

from "Fashionable Desserts" in *The Curious Cook at Home*:

One of the puzzling truths of life is fashion. Not just in hemlines, but in food. Ten years ago, cakes were in; pies were out. During a short and unfortunate stint in a small mountain town as a young cook, the highlight of my work was watching a gifted baker make pie several times a week. There was art and grace in her movements as she rolled, cut and shaped. It reinforced for me just how precious is the gift of the baker's hands, and I never realized that I was watching a food falling into disuse.

In retrospect, I see the passing of an era, as cakes and pies left the domain of the home cook and became the property of restaurants. I grew up in a family that had dessert every evening, frequently home-baked cake. As a mom, especially now that I share my life with a diabetic, I rarely make dessert. But cake is still what I think of when it's a celebration, particularly of anniversaries or birthdays. In fact, in my restaurant days, cake was the special-occasion sweet of choice; a chocolate angel-food cake I called "The Queen" was my youngest son's favourite birthday cake, and a five-layer chocolate extravaganza the choice of my eldest. It is hard to get good pastry in many restaurants, and cake is no longer a simple sweet, but a part of multi-component dessert platters. Happily, I am witnessing the re-emergence of homemade tarts and pies in homemade crusts. Long live the baker-queen! Long live the pastry of careful, graceful hands!

Cookies are comforting, familiar symbols of childhood that continue to please many. North American cookies are soft, sweet, large and often filled with fruit, nuts and chocolate.

But a *tuile*, the fairy tutu princess of French cookiedom, is NOT soft. It is not mild, and it is not easy. *Tuiles* are aristocratic almond cookies, a liquid batter that rests imperiously overnight in the refrigerator, waiting for its sugar to melt. Batter, not dough. Emerging hot from the oven, the cookie is peeled off the parchment and, lightning-quick, patted around an inverted cup or rolling pin to cool.

Cool, it becomes a vessel for cream, berries, and mousse. But it is still a cookie. Crispy cookies, a continent away in style, still manage to convey comfort, *en francais, bien sur*.