

MARATHON TRIAL UPDATES

Sean Collier's brother testifies

Five stylish Tatte cafes and counting



WENDY MAEDA/GLOBE STAFF

By Jill Radsken | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 21, 2015

A deliveryman walks into Tzurit Or's newest Tatte Bakery & Cafe location on Beacon Hill carrying a huge arrangement of orchids and orange tulips. Or scans the card, which is a gift from a grateful vendor, and says, "Very nice," quickly setting the flowers out of the way.

Or has to move fast. She's one of the most sought-after food entrepreneurs in the city. Last month's opening of the Charles Street store was her fifth Tatte in just over three years. She opened the first in Brookline in 2008 following a successful run with her pastries at local farmers' markets, then three more in Cambridge. Her brand's early success — Tatte confections sell like crazy and her places are so inviting customers spend afternoons there — made her popular with Cambridge landlords, who helped to open three Kendall Square locations, one almost after the other.



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Tatte Bakery & Cafe owner Tzurit Or in her Beacon Hill shop.

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"This whole wonderful roller coaster," says Or. "I didn't create it. It just came to me."

Born on a kibbutz near Galilee in the north of Israel, Or did compulsory military service before moving to Tel Aviv at 20 to began working as a film producer. "I'm a producer in my heart," says Or, 42. "That's what Tatte is — a production," She came to the United States in 2003 with a man whom she would marry and, later, separate from. At home with her newborn in 2006, she started baking family recipes and applied for a bank loan to open the Brookline location.

A look around the Charles Street bakery — Tatte is Or's daughter's nickname for her grandmother — reveals the sort of details one might see on a movie set. On the counter, giant biscotti are arranged like a spray of flowers in oversize glass jars. The bakery's signature nut boxes (rectangular-shaped pastries filled with pecans, pistachios, almonds, cashews, and walnuts) are artfully piled high on a display tray. Stainless steel cake stands hold tall muffins, chocolate-hazelnut twists, all manner of brioche and croissants, and appealing buns called "chocolate roses." Tatte is equally known for its savory dishes such as shakshuka, the popular North African dish of eggs poached in tomato sauce and served in many Israeli restaurants; sandwiches, including avocado

tartine, an open-faced sourdough slice with a poached egg, arugula, and radishes; and salads, like one made with the Greek cheese, halloumi, served with sliced green apple, golden raisins, toasted almonds, sesame, and mint.

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Recipe for strawberry-mascarpone cups from Tatte

This Tatte specialty begins with strawberry puree, which goes into cups with white-chocolate ganache and mascarpone cream.

“It’s a very personal menu,” says Or, whose family made everything from scratch. “Salads were something that was very missing in America. In Israel, salad is a meal.”

Or says she curates her decor as carefully as her menus, regularly sharing artsy images of both with 16,500 Instagram followers. Filled with natural light, Charles Street is designed like many of her other spots: white subway tiles with black and grass-green accents along white walls and a wood counter, and reclaimed metal and wood stools for seating. Space limitations kept her from building a custom-designed chandelier like the ones that hang in the other locations so, instead, she strung different light fixtures (from Germany, Israel, Maine) along the customer path.

Consultant Michael Staub, who has helped launch more than 70 restaurants in his 30-year career, calls Or “a force of nature.” He says, “It’s been a rocketship. Tzurit is so focused and driven and really committed to her employees, the product, and the brand.

She's fiercely protective." Among Staub's other successes are Ribelle in Brookline, Lumiere in West Newton, and Il Casale in Belmont.



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Avocado and soft egg tartine.

Staub began working with Or in 2010 when she was looking to expand her one Brookline bakery. "I don't know anyone who's grown this quickly," says Staub. "Tatte is still an infant in restaurant years. The real question now is: 'What next?' I made her promise not to open any more stores in 2015."

Some people who have been to the popular Ottolenghi cafes in London compare Or to Yotam Ottolenghi, an Israeli-born chef who now runs five establishments (including his Nopi restaurants).

With Charles Street, Or now has more stores than this region's celebrated baker, Joanne Chang, but they don't travel in the same circles. "I spend my days baking," says Or. "I am not good at going to events. I am good behind the scenes."

The two bakery owners do have staff who have worked at both places. "Our Director of Ops is a Tatte alum," writes Chang in an e-mail. "I run by the new location every day — it's on my running route — and it's gorgeous. I love her visual style and her bakeries are

beautiful. I think her approach to create lovely cafes with mouthwatering foods and pastries is a smart one; it's the one we take as well."

Or's directness is part of what impresses Tony Maws, owner of Craigie on Main and The Kirkland Tap & Trotter, who brunches regularly with his family at Tatte. "Tzurit has a very strong personality and strong sense of how she wants to do business. She's a tough cookie. I respect that a lot," says the restaurateur.

Maws says that even though they aren't that well-acquainted, Or once effusively praised a meal she had at Craigie on Main on Instagram. "To find people who are supportive in a normal way, not just because you do an event with them," says Maws, "it's great."

As if Or doesn't have enough on her plate, she also offers three-hour hands-on baking classes, which are limited to a dozen students and typically cost \$90. Recent subjects concentrated on brioche and some confections made with it, tarts and cookies, and croissant dough and several baked goods that use it.



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Sshakshuka (poached eggs in tomato sauce with feta).

Or's next move may be a cookbook, but she also has a budding wholesale business with Williams-Sonoma to nurture. In 2012, she started baking petit tarts and pear pies for

the company. “The first year we did thousands and thousands of orders, and I had to turn down the last 1,000 orders. I couldn’t keep up,” she says. Her Broadway location was opened with the primary goal of using it as a facility to drop-ship (an industry term for shipping directly to the customer).

Josephine Hsu, food buyer for Williams-Sonoma, writes in an e-mail that Tatte’s appeal “comes from exceptional flavor, exquisite beauty, and extreme attention to detail.” She calls the pastries “truly works of art,” and thinks they’re unique on the market. That reputation has brought Or several shout-outs in O, The Oprah Magazine, and prompted business offers from every corner of the country. “I get three or four e-mails a week from landlords and people asking us to come to their city.”

Or likes to hear customers praise her pastries, but she also appreciates their emotional connection to her places. “It looks like it was always here,” they tell her.

“That’s an amazing feeling for me. I know I made one more person feel welcome,” she says. “Tatte was born to make myself a home away from home.”

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