

Rosie says many of her customers prefer real flowers on their wedding cakes, which she obtains from the florist and arranges herself.

IN 1989, A YOUNG WOMAN NAMED ROSIE ROHRER STARTED A CAKE-DESIGN BUSINESS IN THE SMALL MANHEIM APARTMENT SHE SHARED WITH HER NEW HUSBAND, DWIGHT. TWENTY YEARS LATER, ROSIE'S SKILLS, HONESTY AND, OF COURSE, SCRUMPTIOUS RECIPES HAVE MADE ROSIE'S CREATIVE CAKES THE DESTINATION FOR...

Confection Perfection

BY MELISSA KASHNER

To Rosie, cake design is more than just piped borders and icing roses – she considers it to be an art form. And, she admits that she's always been a perfectionist about her art.

“At a very young age, I told my parents that I wanted to color,” remarks the Manheim native. “They thought I was too young to do a good job, but said that we could give it a try. They would critique my work very critically. This led me to develop quite a keen sense of perfection.”

But, her parents also encouraged her artistic endeavors, which Rosie channeled into cakes after she started watching her sister-in-law decorate them for children. “I was in awe by this,” she says, adding that, when she was old enough, she enrolled in decorating classes offered through the local 4-H and practiced at home. Then, at age 15, her mother helped her get a bakery job at Albrights Food Market in Manheim, where she decorated cakes almost every day after school. In her senior year, Rosie joined Country Table Restaurant in Mount Joy, where she worked half-days as part of her school's co-op program in the restaurant's now-famous bakery. “I worked there before the bakery even



opened, painting the walls in the area I would eventually be decorating cakes from,” she notes.

After three years there, however, Rosie believed she had the talent and drive to make it on her own.

“I wanted to work for myself,” she states.

The timing of that realization was perfect, as she was newly married to her husband, Dwight, and was ready to start a family. “I was scaling down on my workload anyway,” she says, “so I thought it would be a great time to transition.”

Thus, in 1989, in the couple's Manheim apartment,



Fondant details – especially lace (above) – remain a popular choice for wedding cakes, but Rosie also achieves fondant-looking accents using traditional butter-cream icing (below).



Rosie's Creative Cakes was born. A year later, her oldest son, Ryan, was too, followed by Tyler (now a high-school freshman) and Kristyn (now a sixth-grader). In those early days, she also supplemented her income and helped build her client base by decorating party cakes for the former Cake and Kandy Emporium in East Petersburg, where she also taught evening classes in cake decorating and gingerbread houses.

As much as she enjoyed being a mother, Rosie also was determined to take care of her *other* baby – her namesake bakery, which she and Dwight moved into the 19th-century farmhouse on Junction Road they purchased from his parents in 1990. "That was my goal: I wanted to build a business," Rosie states, noting that, with the help of grandparents and her husband, she was able to balance her business with her home life.

Part of that resolve was because, as Rosie says, in-home businesses may not garner much respect in the wedding industry, at least not initially. "If you have a family, your family tends to have some demands on you that don't allow you to maybe do as much as you would if you were in a professional storefront setting," she observes. "Because I have been in the industry for so long, I think people realize I'm in it for the business. I'm not in it because it's a hobby."

She's also in it simply because she loves cakes – and flowers and colors and patterns, all of which inform her confectionary art. "Just looking through a magazine and seeing a textile fabric on a sofa, 'I'll say, 'That'll make a great design on a cake.' Or, going to the card store and pulling out a card and saying, 'I could do that in sugar,'" Rosie envisions.

She says it's important to continually find inspiration since it's easy for cake designers to fall into a rut. "Each cake is somewhat different, but some designs you get tired of," she admits, acknowledging that most brides see those same designs with fresh eyes. "This is something new and different to them, and sometimes they can be overwhelmed by all the options."

That's one reason Rosie likes to keep her flavor menu simple, yet still fabulous. "There are tons of bakeries out there that have 25 or 30 things to choose from, but if [clients] can't decide from 15, how are they going to decide from 25?" she says. "I think it just makes it more confusing."

