

The French Connection

Miniature Food

Text and photography by Sophia Twaddell

I've always loved food: reading about it, cooking it, eating it. As I am a passionate Francophile, it's no surprise that I started collecting French food—in miniature. In addition to pieces I have displayed in various room-boxes and houses, I have filled too many Lucite boxes to count, with foods made by various artisans.

Like many collectors, I really didn't go about assembling my collection in an intentional way. I just bought what I liked when I saw it, with no idea where I would display it. But soon a pattern emerged: I was buying enough sweets to fill a French bakery. I bought classic pastries, especially macaroons, those melt-in-your-mouth delights in every color of the rainbow, glistening fruit tarts, and eclairs in every flavor and color. Since one of my favorite things to do is to have tea at Laduree in Paris, I eventually decided to make a miniature tribute: a small roombox in which to display my burgeoning collection. Before I knew it I had enough sweets to fill several patisseries!

One thing I realized early on is that size matters when it comes to miniature food. Accurate scale is very difficult to achieve. A one-inch cake in miniature is the equivalent of a 12-inch cake in full scale, but most real cakes are 8 or 9 inches. The usual size for a macaroon is 1½ inches, which means .125 inch in miniature. For me, no matter how pretty a piece is, if the scale is too big, it doesn't make its way into my collection. Another important feature is that the piece not look chalky. I like my food to look



The author's patisserie, made in a Whitledge-Burgess class, is filled with cakes, candies and pastries from French artisans.

good enough to eat, an effect achieved by a combination of the clay mixtures, glazes and other finishing techniques.

Among the first French artisans I discovered—on eBay when they were just starting out—are

the very talented Emma Martinot and Neil Dyde, who live just outside Paris and trade as Paris Miniatures. Frenchwoman Emma has been making miniatures of one sort or another since she was a child, and her fiancé, Neil, an

Artisans of France



Englishman who made models as a boy, is also a skilled photographer. They have been making miniatures together since 2004. Also known as Emmaflam and Miniman, this duo shares a love of French food and “strives to

make realistic versions in miniature, from pastries and cakes to classic French dishes.” They have created many wonderful pieces for me over the years.

One of the first items I commissioned, and still one of my

very favorites, is the macaroon tower that sits in the window of my large patisserie. These towers, know as *pièces montées*, are often seen at French weddings and other special occasions, and populate the windows of patis-



Luce's *Tarte Tatin* preparation tableau: pastry dough, whole and sliced apples and peels, a chunk of butter, and a partially-filled tart pan. The color of her caramel is perfect!

series in the spring and summer months.

"We only make enough to sell our work directly to collectors," says Emma, "either at Paris Creation and SIMP, the two major French miniatures shows, or through our Etsy shop." They hope to exhibit in the United States in the future. Meanwhile, they encourage U.S. collectors to contact them by email.

Over the years I've also had the good fortune to discover, primarily by combing the Internet, "new" French artisans, including Nathalie Gireaud (Provence Miniatures), Stèphanie Kilgast (Petit Plat), and Luce Fediere (My French Cuisine).

Nathalie Gireaud lives in a small town in the south of France. She specializes in 1:12 scale foods, and is the author of a book, *Miniatures en Pate FIMO*. Although the text is in French, there are over 100 photos that are very easy to follow. Nathalie taught herself by reading articles and books, but "mostly trying materials and ideas until I was satisfied with the result." She works largely from life, mixing colors and pastels with translucent FIMO to achieve life-like colors. She also makes her own fruit canes so that the scale of her fruit slices is scrupulously accurate. Nathalie crafts each item individually, completely by hand, without using molds. This summer, for the first time, Nathalie will be teaching food classes in the New York area.

Stèphanie Kilgast of Petit Plat



Close-up of Nathalie's large chocolate display.



Luce Fediere's *pastel chouquettes* (puff pastry sprinkled with sugar) spill from a paper bag. She creates texture with a cocktail stick, aluminum foil, and other household items to achieve the looks she wants.

is another young food artisan who lives near Paris. She has a master's degree in architecture, but like many miniature artisans, she is largely self-taught. As Stephanie tells it, "I stumbled across miniatures in 2007, when I was looking for a new hobby. I remembered making Barbie food out of sticky clay when I was a girl. Before I knew it, miniatures had become my passion and I was determined to make them my vocation as well."

Stephanie makes a range of baked goods from FIMO in addition to preparation boards and main dishes. I am a particular fan of her jewel-like fruit tarts, with their tiny slices of glimmering fruits, and her perfectly browned *petits pains aux chocolats* on trays, piping hot from the oven. In addition to food for the miniature setting, she makes jewelry based on her designs, including rings, earrings, and pendants featuring cakes, candies, ice cream, tarts, fruit, waffles, and even sushi! Stephanie sells her work at shows in Europe, and through Etsy, Custom Doll House Miniatures (CDHM), and her own website. She welcomes custom orders.

