

Good Girl Dinette's Diep Tran brings us all some figgy pudding



The figgy pudding at Good Girl Dinette. (Cathy Chaplin)

By **Cathy Chaplin**

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It's the season for peppermint-, pumpkin- and gingerbread-centric sweets, but not for Good Girl Dinette's Diep Tran, who marches to the beat of a different drummer boy. At her Highland Park restaurant, it's all about figgy pudding, the oft-overlooked and under-appreciated Dickensian delight.

"People love fresh figs, but dried figs get relegated to prunes -- they're unsexy," Tran said. "I like the wallflowers of desserts -- a slow burn. Pumpkin spice this is not."

"Three Christmases ago, my nephew was learning Christmas carols and asked me, 'What's figgy pudding?'" Tran said. "I tried to explain medieval cookery and Moorish ingredients, and realized that he didn't comprehend any of it. So we decided to make it from scratch."

In fashioning her thoroughly seasonal and local figgy pudding, Tran referred to a hodgepodge of antiquated and modern sources. Literary inspirations included Peter Carey's "Oscar and Lucinda," Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women" and, of course, Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol."

"Peter Carey made [figgy pudding] sound so delicious!" she said.

Tran also consulted Nigella Lawson's and David Lebovitz's arsenal of British desserts, and researched the tradition of holiday fruit cakes.

"A pudding," she said, "is a boiled cake, as necessitated during a time before ovens."

The pudding recipe served at the Dinette has changed over the years, and sometimes varies from batch to batch.

Tran said that when she introduced figgy pudding to her menu three years ago, she incorporated an abundance of California walnuts along with dried mission figs. Over time, she said, she's tweaked the ratio of fruit to booze, fiddled with garnishes, eliminated nuts and experimented with spices. Now in its third year, she said she's got the recipe down. Mostly.

Served warm, the pudding base is packed with the gentle sweetness of dried figs. Sometimes, if the mood strikes, she adds ginger too.

"I change it up every time I make it," Tran said.

A sticky pool of treacle adds a dark, almost bitter dimension, while candied Buddha's hand citrus bring a bright zing. The final touch, a pretty mint leaf garnish, takes the place of traditional (poisonous) holly.

"It tastes like an old recipe, kind of stodgy and frumpy," Tran said. "I like that it's Christmasy but doesn't have things that are associated with the holidays, like nutmeg and peppermint."

Now bring us some figgy pudding!

Figgy pudding is available at Good Girl Dinette now through the New Year.

Good Girl Dinette, 110 N. Avenue 56, Highland Park, (323) 257-8980, goodgirldinette.com.

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