However, that doesn't mean Rosie's Creative Cakes only offers, say, white and chocolate. The diverse yet manageable menu also features such flavors as Lemon, Spice, Red Velvet, Black Walnut and Tropical Passion, as well as five kinds of frosting and a dozen crème and fruit fillings – all of which come from Rosie's own recipes, which she's tweaked and perfected over the past 20 years.

For weddings, however, Rosie wants the bride and groom – and their guests – to experience something a bit unexpected. That’s why she rarely offers marble cake for couples to sample. “You have had marble at every birthday party you’ve been to,” she states. “This is your wedding! Yes, everybody’s going to like marble cake, but you want something that they haven’t already had.”

Those wanting a marble-esque pairing of flavors may want to try her popular Raspberry Swirl instead – a white cake delicately spun with a pink berry essence. “It’s a cake combination everybody likes,” Rosie says. “This is a very mild, but yet very pretty look.” It also does not demand a filling. “A filling will definitely enhance it,” she adds. “But, it can stand by itself.”

Chocolate lovers will enjoy Chocolate-Mocha Chip filled with white-chocolate mousse – which Rosie says is smashing with peanut-butter frosting. “It all depends on how much chocolate people want,” she observes. “I tend to stay more neutral, because I love chocolate and I want to taste it!”

From Bridal White with black-raspberry Chambord filling (“Everybody’s had red raspberry, but black raspberry adds a different twist”) to Orange Citrus with pineapple-orange crème filling (“You definitely need to have a filling for this cake or it’s not going to work. It’s like peanut butter and jelly!”), Rosie is game to try almost anything and will always give her honest opinion.

She’ll also insist the couple taste an unusual flavor combination before ordering it – which helps to avoid, for instance, the lemon cake with chocolate frosting one couple envisioned. “Those don’t belong together!” Rosie laughs. On the other hand, she also was doubtful of a request for spice cake with peanut-butter frosting. “It was actually good!” she confesses.

Ultimately, Rosie believes how the cake tastes will be remembered long after the bouquet is tossed. “That’s really the lasting impression somebody’s going to have of their wedding,” she says.

Of course, how the cake *looks* also leaves a lasting impression. This is where the artist in Rosie really shines, as she’ll often pencil-sketch a number of designs for the brides-to-be. “This gives them something visual,” Rosie states, describing herself as a visual person. “It also allows them to get feedback from close friends and family that may not be at the consult. Giving them the opportunity to process their options over several days makes the decision a lot less stressful. And, every bride wants to cut stress as much as possible.”

She also encourages clients to bring photographs or other images of their dream cake. In fact, one of Rosie’s more unusual cakes was inspired by a photo of a green-apple wedding cake – not green-apple flavored, but round tiers stacked



Above: The Rohrer family (clockwise from top left) includes Kristyn, Tyler, Dwight, Rosie and Ryan. Photo by Regina Martin, Radiant Images.



Left: Rosie’s Creative Cakes is housed in the farmhouse that has been in Dwight’s family for six generations.

upon Granny Smiths and accented with green ribbons. “This was somewhat of a challenge,” Rosie admits. “We actually used real apples.” Rosie cored the fruit in order to slide the pillars through and used faux apples as the cake topper – which looked like the real deal, even up close.

As an artist, Rosie enjoys the hands-on process of bringing her visions to life – which is one reason why, in the age of Food Network-inspired fondant creations, she sticks mainly to tried-and-true butter cream. “I do fondant cakes on occasion, but they’re not my passion,” she says, pointing out that the sugar dough’s texture doesn’t lend itself to her signature moist, airy cakes. “For fondant, you need to have a dense, heavier cake or it’s not going to plate nicely.” (Fondant for an entire cake also needs to be rolled very thinly, which requires special equipment that Rosie says just isn’t practical for her small business.)

She does, however, frequently use it for accents. “There’s so much you can do with fondant,” she says. “I tend to mix the mediums a lot.



A chocolate-iced wedding cake is a fun option, and can be just as beautiful and creative as a traditional cake.

One of the more unusual wedding cakes Rosie has created is this Granny Smith-themed confection.

