

## Baking skills propelled Dufflet to gastronomic fame

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Staff Reporter

**T**hirty-six years ago, when she was only 20, Dufflet Rosenberg began baking desserts at home.

Not for herself or for her parents, Joe and Ruth, but for Torontonians who could not resist the sublime and heavenly taste of a scrumptious piece of cake that melts in your mouth.

A university dropout who grew up watching her mother bake, she sold these handcrafted confections – chocolate fudge cakes, apple tortes, cheese cakes and the like – to such cafés as the Cow Café and Just Desserts, both now defunct, and to a medley of restaurants.

Achieving instant success, she became one of Toronto's finest up-and-coming bakers. "I was surprised by the reaction," she said in a recent interview. Almost four decades on, Rosenberg presides over a mini-empire.

Her company, Dufflet, produces a dizzying array of cakes, pies, tortes, flans and cookies, as well as packaged nut-based candies coated in chocolate. She sells to supermarkets, gourmet food stores, restaurants, caterers and hotels.

Rosenberg's ascent to gastronomic fame has been spectacular. In 1980, she opened a bakery on Queen Street West, near her home. Two years later, it evolved into a café. Business boomed, and by 1985, she was working out of a 5,000-square-foot facility on Dovercourt Road.

Nine years ago, she opened another café on Yonge Street. In 2007, she launched her third café in the Beach neighbourhood. In 2009, she moved her headquarters to a 30,000-square-foot plant in Etobicoke.

"We're constantly expanding, but there's no big master plan" said Rosenberg, sipping a cup of coffee at her unadorned Queen Street West café. "We're growing all the time."

Citing examples, she mentioned her Small Indulgences

line of chocolate crackles, morsels and "tumbles," and her Grab and Go frozen cakes, tarts and waffles.

Dufflet products are sold across Canada and in the United States. In the future, she hopes to expand to Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Although she had broadened her base, cakes and pies still account for the majority of sales. She is loathe to discuss dollars and cents – "we don't give out financial information" – but admits that sales figures have cracked the \$1-million mark. A diminutive woman with greying red hair and a soft-spoken manner, she ascribes her success to several interrelated factors.

"I think we're very creative, and we never skimp on ingredients. We make everything from scratch, never from a mix. We do not use artificial flavours, colours or preservatives. Nor do we use hydrogenated fats and oils. We live up to our promise of pure and sweet."

To Rosenberg, product consistency is of the utmost importance. "You always get what you expect," she said.

Rosenberg regularly travels to food shows for new ideas. "We watch trends. We know what's going on out there."

Today, Dufflet produces about 100 different kinds of pastries, from strawberry cream cakes to classic New York-style cheese cakes. After more than three decades, her best-seller is still her signature carrot cake, a dense concoction of carrots, pineapples, coconuts and walnuts layered and iced with cream cheese and honey icing

The meringue cake, however, remains her all-time favourite dessert. "It's light, with lots of texture and flavour."

Though she loves the taste of baked goods, she is sufficiently disciplined to keep her weight down. "I watch what I eat," said Rosenberg, an avid cyclist and skier who exercises



**Dufflet Rosenberg at her Queen Street West café**

*[Sheldon Kirshner photo]*

with a personal trainer.

For the past five years, she has administered Dufflet with Daniele Bertrand, who came on aboard as a partner. "The business was expanding and was too much for one person to manage," she explained. "Daniele comes from a corporate background and is very experienced."

Rosenberg, the CEO, is in charge of product development. "The focus is on coming out with the next great thing," said Rosenberg, who can sometimes be found baking in her spanking new test kitchen. "We launch 15 to 20 new products a year."

Rosenberg was brought up on home baking. "My mother was a good baker," she said. "I always liked to watch her. I liked sweets."

She began calling herself Dufflet when she was 15. She acquired the nickname from her brother, Duff, who was fond of chocolate and cherry combinations.

Rosenberg's father – a partner in Ideal Food Service Equipment, founded by her grandfather – also devoured desserts, especially banana cakes, butter tarts, apple pies and ice cream.

She baked her first dessert, a chocolate cake, at the age of 16. She took arts courses at the University of Toronto, but never finished. Drawn to the culinary world, she enrolled in a baking course at George Brown College. She enlarged her repertoire by attending a course in French pastry baking at the École LeNôtre in Paris. But much of what she knows today is self-taught, she noted.

Rosenberg's husband, Martin Kohn, an architect, has a sweet tooth, too, but he manages to control his intake of Dufflet's cornucopia of cakes, pies and cookies.