There are many up-and-coming miniature food artisans selling on Etsy. One artisan I discovered quite by chance is Luce Fediere—My French Cuisine. Luce lives in



Traditional French candies. Top shelf: Paris souvenir chocolates by Paris Miniatures, truffles by Stephanie Kilgast; second row: pastel meringues and berlingots by Luce Fediere. Shown larger than actual size.



Note the highly realistic texture of the cake.

a small town in the Languedoc-Roussillon region in the south of France, near Nimes. She has only been making miniature food since 2008, but her range of sweets is unique and each one is perfectly rendered. Her work combines both highly accurate

French artisans represented here: top row, L to R: fanciful Eiffel Tower cake, yellow cake with strawberries, strawberry St. Honore, all by Paris Miniatures.

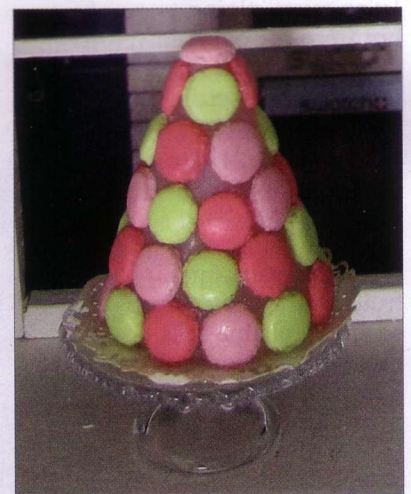
Second row: jewel-like mixed fruit tart, Stephanie Kilgast; square tart and Bavarois by Nathalie Gireaud. These artisans prefer to make their own fruit canes.

Bottom row: chocolate "Autumn Leaves" cake by Paris Miniatures, dome cake by Nathalie Gireaud. The smooth, shiny surface gleams as though it's just been dipped in liquid chocolate—an effect she achieves with liquid clay applied with a brush and smoothed with a fingertip. Chocolate *Entremet* by Paris Miniatures.

scale and life-like colors and textures in such treats as *Tarte Tatin* (up-side-down caramelized apple tart), *chouquettes* (bite-size puff pastries covered with sugar sold in a paper bag), and the tiny triangular *berlingots* candies that are beloved by French children. In



Highly detailed three-level castle cake by Nathalie Gireaud.



Macaroon tower by Paris Miniatures in the front window of Sophia's patisserie, which she locates "overlooking the Ritz Paris."

addition to pastries, Luce makes traditional bistro foods. She welcomes commissions and can be reached through her Etsy shop. ■

Sophia Twaddell is a miniaturist and an Emmy-award-winning producer for a documentary film.



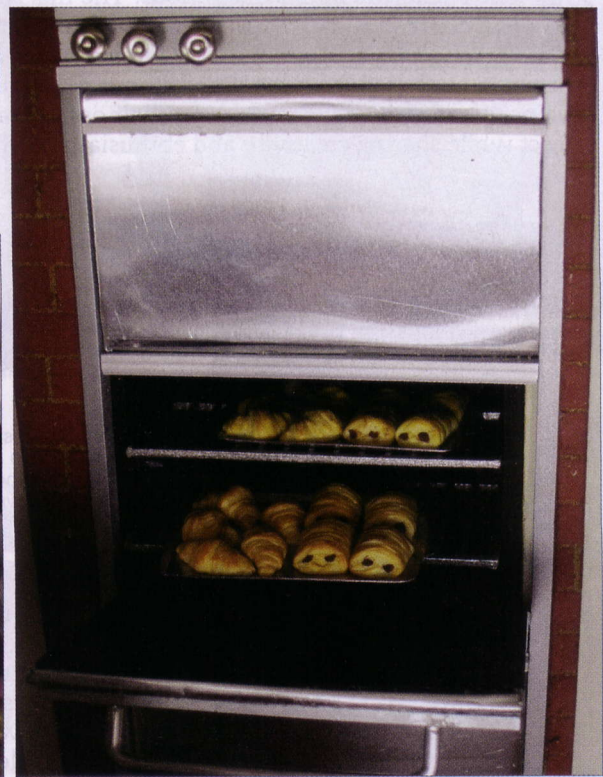
On this tray of individual pastries, back row, L to R: Paris Brest, strawberry St. Honore, swan; front row, L to R : pink dome cake, tart Tropizienne, chocolate dome cake, religieuse, all by Paris Miniatures. Macarons and bonbons in the background are also by Paris Miniatures.



Top row: Paris-Brest and Tarte Tropizienne; bottom: St. Honore, Tarte Tatin, and apricot tart, all by Luce Fediere.



Laduree tray, champagne bottle, violet cupcake and tier of sweets, all by Paris Miniatures.



Stephanie Kilgast's amazingly life-like croissants and petits pains aux chocolat are coming out of the oven of Sophia's patisserie.

CONTACT INFORMATION

My French Cuisine, Luce Fediere, luce.fediere@free.fr
 Paris Miniatures, Emma Martinot & Neil Dyde, emmaflamminiman@gmail.com
 Petit Plat Miniature Food, Stephanie Kilgast, stephaniekilgast@yahoo.fr
 Provence Miniatures, Nathalie Gireaud, nathalie@gireaud.com