

# MARIN

Let Us  
Eat Cake!



Restaurant  
Profiles

NOVEMBER 2023



*Lydia Balslev*

**HOLIDAY WREATH:** Collage of vegetables, leaves, and fresh herbs.  
**PUMPKIN SPICE LATTE:** Butternut squash soup topped with spiced cream.

**DOUBLE DUTY**  
"Arranging is was half the fun," says award-winning cookbook author Lydia Balslev. From recipe development to styling to cooking to catering, Balslev has worn many hats in the food industry since attending cooking school in Paris in her 20s, but the intricately designed cradles' wreath was her first attempt at trompe l'oeil. "I love the final piece," she says, "and that they both make sense for the occasion." Balslev, who spent 17 years traveling and growing her business in Europe, has been living in San Diego with her family for the past twelve years. Thanksgiving is her favorite holiday. [lydiabalslev.com](http://lydiabalslev.com)





## Michelle Hester Oh Cake!

**TURKEY CAKE:** This no-egg (30 lb.) carved Tishian vanilla bean cake layers sandwiched between layers of vanilla buttercream. Sculpted turkey carved in a thin layer of caramel (turkey skin) hand-painted fondant.

**PUMPKIN PIE CAKE:** Pumpkin moussé cake, complex with sculpted and painted fondant pie crust and decorative, seasonal toppers.



## THAT'S A CAKE!!!

"I like a challenge," says Loma Valley-based communications executive Michelle Hester, who creates astonishingly "topper realistic" cakes for her company, Oh Cake! "Sometimes I lay in bed at night thinking about it." Over the years, Hester has made hundreds of cakes in the likeness of everything from romance novels to a Chanel shopping bag. Once she created a "stack of magazines" cake for a magazine launch, and someone tried to grab one. Hester, who comes from a big family of bakers, says she's always loved making beautifully designed desserts. "Cake is the ultimate part of the meal," she says. She started Oh Cake! in 2010 as a hobby, but says it has "morphed into a lucrative side-hustle." Aside from baking for friends and family, she now makes up to four custom cakes a month. [instagram.com/ohcake](https://www.instagram.com/ohcake)

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## Basma Alyahya Basma's Wellness

**PUMPKIN-SHAPED SOURDOUGH LOAVES:** One made with pumpkin puree and the other with tannin.

**HOLIDAY MOCKTAIL:** Pomegranate juice and homemade elderberry syrup garnished with fresh mint.

### ACCESSIBLE HEALTH

Navigating a hectic life while still managing to prepare healthy food is easier than you think, according to Mill Valley-based health coach Basma Alyahya. "There are so many tips and tricks," she says. "If I can do it, anyone can." Alyahya's company, Basma's Wellness, offers one-on-one health coaching and healthy-cooking classes for both adults and kids. Her latest offering, a hands-on sourdough workshop, covers the art and science of sourdough bread making. "It will transform the way you think about bread," she says. "I was making sourdough way before Covid," she adds. "It's full of health benefits!" [basmaswellness.com](https://www.basmaswellness.com)



## Kate Plushkin Sugar Cookie Kate

**COOKIE NAPKINS:** Napkins made out of Kate's signature lemon-vanilla sugar cookies, iced and hand-painted to look like fabric napkins.

### DREAMY DOUGH

"Cookies are my creative outlet," says her Redwood-based Plushkin. "I have a ridiculous amount of fun creating practically anything from a cookie." Some of her favorite projects — what she calls "Cookie Interiors" — include the neighbor's favorite things, from foods to traditions to their beloved family pet. "I recently recreated a ceramic Picasso piece from 1940s by using a large cookie as the plate and royal icing marionette for the fish, sun, and fish, hand painting them to mimic Picasso's glass," she says. Plushkin has also done hundreds of cookie favors for charities like Guide Dogs for the Blind and educational work for Williams-Sonoma and Pottery Barn among others. [instagram.com/sugarcookiekate](https://www.instagram.com/sugarcookiekate)



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## Debbie Faubel: Mill Valley Boards

**CHARCUTERIE TURKEY:** Pear (as turkey's body) in a "pumpkin patch" of fresh gourds and displaying "barkies" of meats, cheeses, fruits and edible flowers. **CHARCUTERIE BOUQUET:** Edible bouquet, all the ingredients are shaped to mimic particular flowers.

### EDIBLE ART

"My work makes people smile," says food artist and founder of Mill Valley Boards, Debbie Faubel. "It's a little sophisticated, a little whimsical, and a lot of beauty." Indeed, Faubel's boards look like works of art: gorgeous and delicious blends of charcuterie, artisan cheeses, fruits, vegetables, herbs and edible wild flowers, full of details, textures and layers. From intimate occasions to 15-foot "greeting tables," each board is unique, and intended to spark conversation and forge connections. "It started as a fun interesting idea and organically flourished during Covid," Faubel says. "Now it's a full-time business." [millvalleyboards.com](http://millvalleyboards.com)

## Stacey Dillon: 38north Design Co.

**STYLING AND DESIGN:** Gathered additional elements from Baked Blooms and Sugared Delights along with props and linens.

### PLANNING PERFECTION

"I've been throwing parties for as long as I can remember," says award-winning event planner Stacey Dillon. "Even as a child I loved to help my family entertain." After many years in high-tech project management, Dillon decided to shift her skills to managing weddings and events nearly two decades ago. In 2019, she decided to focus solely on Marin County. "This allowed me to have a work-life balance of staying close to home, as well helping folks celebrate amongst the beauty and magic Marin has to offer — whether they live here or are just visiting for their festivities," she says. It's also the origin of the company's name, the latitude coordinate 38° for Marin. [38northdesignco.com](http://38northdesignco.com)

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