It's hard to describe...."

Here it is, component by component:

Chocolate Yoo-Hoo cake: "It's devil's food cake, cut into blocks, dehydrated completely in the dehydrator, so it's a dry hard piece of cake. I put it in a Cryovac with [Yoo-Hoo](#) and

then the Yoo-Hoo fuses into the cells of the cake and then rehydrates it with the flavor of Yoo-Hoo. It's compressed Yoo-Hoo cake. I have two cases of the stuff [Yoo-Hoo] in the trunk of my car right now....

"I've always thought they were delicious."

Mozzarella milk ice: "I take mozzarella and infuse it into the milk. It's pure, simple, silky, milky ice cream that tastes exactly like mozzarella but it's sweet. It's made with no eggs, so it's pure white."

Silver sauce: "The sauce is made out of silver -- it looks like mercury. It's ground silverleaf powder (dissolved in an alcohol base) and St-Germain [elderflower liqueur]."

Chocolate cream: "This is ganache with a fluid *crème anglaise* base -- eggs add a nice richness to the base."

Ube purée: "Ube is purple yam from the Philippines. I was looking for a purple on this dish. [I know a lot about purple food.](#) I wanted to incorporate violet somehow in this dish. The color is pretty extraordinary. I'm amazed at how this ingredient works. We cook the ube in water and purée it and then add glucose, sugar, vanilla bean, blueberry tea that we make with freeze-dried blueberries and hot water. A nice base background -- it's not just starch and sugar. It's a beautiful unctuous texture and it's super super purple. I can't stress how purple it is."

Violet sauce: "It's a fluid gel -- a gel made from agar agar, then puréed so fine that it becomes smooth. [It's made with] violet aroma that we get from France -- a high-quality essential oil, really concentrated."

Crunchy chocolate mousse: "Chocolate mousse is smoothy and airy and creamy. I inverted the properties of it, made it crunchy. It's an eggwhite-based mousse, dehydrated, instead of a cream-based mousse. There's a small amount of methocel (which gels when it's heated). It's crunchy, and gets broken up into pieces...."

"I'm sure there's stuff that I'm forgetting on this dish.... It's not particularly ingenious, I'm just taking a different road."

XIV, 8117 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 656-1414.

-- Betty Hallock

Photo of BITTER CHOCOLATE CREAM, UBE, MOZZARELLA MILK ICE, ELDERFLOWER, VIOLET, courtesy of XIV