

TASTE

A Sweet New Year

For Rosh Hashana, Amy Pollokoff continues a family tradition that goes back more than 50 years — preparing an annual holiday cookie party

BY KAREN NITKIN
(SPECIAL TO THE SUN)

EVERY YEAR AS THE Jewish High Holy Days approach, Amy Pollokoff goes shopping. She buys five dozen eggs, 30 pounds of flour, 16 pounds of butter and two 4-pound bags of chocolate chips, among other things.

Then, three weeks before her annual cookie party, the Owings Mills mother of two starts baking. She makes strudel and candy-bar cookies, Austrian nut-butter cookies and cream-cheese cookies. In all, she makes 21 kinds of cookies, doubling and tripling most recipes. Next week, she'll serve them to friends and family on Rosh Hashana.

It's a party that's been going on for more than half a century. Starting in the 1950s, Pollokoff's grandmother, Bess Fedder, who was born in Baltimore in 1904, would have family members — as many as 35 people — over for lunch each year after Rosh Hashana services. Then she'd open her house to 100 or more friends and neighbors for the cookie desert.



Amy Pollokoff (left) with her grandmother, Bess Fedder

The cookie parties stopped for several years in the mid-1980s as Fedder suffered from Alzheimer's disease. Pollokoff and her husband missed the parties. So in the summer of 1992, Pollokoff met with her grandmother specifically to learn the cookie recipes and continue the family tradition. Pollokoff said her grandmother did not recognize her, but was happy to discuss the cookies.

Over the course of several days, the two women went through all 21 recipes. Then Pollokoff spent the next few months practicing before baking in earnest for the holidays. She's held the party every year since then.

"This is something that's going to be passed down," she says. (Please see COOKIES, F7)



Amy Pollokoff of Owings Mills makes 21 kinds of cookies in preparation for celebrating Rosh Hashana next week. It's the time when friends and family get to taste her treats.

PHOTOS BY ALGERIA PERNA (SUN PHOTOGRAPHER)

ONLINE Watch Amy Pollokoff bake some of her Rosh Hashana cookies at baltimoresun.com/cookies



Hugo Liu wants folks to think about food in more creative ways. CHANNING JOHNSON (FOR THE LOS ANGELES TIMES)

More than a dash of whimsy

Computer whiz tosses emotion into the mix in developing recipes

BY REGINA SCHRAMBLING

CAMBRIDGE, MASS. // Hugo Liu says he hates recipes. The whole concept seems hopelessly antiquated to a guy who starts cooking by scriffing spices and thinking. Yet he has invented a revolutionary way of developing them.

He explores new tastes with a vengeance. To learn to appreciate kale recently, he consumed it steamed, boiled, sautéed, raw, pureed and even as a cocktail. Yet he believes the future lies in helping other people make food decisions not by mouth but with the click of a mouse. Give him your last few meals and he can virtually map your taste buds.

Chef Auguste Escoffier would be appalled by the very notion, but this 27-year-old, spiky-haired computer whiz at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Lab here in Cambridge is starting to shake up the food world with a combination of artificial intelligence and natural obsession. Any geek could run 100,000 recipes on the Internet through a software program to deconstruct them. How many would think to sort them not by course or ingredient or even technique but by that most ineffable of quantifiers: emotion?

His first big project, a searchable database called The Synthetic Cook, brought Liu to national attention two years ago. His latest computer project, Gulp Fiction, creates recipes to order.

"Hugo was like a wet finger in an electric socket," says Antonia Allegra, who organized a food writers' conference at the Greenbrier in West Virginia in May and booked Liu after hearing him speak at the Taste 3 forum in California's Napa Valley earlier this year. "People who didn't understand a word knew what he was saying was very important."

In applying artificial intelligence to aesthetics, Liu says his overall goal is to "help people become fluent in taste." And he is clearly equipped with one of the more free-ranging minds in food today. Whereas Harold McGee brought rigorous science to bear on food, Liu contributes a combination of linguistics, imagination and fascination.

(Please see LIU, F7)

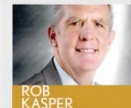
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ONLINE TODAY

Read restaurant critic Elizabeth Large's blog at baltimoresun.com/diningatlarge

Man hits his mark: 1,000 beers



ROB KASPER

THERE ARE MANY MILESTONES in life. Among them are graduating from college, landing a job, drinking 1,000 beers.

Jay Heckman passed the beer landmark in rare style last week at Mahaffey's Pub in Canton. A cheerful crowd toasted the 25-year-old Thursday night as he enjoyed Sierra Nevada Anniversary Ale. The beer, a bottle of a new release from the California brewery, was slightly different from the draft version of the brew he had downed a few days earlier when he officially reached the 1,000-beer mark.

Unlike many re-cream beer drinkers who believe they have easily downed 1,000 beers in their careers, Heckman reached his total by sipping 1,000 different beers over three years. There were no repeats. He paid for the beers, estimating the undertaking cost him at least \$6,000.

"It is all about variety...in beer drinking and in every part of my life," Heckman repeatedly said of his sudy achievement. "When I go into a restaurant, I order what I haven't had before. I like to have that knowledge, to know what things taste like." Beer drinking, he added, is "a good social hobby."

Heckman commutes to College Park, where he works as a bartender at the Santa Fe Cafe, an establishment that serves only bottled beers. His bosses, he said, have asked him to select a new beer or two for the cafe menu.

There were rules that governed this endeavor. Heckman's two encounters with the Sierra Nevada Anniversary Ale, for instance, added two notches to his tally, one for the bottled version, one for the draft.

Moreover, there was an official scorekeeper. It was Wayne Mahaffey, owner of the Dillon Street pub that prides itself on pouring a frequently changing array of beers. Each time Heckman or any member of the pub's beer club bought a beer, the name of the beer and drinker's club membership number were recorded on sales slips. After the bar closed, Mahaffey would tally the sales slips' data and punch them into a computer. A running tally of who had tasted what was displayed on the pub's Web site. Last week when Heckman was (Please see KASPER, F7)

INSIDE CHAMPAGNE GRAPES

The fruit, very sweet and juicy, is quite good paired with various cheeses.

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»»» RECIPE FINDER, PG 2F

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

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