

william porter

New competitors sweeten East Colfax

By William Porter
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It might not be Coke vs. Pepsi, but a business rivalry has sprung up on a short stretch of East Colfax Avenue.

And in a refreshing change, the entrepreneurs are not strolling in spike heels.

Here's the deal: At the corner of St. Paul Street sits The Shoppe. One block east is Lovely Confections Bakery.

They sell cupcakes. They opened a week apart in January. Neither knew the other was coming. Surprise.

Remember the Clint Eastwood movie "A Fistful of Dollars," where two gunslinging families on the same street shoot at each other from their fortress-like compounds?

Well, this rivalry is a friendly one. No cupcakes at 20 paces. At least for now.

"It's actually good for both of us," said Porche Lovely, owner of Lovely Confections. "We get a cluster effect."

Both shops are departures from the traditional bakery. Lovely's room features armchairs and a stylish sofa to go with the tables. The Shoppe also has a seating area and an array of hip retail goods.

"Cupcakes are so simple, so personal and so sweet," said Shoppe co-owner Emma Skala. "They're fun. Kids come here and their eyes light up."

Skala has baked since childhood. She learned the ropes in her mom's kitchen and turned pro six years ago. Opening The Shoppe was a dice roll, but she knew she made the right decision on Valentine's Day when a line of customers snaked out the door.

Lovely took the indirect route. She earned a history degree in college, then worked at Sun Microsystems. After being laid off in 2004, she went to Johnson & Wales' pastry school and worked on "Sugar Rush," a TV food show.

"But I needed something more than working in someone else's kitchen," she said.

So Lovely opened her shop, emphasizing organic but luscious ingredients. Fans include the pastry chefs at Fruition and Frasca, two top area restaurants.

Business is brisk.

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"When the special orders came in for graduation parties, we were running around like one-armed paper hangers," Lovely said.

She enjoys adapting the recipes of panicked amateurs to tricky high-altitude baking conditions. "You can actually see the relief on their faces that you've made it work."

Corey Burton visits Lovely Confections once a week, often with her mom in tow. She stopped by Thursday to pick up cupcakes for her dad's birthday, going back and forth on whether she wanted chocolate-chocolate, coconut or lemon. She ordered some of each.

"I drive here all the way from Highlands because they're the best," Burton said. "And I'm quite the dessert connoisseur."

Along with traditional flavors, The Shoppe offers Oreo, mojito, raspberry and mocha.

It's popular with students at nearby East High, who swarm in for their morning sugar fix. Teachers, apparently trying to keep up, come in too.

"We bake about 90 cupcakes on weekdays and 300 on Saturdays," Skala said. "We make a lot."

Lovely is amused when people on a cupcake crawl try to hide the fact they're going from shop to shop, as if they're afraid she'll find out they're seeing another bakery on the side.

"They'll slip the cupcakes from the other shop

into their car, then walk in here," she said. "It's like they don't want me to know."

Sweet.

William Porter's column runs Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Reach him at 303-954-1977 or wporter@denverpost.com.

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