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F. Culinary Fireworks

Pastry chef Laurent Lhuillier of the Windows Catering Company sculpts artful centerpieces that are worthy of saluting—and are never polluting!

BY VALERIE COVARRUBIAS

IT'S LIKE NO OTHER FIRECRACKER you've ever seen. Standing just over four feet tall, this showstopper features arching trajectories, "explosions" of sparkling chrysanthemum-like sprays and patriotic stars, and brilliant "pops" that sizzle with the white-hot drama of Roman candles. Its glittering bursts last a bit longer than those in the sky, though, mainly because this pyrotechnic display is crafted of sugar and corn syrup.

That's right. The fabulous, entirely edible—and therefore eco-conscious—fireworks display is one of the remarkable centerpiece creations of chef Laurent Lhuillier, executive pastry chef for the Windows Catering Company. The 2005 National Pastry Team champion and captain of the US bronze medal team in the 2006 World Pastry Championship, Lhuillier honed his stellar sugar-sculpting skills in the kitchens of top hotels around the world, approaching the design of each new showpiece with the soul of an artist and the precision of an engineer.

It takes days to bring these masterworks to life. The concept is first sketched on paper and then duplicated using a cardboard maquette to ensure that it's not only structurally sound but also visually delightful from every angle. Then the creation of the intricate sculpture begins, color is added, and the sugary shapes are molded through the deft application of heat. Careful control of temperature and humidity is key to the success of these delicate artworks. Even with the most meticulous planning, however, variations in the climate of the display space make it necessary to always have duplicate elements on hand. Final assembly occurs on-site, where Lhuillier can make last-minute adjustments and ensure that each extraordinary sculpture displays the essence of culinary artistry. *Windows Catering Company, 5724 General Washington Drive, Alexandria, Virginia, 703-519-3500; catering.com.*

A Fourth of July-inspired edible centerpiece from the Windows Catering Company.



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