

By Victoria Spencer

Desserts

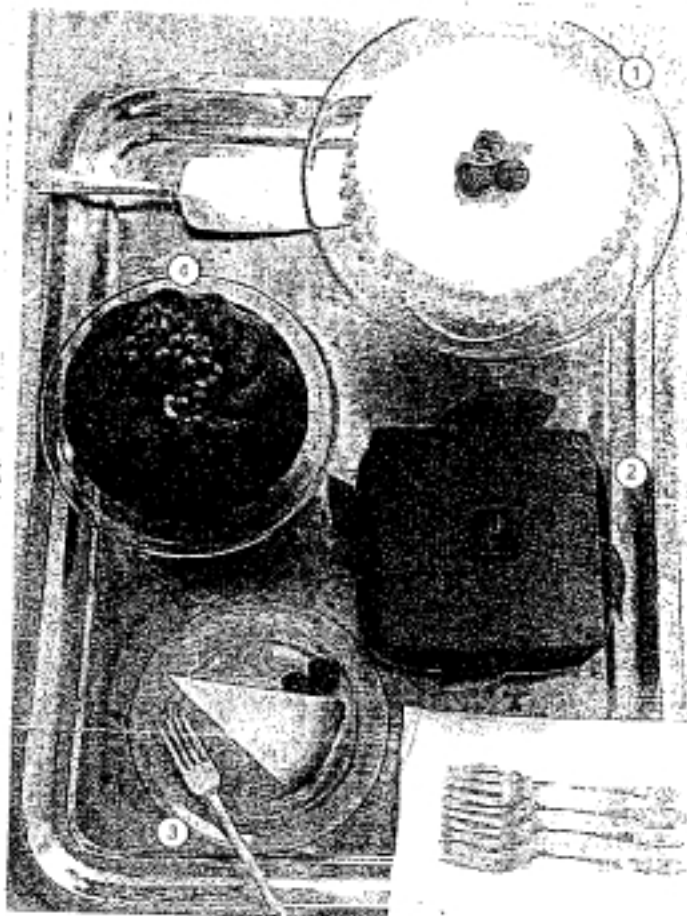
Delivered

LOOKING FOR A SLICE OF HEAVEN? A PANEL OF TOP PASTRY CHEFS PICK AND CHOOSE THE BEST DESSERTS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BY MAIL

SERVING A DELICIOUS DESSERT DOESN'T NECESSARILY REQUIRE you to turn on the oven, let alone unearth your mixer or baking tins. Instead, save lots of time and hassle by ordering one that arrives at your door ready to be lifted from its box and plated for the table. You'll serve your guests a good-looking, great-tasting dessert—and all you'll have had to do is pick up the phone.

To identify the best desserts available by catalogue and on the Web, *In Style Entertaining* convened a panel of four top pastry chefs, all from N.Y.C. restaurants: Claudia Fleming of Gramercy Tavern, Eric Hubert of Jean-Georges, François Payard of Payard Pâtisserie & Bistro, and Sarabeth Levine of Sarabeth's Bakery (the latter two have their own highly regarded mail-order businesses, at payard.com and sarabeth.com). They blind-tested 40 desserts, judging for taste, presentation, quality and packaging. Here are their top choices. Your only decision? Which one to try at your next party.

CAKES When it comes to mail-ordering cakes, flavor is only one factor. The panel knew that a beautiful dessert with delicate icing and fancy decorations may be unable to withstand the bumpy ordeal of shipping. As our tasters' choices prove, a cake that's well made, unfussy and, of course, delicious is the way to go.



1. David Glass
Ultimate Luscious Italian Almond Cake
Price 8" cake, \$28 plus \$12 for overnight shipping; 800-775-6413 or davidglass.com Why it's good The panel admired this cake's rich and buttery taste, appearance and ease of cutting. It up with crème fraîche "ies," recommended Serves 10-12 people

2. Fran's Chocolates
Triple Chocolate Torte
Price 6" cake, \$20 plus \$8 for 2-day shipping; 800-422-3726 or franchocolates.com Why it's good A mix of dark, milk and gianduja chocolates, this torte tasted as good as it looked. Payard praised its consistency. Hubert said, "Serve it cold to best enjoy the contrasting textures." Serves 6-8 people

3. 585 Classic
Cheesecake
Price 7" cake, \$28 (includes shipping); 800-822-5369 Why it's good Served at N.Y.C.'s top steak houses, this cheesecake won the highest marks in the cake category. Exceptionally well packed, "this is New York cheesecake, period," said Levine. Serves 6-10 people

4. Dancing Deer Baking Co. Deep Dark Gingerbread Cake
Price 6" cake, \$12.50 plus \$10-\$12.50 for 2-day shipping; 888-699-3337 or dancingdeer.com Why it's good Not too sweet, the gingerbread is slightly sticky with lots of clove. "It has beautiful texture, and slices and serves perfectly," said Levine. Serves 6-12 people

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