

Food

Two Scoops of Ube Microcreameries churn out ever stranger flavors

By Josh Sanburn

VANILLA IS STILL BY FAR THE MOST POPULAR ice cream flavor in America. That's a testament not only to its use in sundaes and on pies but also to its ability to compete with the 32 bazillion other flavors that are vying for our attention. Partly as a response to the trendiness of artisanal foods, ice cream has been moving into more adventurous territory. Weird flavors—or at least the idea of them—have become so mainstream that customers expect a good ice cream shop to offer something unusual even if no one ever orders it. At Sweet Republic in Scottsdale, Ariz., the summer lineup includes chocolate orange Sichuan peppercorn, honey blue cheese and sweet corn, which contains whole kernels of locally grown corn. “They either love it or tell us that it was a fun flavor—and then get their usual favorite,” says co-owner Helen Yung. “But they’ll still tell their friends about it.”

Owners are generally happy to crank out the experimental stuff, since it's often what gets folks in the door. At Salt & Straw in Portland, Ore., chef Tyler Malek uses goat cheese to make a marionberry-and-habanero-jam ice cream. He recently began work on a tempura-battered-bacon flavor, but his cousin (and the store's co-owner) Kim Malek nixed it. It was too labor-intensive, for one thing, and in terms of flavor, she says, “it was too far out for me.”

Contrast that with Manhattan's Il Laboratorio del Gelato, where in-store customers can get scoops of such oddities as black sesame, Earl Grey tea and cheddar cheese. Although the street traffic is great, about 75% of its business comes from restaurants, many of which request new, specially designed flavors. In 10 years, owner Jon Snyder has rejected only one ingredient request—caviar—but not because of the ick factor, he says. “I just didn't want to contaminate my machinery with it.” ■

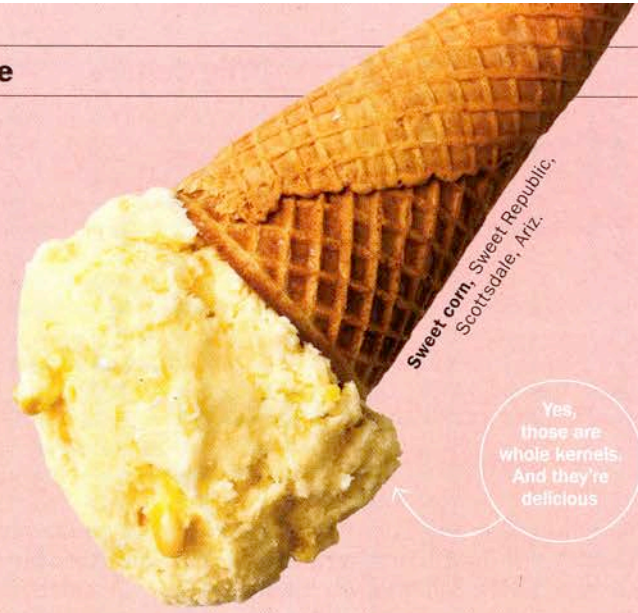


The Culture



Black sesame. Il Laboratorio del Gelato, New York City

The color is off-putting, but the taste is refreshing



Sweet corn. Sweet Republic, Scottsdale, Ariz.

Yes, those are whole kernels. And they're delicious



Chocolate orange Sichuan peppercorn. Sweet Republic, Scottsdale, Ariz.



Chèvre with marionberry habanero jam. Salt & Straw, Portland, Ore.

A perfect balance of sweet berries and zesty jam



Strong candied flavor but with a good bit of heat



Thick and fleshy. Essentially a mango in a blender

Mango lassi frozen yogurt. Jeni's, Columbus, Ohio



All cantaloupe—until the cayenne really kicks in at the end

Cayenne cantaloupe sorbet. Humphry Slocombe, San Francisco