It doesn’t have to be one or the other.” Thus, her wedding-cake gallery includes leaves, lace, ribbons and other details molded from plain and chocolate fondant.

But, there are many more elements – scrollwork, patterns, flowers, stripes – rendered seamlessly in butter cream. “The one thing I would say I find frustrating as a cake designer is the fact that there is so much stuff out there that looks cool and great, but it takes no artistic ability,” Rosie comments on “pre-made” designs such as chocolate transfer sheets, which she describes as, essentially, “slap out, put it on” details. Butter cream, on the other hand, grants her the freedom to add personal twists and touches. “It allows me to do something artistic without feeling it’s just another cookie-cutter cake,” she says.

Rosie also stretches her artistic muscles by arranging flowers on the cake herself. “I use fresh flowers a lot on wedding cakes because, let’s face it, we’re economical people in Lancaster County,” she comments. “Fresh flowers are a very practical way to decorate the cake.” In fact, Rosie admits that if she hadn’t gone into cake designing, she would have become a florist.

As an artist, Rosie also believes that, although she has a part-time assistant, the actual decorating is her *raison d’être*. “I was never really comfortable giving up the decorating end to somebody else,” she relates.

When she first started the business, she truly was a one-woman band – but, after Kristyn was born, she realized she needed help. “I was to the point where I said, ‘I am struggling to keep my

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house, to even get the laundry done,” she recalls.

So, Rosie hired a girl named Katie to help with the housework so that she could concentrate on cakes. But, Katie soon proved herself adept in the kitchen, as well, and eventually split her day between domestic duties and helping Rosie with cakes.

Rosie soon realized that having part-time help was, in fact, a boon to her creativity, as it allowed her to concentrate on what she loved most – decorating. Her current part-time employee – also named Katie – works at least 20 hours a week and performs nearly all of the baking and prep work. “That is a *huge* help,” she says. “Every now and then, you get somebody you know is a gem and you know when they leave, it’s going to be a void that can’t be filled.”

Although Rosie started out as a small-occasion cake decorator, she says that, for the past two years, wedding cakes have made up a greater portion of her sales – a fact for which she directly credits her website (www.rosiescreativecakes.com), which she established two years ago.

She’s also streamlined her menu,

eliminating cake sizes that serve less than 20 people (her smallest cake is now a 9x13-inch sheet).

However, that doesn’t mean she’s given up on cakes for birthdays, bridal showers and bar mitzvahs. “What really got my business rolling was the small party cakes,” Rosie says.

But, in shifting into larger orders, she explains that customers will benefit since she will be able to devote even more time and personal attention to their cakes – another hallmark of Rosie’s Creative Cakes.

Just how much personal attention? Well, there was the wedding that took place during a nasty March snowstorm. Rosie called the bride the night before to confirm her plans – and, sure enough, the bride was adamant that since she already paid for everything, she was going to get married.

So, Rosie decorated the cake that evening, but when she awoke early the next morning, she looked out her window and saw nothing but white. Still, she was determined to deliver the bride’s paid-for cake to the reception hall – which she wasn’t even sure was open yet. “I had a little Honda Civic and I put everything in the trunk of

my car!” Rosie says. “I decided, ‘You know what? I have to leave now. Whether they let me in or not – I will sit in their parking lot all day if I have to! This girl’s getting married, I have an obligation and if I wait, I’m not getting out.’”

Rosie made it to the reception hall, which was open, and set up the cake with hours to spare – and the wedding went on as scheduled. However, since guests had a hard enough time making it to the wedding, the couple decided to postpone the reception until the following week.

And, the cake? The couple placed it in their garage.

Rosie recalls how the newlyweds – and their guests – worried how the cake would hold up. “I said to them, ‘You putting it in your garage was like sticking it in the freezer. It didn’t do anything to hurt your cake,’” she remarks. “And, everyone commented on how wonderful the cake was!” ❖

Rosie’s Creative Cakes is located at 2385 Junction Road, Manheim. For an appointment or more information, call 898-9156 or visit www.rosiescreativecakes.com.