



Flour Rangers

Think pastry is a woman's domain? Don't tell that to these guys! | *By Joshua Lurie* | *Photography by Melissa Valladares* |

Most Angelenos are familiar with Providence's Adrian Vasquez, who's won *Angeleno's* Pastry Chef of the Year award twice in its eight-year existence. But those other years? All won by women, who have traditionally dominated L.A.'s pastry scene. Could a new dawn be rising? If so, keep an eye on these five dudes.

Cube (615 N. La Brea Ave., Los Angeles, 323.939.1148, cubemarketplace.com) dessert maestro **Jun Tan**, 32, sprouted his pastry roots in Manila, where his mother taught him to bake at age nine. He followed a sugar rush (and family) to L.A. and opened a bakeshop called La Spiga before settling at Cube. He originally applied for sous chef but was quickly pressed into last-course action when the restaurant needed a good closer. Tan keeps his market-driven menu simple and rustic. Think gooey grape pie or steaming strawberry cobbler. But once a week for "Dessert Bar Mondays," he lets loose with the likes of vanilla buttermilk pancakes layered with maple mousse, fresh berries and, oh yeah, bacon.

Ramon Perez, 29, took a familial path to the pastry table, too, making his first tarte tatin at his parents' Nevada City brasserie. He immediately became intoxicated. "I started going crazy," says Perez, "reading books and testing recipes until 3 or 4 in the morning." Perez got his break in pastry at David Myers' **Sona** (since closed) and now oversees desserts at **Comme Ça** and **Pizzeria Ortica** (8479 Melrose Ave., West Hollywood, 323.782.1104, commecarestaurant.com; 650 Anton Blvd., Costa Mesa, 714.445.4900, pizzeriaortica.com). He recently filled a glass with cocoa nib crème, carob mousse, milk chocolate feuilletine, Sacher sponge and raspberry gelée. The dish might sound complicated, but as Perez said, "I kept it as natural to the chocolate as possible, as simple as possible."

Craft's (10100 Constellation Blvd., Century City, 310.279.4180, craftrestaurant.com) **Shannon Swindle**, 42, caught the pastry bug

at the market-driven 612 West in Austin before Tom Colicchio tapped him for dessert duties at Craft Dallas, later transferring him to L.A. For him, our abundant local produce dictates a menu of fresh figs simply roasted or a perfect plum swirled into sorbet. Peak-season blackberries become pie topped with wild fennel ice cream.

Like Tan and Perez, Burbank native **Josh Graves**, 24, credits his mom for his sweet tooth. Her cookies and pies were always in the back of his mind while training at Le Cordon Bleu. He briefly baked Mexican pastries at Casa, impressing chef Kris Morningstar enough that he would later lure Graves to Hollywood as his dessert chef at **The Mercantile** and the adjacent **District** (6600 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood, 323.962.8202/8200, themergantilela.com; districtonsunset.com). Contrary to Swindle, though, he doesn't obey the market. He's inspired by emotion and childhood flavors. "I used to eat Nutella banana sandwiches every day growing up," says Graves. Thus he created the irresistible Nutella banana ice cream for The Mercantile. At District, he recently layered zucchini bread with fluffy zucchini mousse to form a terrine before adding walnut praline (another childhood fave) and cream cheese ice cream.

Buenos Aires native **Manuel Ortega**, 37, immigrated to Boston, where he attended culinary school. After a couple of short stints along the way, he landed at Westwood's **Napa Valley Grille** (1100 Glendon Ave., Westwood, 310.824.3322, napavalleygrille.com). What inspires Ortega is the transformative nature of cooking itself—and the ability to leave a mark. For the fall menu, he's just created a twist on fresh-from-the-oven apple pie using fennel bulbs and chai cream. But he also understands the power of a classic. He insists "there would be mutiny" if he took the custardy brioche bread pudding off the menu, even though it "looks like a big cobblestone when it arrives to the table." ▣