

Sunday, February 6, 2011

### [Are You The Next Cake Boss?](#)

One of my favorite foods in the world is cake. And one of my guiltiest pleasures is watching cake shows on TV. (Don't judge.) Without all the cake competitions sponsored by Food Network and the crazy antics of Duff and the Ace of Cakes staff, I'm not sure how I would've survived grad school.



After getting super into cake shows and finding out that one of my friends actually made her friend's entire wedding cake (fondant and all!), I decided that it was high time I explored my creative cake decorating side as well. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to find an affordable or convenient class in LA or SD before I left either city, so I made sure to start looking as soon as I landed in Philly.

With some probing, I found out that Fante's Kitchen Wares Shop in the Italian Market (one of my all-time favorite cookware stores) actually offers classes spanning several weekends. In addition to basic and intermediate cake decorating, they also offer classes on rolled fondant and gum paste, gingerbread, and chocolate.

Although I had wanted to sign up in the fall, I found out that the basic classes were booked up way in advance, and that I'd have to wait until the next set of classes were scheduled and posted. As I was dead set on getting in, I pounced as soon as the spring classes showed up online. Take away message: SIGN UP EARLY.

The basic cake decorating class consisted of three back-to-back Saturday mornings -- 9:30AM to 12:30PM. While the trek from Center City to the Italian Market doesn't usually require much effort, doing so: 1) in the snow, 2) with several containers of buttercream and royal icing, and 3) with a frosted cake in an unwieldy cake carrier, was mildly treacherous. Thankfully, the class, the instructor, and my fellow cake decorators made the trek well worth it.

All of the cake decorating classes at Fante's are taught by Deborah Dicintio Lang -- "a professional baker, caterer, Master Decorator, and winner of many awards," according to the store's website. Not only was Debbie really helpful and supportive in class, she made herself readily available for consultation by giving us her cell phone number the very first Saturday morning. Have we ever heard of a professor doing that? Never.

We spent the first session going over the syllabus and the supplies list, and then wandering up and down the mesmerizing aisles of cookware. While I expected to spend \$70-\$100 (as suggested for the class), I ended up dropping a whopping \$170 that morning! Was all of that on cake decorating supplies? Why of course not! Because one of the benefits of being a student was that I got a 10% discount on any items purchased during the duration of my class. Let's just say I somehow thought of a lot of items I just had to have.



While we were shopping, Debbie prepared buttercream for us to work with. And as soon as we completed our purchases, we dove right into working with our pastry bags and various icing tips. First, she demonstrated each technique, making every movement seem easy. Then we were all expected to follow suit, with Debbie guiding us past our insecurities. In a matter of minutes, pretty designs and objects magically appeared before our eyes.



For each of the two remaining sessions, we were expected to prepare buttercream icings of varying consistencies (i.e., stiff, medium, thin), royal icing, as well as frosted cakes to be decorated in class. Needless to say, preparing for class was always a bit of a hectic, last-minute process for me (damn you, procrastination!), though it made sense for us to use our own products on our own cakes. Plus, at the end of the day, we had something that was truly prepared by us, to bring home (or to the office, as the case may be).

Over the course of three Saturday mornings, we learned various techniques -- several of which we applied directly to the cakes we brought to class or we could use on future cake projects. For example, we applied the shell technique immediately, decorating the top and bottom edges of our cakes. We also worked on various flowers, leaves, and ribbons, which all blossomed in different ways on different cakes.

Debbie also showed us different techniques for different kinds of flowers -- some that could be piped directly onto a cake, others that needed to be piped onto a flower nail before being (gently) transferred over. She was certainly a dedicated instructor, zipping through various techniques, yet making sure that we were mastering the techniques ourselves. She was attentive, kind, and supportive throughout the entire class.



The last session was probably the most fun, as we all made clown cakes. To create our clowns, we learned a technique called "striping," which involved brushing various colors into the lining of a pastry bag, and allowing buttercream to pick up the various colors as it was squeezed through the bag. As a result, we created the bodies of the clowns into which we stuck character picks. While the process was a bit more laborious, it certainly produced a cake worth showing off.



Considering that we all left class with multiple masterpieces, my only qualm was that the classroom was a bit cramped, even for our small group of nine. While I don't believe windows were necessary, the fact that we didn't have much space to spread out all of our equipment made the work a lot more challenging.

All in all, I'd definitely say the class was well worth the \$50 course fee. I might even say that the class was worth the additional \$100 I spent on cake decorating supplies. Unfortunately, I can't help being a compulsive cookware shopper, so I'm really not sure the class was worth the yet

another \$100 I spent on random kitchen supplies -- eek! If you can control yourself, however, I'd definitely give this class two thumbs up!

Check it out: <http://www.fantes.com/courses.html>!