

Gourmet Girls

If you happen to be gluten intolerant, you're going to love Gourmet Girls in Tucson. Its philosophy is simple: Make gluten-free foods that people won't guess are gluten free.

KATHY MONTGOMERY

GOURMET GIRLS IS A BRIGHT SPOT on the Tucson dining scene. In every sense of the word.

The gluten-free bakery and bistro is, quite literally, bright — painted a shade of green that brings to mind glow sticks. If you happen to be gluten intolerant, Gourmet Girls might make you weep tears of joy. For the rest of us, it's just

good, clean and healthy food.

Gourmet girls Mary Steiger and Susan Fulton began their partnership as caterers. A client's request for a gluten-free cake set them on their current path.

"At the time, it was a non-served market," Fulton says. "There were a few commercial products available in the stores, but they weren't very good. And there

was nothing, really, on a more house-made, homemade, handcrafted level."

After developing a following at local farmers markets, they opened their retail operation in 2011 — 11/11/11 at 11 a.m., to be exact — and built their menu by identifying foods that gluten-intolerant customers might be missing. Pancakes, French toast, and biscuits and gravy sprang to mind for breakfast, as did beer-battered fish and chips, a grilled cheese sandwich and a Reuben on "rye" for lunch.

"We've had people sit at the table and cry because they're eating eggs Benedict for the first time in 20 years," Fulton says.

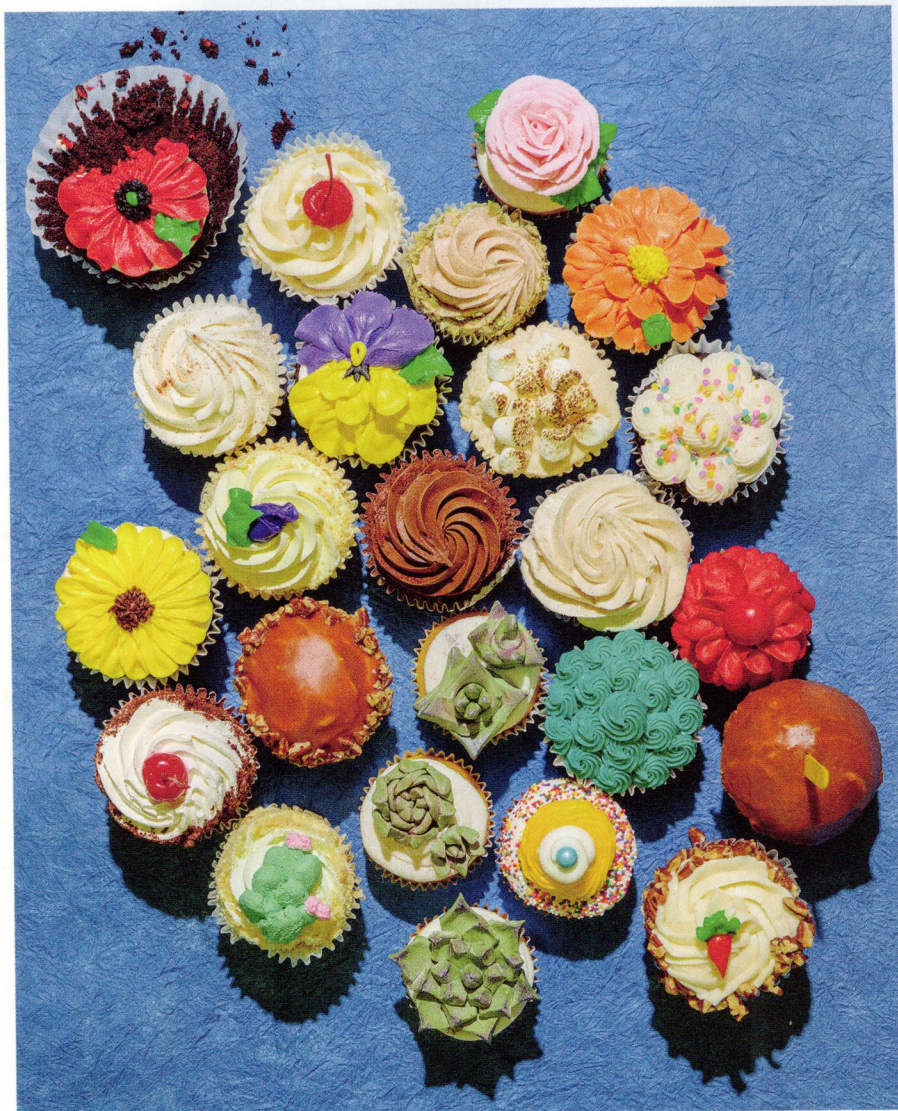
The goal at Gourmet Girls is simple: Make gluten-free foods that people wouldn't guess are gluten free. And Steiger and Fulton have succeeded.

But whether you're gluten intolerant or not, Gourmet Girls will put a smile on your face. Take, for example, the cupcake menu, which changes frequently. On a recent visit, it included root beer float cupcakes topped with a cherry and a bendy straw, pink and blue cotton-candy cupcakes, and s'mores cupcakes crowned with a cascade of toasted marshmallows.

Why cupcakes? "Because they're so much fun," says Fulton, whose hair sports a stripe the same bright green as the wall. "Who doesn't love a cupcake? They just lend themselves to everything. In October, for breast cancer [awareness], we made boob cupcakes and donated a portion of the proceeds to the local cancer society. So that was really fun."

Oh, and they're delicious, too.

By the time you read this, Gourmet Girls will have rolled out a happy-hour menu with foods gluten eaters take for granted, such as mozzarella sticks and chicken tenders, along with others you might not have imagined, such as cupcake and wine pairings, gluten-free beer and signature cocktails. The award-winning 14 Carrot Gold margarita gets its cheerful Tang-y color from carrot juice, though you'd never know it by the taste. And their latest margarita creation is the Can't Beet This. It's just the most recent in a long line of bright ideas.



TUCSON Gourmet Girls, 5845 N. Oracle Road, 520-408-9000, www.gourmetgirlsglutenfree.com