

LAST BITE

THE NAKED TART

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIANE HUGHES



Years ago, as a graphic designer at IBM, Diane Hughes drew pictures of machine parts for a manual. It was only after working on the project for a year, drawing pictures of countless pulleys and gears, that she learned she had been drawing the internals of an ATM. She had never asked and nobody had told her. Her focus was on the parts and she knew nothing about the whole.

It's a different story as owner of The Naked Tart, where Diane focuses on the whole picture. Her organic, vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free, mostly raw tarts nourish the body, and their sheer deliciousness and glossy-magazine beauty nourish the spirit.

Inspired largely by the health problems she battled in the past, she wanted to create a dessert that others with dietary restrictions could enjoy without guilt.

Diane's tart-making is a labor of love but it's also plain labor. Sourcing fruits locally means that she drives to CSA pickup locations and farms. She picks figs right off the trees. She's on her feet in the kitchen for up to five hours, preparing the fruit and forming the crusts. Pumpkins are the hardest.

"I have to first peel them, then slice them," she says, "and they're hard. [I] pull out the seeds and make sure I use the guts, as there are lots of nutrients there. It's very labor intensive."

She hand-presses each lemon and lime, one by one. Forming the crusts was starting to give her symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome, but now she's built up strength in her forearms and thumbs. Making 250 tarts a week will do that.

Her customers say that the effort is worth it. Owners and merchandisers at the stores that carry the tarts say that they regularly sell out. The word that Marley Claridge of Eco-licious uses to describe her customers' reactions is "elation."

"Diane's tarts have most definitely filled a need for our customers on restricted diets."

Instead of cane sugar, Diane sweetens

the tarts with honey, maple syrup, and coconut nectar. She uses almond flour instead of wheat, and coconut butter in place of butter.

But you don't have to be on a restricted diet to appreciate them. I tried a chocolate tart, and if I had doubts that a dessert made with almond flour could taste good, those doubts were banished with the first taste. It was rich, decadent, and just a little complex. I might have to try it again. And again.

Her tarts come in thirty-five flavors. Summer showcases berries and peaches, while autumn brings sweet potato, pumpkin, and pecan. Customers can enjoy coconut and chocolate tarts all year. The newest creation is a peanut butter tart.

Several local health food stores carry products from The Naked Tart, but Diane's reaching new customers—and not necessarily just health food shoppers—each Saturday at Charlotte Regional Farmers Market. It's the free samples that get them.

Next up for The Naked Tart is expanding the customer base even more widely.

"I want to offer this product all over the United States. We've started shipping already, and we ship to Asheville and New York."

I ask if she was thinking of expanding her product line into other desserts. Cakes, cookies, ice cream?

Diane doesn't skip a beat.

"I'm going to stick with tarts." 

Find The Naked Tart at:

- *Eco-licious, Charlotte*
- *Healthy Home Markets, Charlotte and Davidson*
- *Queen City Pantry, Charlotte*
- *Charlotte Regional Farmers Market*

For local delivery:

- *Nourish Charlotte*
- *ModPaleo*