PIES without NUMBER

Monroe Boston Strause, Who Thinks of Them in Terms of Dozens as an Adviser to Bakers, Sidetracks Some Tips to St. Louis Housewives.

By VIRGINIA IRWIN.



Monroe Boston Strause Begins on Pies



Dough in the Pan



Some Trim Work



All Set for the Oven



MR. MONROE BOSTON STRAUSE can crochet a perfect pie with both eyes shut and one hand tied behind him. He doesn't do it very often, of course, but the point is, he can. And when you taste the finished product, you are forced to admit—with apologies to the memory of your grandmother—that Monroe Boston Strause knows his pie business.

Soggy crusts? Stuck to the tin? Flavorless filling? Not for Monroe B. Strause, apostle of the good pie. A slice of something that tastes like the top of an old shoe filled with melted-down inner tube? Appalling, thinks Monroe Strause. Also inexcusable. So easily remedied.

"And just the thing that keeps the liver pill business paying dividends," scorns this perpetrator of the perfect pie.

St. Louis pies? No better and no worse than usual. But if the premier pie baker of America makes any kind of a dent in the consciousness of our pie-minded pastry cooks, St. Louis pies will at least improve, if not be perfect. For two nights last week he demonstrated to the members of the St. Louis Restaurant Association at the Municipal Auditorium the intricacies of baking the pies that brought him fame and fortune. Now he is going to Columbus, O., to look into the pie situation there. But he'll be back to personally supervise the installation of his latest scientific pie baking methods.

"Until five or six years ago bakers took their pie cues from the housewife," Strause admits. "But now it's different. Today the housewife copies the baker's ideas. Modern kitchen equipment, such as electric mixers, makes it possible to use at home the same methods that are used in the bakery."

In the opinion of this pie baker extraordinary, restaurants nowadays are making pies just as good, if not better, than the ones mother used to make. He cites a large St. Louis cafeteria to prove his contention.

"Fifty per cent of their customers choose pie for dessert," he pointed out. "If the pie wasn't as good as they get at home, they'd take some other dessert on the nights they eat out."

The pie business is looking up, too, according to Strause, because restaurateurs are beginning to realize that there's nothing like a good pie trade to put shekels in the till. And that's where Monroe Boston Strause comes in. As pie counsellor he shows them how to bake the pies that bring in the customers.

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STRAUSE started out at 19 with a bakery in Los Angeles, left on his hands by an uncle, decided that the thing to do was specialize in, not bigger, but better pies, and went to work. He created the California Black Bottom — a gorgeous concoction pyramided on a graham cracker crust, shading from whipped cream at the top to shaved chocolate at the base. It sold for $1.65 a copy. Then he invented chiffon pies and the term "chiffon" as applied to pies. Next he thought up the idea of the graham cracker crust, the vanilla wafer crust, and the butterscotch cookie crust, and West Coast bakers began beating a path to pieman Strause's door.

Would he help them do something about their pies that were just pies? He would. For a consideration.

And that was how Monroe Boston Strause became a pie specialist. After he sold his bakery—for a tidy sum—and started in telling Southern California bakers what was wrong with their pie ideas, the news somehow got around and Eastern concerns put in a bid for the services of the California marvel. Eight years ago the American Society of Bakery Engineers voted him the title of "Premier Pie Baker of America" and now all Monroe Strause does is travel around the country acting as pie repair man to big bakeries and large restaurant chains. He has tentative plans, too, to invade Europe and sell his ideas to continental bakers.

Most of Bakerman Strause's ideas are just good common horse sense. Anybody could figure out the same things about pies, if they spent enough time thinking about that grand old American dessert.

"For instance," he explained, "fruit pies boil out of the crust and all over the oven simply because the filling is brought to a boil. The thing to do is cook the filling, place it in the crust, pop the pie into the oven, and leave it there only long enough to bake the crust. Since the fruit is already cooked, there's no reason to let it boil inside the crust.

"Salt should never be put in fruit pies, except blueberry, peach and apricot.

"Salt should be added to the water and never to the flour.

"The quicker a pie bakes, the better. Slow baking causes sogginess, and once the pie is in the oven, the temperature should never be reduced.

"A good graham cracker crust is made by adding a little light syrup to the graham crackers and butter. The syrup helps hold it together. Sugar should never be used, because sugar carmelizes and makes the crust stick.

"It is never necessary to grease a pie tin. If the crust contains enough shortening, greasing the tin is superfluous.

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BAKER STRAUSE could talk for hours about the do's and don'ts of pie baking. In fact, he does. Everywhere he goes somebody wants to know something about pie. Strause knows all the answers. He hasn't found a pie problem so far he couldn't solve.

Right now he's working on ideas for a pie promotion campaign.

"There's no question about it that repeal has hurt the pie business to some extent," he admits. "People don't eat pie after they've been drinking beer or liquor, so we've got to concentrate on making more non-drinkers pie-minded."

The premier pie baker of America says, too, that there's nothing to the old idea of associating pie with stomach aches.

"When mother used to say, 'save room for the pie sonny,' she was giving good advice," says the premier pieman.

And what is the most popular pie? Apple of course, with lemon meringue running a close second in the pie derby. Strause reverses the order when it comes to personal preference. He seldom eats pie because he sees too many of them, but when he takes a notion for dessert he prefers a piece of lemon pie, and if there is no lemon around, his second choice is apple. Strause rarely bakes a pie at home. First, because he's seldom there and second, because he has difficulty making just one pie. He's used to thinking in terms of 60 pies at a time. As a special favor, though, he once tried to bake a pie for his mother. When he finished, he had pies all over the kitchen and living room.

Pie specialist Strause is a square-shouldered hefty blond, 36, married, left-handed, and wears glasses. He calls Los Angeles home, but in the last four years he's been so busy that he and Mrs. Strause have spent only six weeks in their own house. The highest paid man in the baking industry, baker Strause looks like a big-business man when he's dressed up, but has no objection to donning a pair of white duck pants and plunging into a pan of lard and flour up to his elbows.

His proudest achievement he thinks was the creation of "chiffon" pies. Right now he's pretty pleased with a movie he has just finished. It is called "How to make pie crust."

David Lamson to Adapt Book.

David Lamson's book, "We Who Are About to Die," written during the year he spent in San Quentin prison under sentence to be hanged, has been bought for screen adaptation and Lamson himself will collaborate on the screen play. Murder charges against him, based on the death of his wife, were dismissed recently.

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