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## The time of year to swoon over mooncakes



By Anh Do · Contact Reporter



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glancing at the mango panna cotta cups or the strawberry tiramisu. "I heard today is mooncake day and that's all I want," Eric Fenchel said, scanning the bountiful case of treats for the Mid-Autumn Festival.

he man in the Levi's, loafers and fedora strolled into the bakery, not even

Inside 85° C Bakery, where lines coil out the door and snake past the shops in a bustling

The real estate agent was looking for a gift for a client from Hong Kong.

The time of year to swoon over mooncakes

multicultural district in Irvine, customers press up against the display cases as workers fill trays with the traditional cakes, along with mocha bread and buns oozing squid ink. From the San Gabriel Valley to Little Saigon, bakeries and vendors go into warp speed at

autumn festival time, a traditional harvest celebration when families gather to give thanks. The mooncakes, a symbol of the full moon — often with an orb-like egg yolk baked into its crunchy dough, are exchanged happily among family, friends and business associates. The cakes arrive in colorful tins and cartons, some of the pastries as big as



who we are."

hockey pucks and filled with pineapple, chicken, almonds and a full spectrum of beans. Fenchel was among the few in the shop who knew little about the colorful holiday

(and the equally colorful pastry that signaled its arrival) celebrated in Chinese and Vietnamese communities such as Irvine. But the 33-year Irvine resident quickly got into the spirit. "I think we should all share each other's culture," he adds. "That's how we get an understanding of what makes each of us

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## makes each of us who we are. - Eric Fenchel, 33-year Irvine resident

She stopped by the crowded bakery — named for the ideal temperature for drinking coffee —for some crispy tuna croissants and a few mooncakes for friends and her child's teacher.

Roya Salehpour, who was born in Iran, was also intrigued by the mooncakes.

Her daughter is a high school sophomore with a fascination for learning Mandarin. "It's delicate. It's delicious," Salehpour said. "You share it among those you care about and to me, the more our kids know about how people live around the world, the better it is for

us in honoring the beauty of life." Mooncake season is essential to the bottom line in any Chinese or Vietnamese bakery in Southern California.

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stuffing such as walnut dates.

hold a steady popularity with young and old.

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Mooncake season is essential to the bottom line in any Chinese or Vietnamese bakery in

based chain. "It's a big operation. We start planning nine months ahead to make sure we have enough supply to keep everyone happy. We have companies pre-ordering 200 boxes for presents,

and besides, it's an endearing way for us to remember one another."

priced at \$35 remained on the shelves by Monday afternoon. Manager Pady Khoe grabbed it and popped open the lid, noting its Taiwanese-style flavors such as matcha red bean and golden date yolk beneath a round pastry fitting into the palm of one's hand. The Cantonese-style box, priced at \$29, brims with square pastry with more traditional

At the Irvine bakery in the Diamond Jamboree center, only one Taiwanese-style gift box

"This is for me - just me, and oh yeah, my husband," said Tina Zhou of Laguna Niguel. "It will be just right and so, so creamy."

"I adore them and so does my grandfather," says Cathy Chaplin, author of the "Food Lovers' Guide to Los Angeles" and creator of the Gastronomy Blog.

Unlike fruitcakes, whose popularity failed to cross generational lines, mooncakes seem to

remembers the nostalgic after-dinner rituals "when Grandpa had received these as gifts and he would slice them and offer them with tea around the table."

Chaplin grew up with her grandparents in a Vietnamese household in San Diego and

Her favorites are from at the Phoenix Bakery in Chinatown, where they are sold at a

"I look forward to buying lots and lots of them at 50% off," she says. "There's no taste like it."

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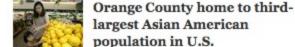
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