

# Sweet Cakes



Visit this family farm just outside of Hilo for a Japanese twist on the traditional German baumkuchen.

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**PHOTOS BY AARON K. YOSHINO**





**T**HE FIRST TIME MARKUS STOLZ ATE BAUMKUCHEN, a traditional German cake that resembles a hollowed cross-section of a tree trunk, he was in Japan—not Germany.

“It’s really soft and moist,” says Stolz, whose parents moved from Germany to Japan, where he was born and raised. “That makes this version much more different.”

The German version of the cake, which is often eaten during Christmas, isn’t as spongy or delicate. And Stolz, who moved to Germany at 18, preferred the lighter style made in Japan.

Then on a particularly cold and dreary winter day in Munich, Stolz was bored and started looking up real estate on Hawai‘i Island, where he and his wife, Marie, had honeymooned several years earlier. “I just wanted a warm feeling,” he says, laughing.

But he was serious about moving to Hawai‘i, and he needed a plan.

And that plan was baumkuchen.

“There was no baumkuchen in Hawai‘i,” he says.

So, four years ago, Stolz relocated his family—which includes three kids—to Pāpa‘ikou, a sleepy town (fewer than 2,000 people) about 10 miles north of Hilo along the island’s rugged eastern coastline. The family purchased a 9.2-acre property up *mauka* (toward the mountains) that included a greenhouse, where Stolz is now growing vanilla, and groves of palm and mangosteen trees.

It’s here where Stolz and his wife produce delicate, Japanese-style baumkuchen, enhanced with Hawai‘i flavors like macadamia nut, Kona coffee, mango and pineapple. The couple had visited various shops and bakeries in Germany, then worked on perfecting a recipe that combined the best parts of both the German and Japanese versions.

Stolz shows us his specialized oven, which he brought from Germany. Baking baumkuchen—which translates to “tree cake”—is an elaborate and tedious process. The cake is baked on a stick, layer by layer, while it turns. This creates the cake’s “rings”—similar to the rings of a tree. The baker coats a spit with sponge cake batter and mounts it in the oven, rotating it slowly until the first layer is baked. The process is then repeated as many times as the desired amount of layers until the cake is done. The cake is then sliced into rings and taken off the spit. The result is a gorgeous ring-shaped cake with nearly paper-thin layers that Germans call “the king of cakes.”

#### OPPOSITE

Baumkuchen translates to “tree cake” in German. It has thin layers similar to the rings of a tree.

#### TOP RIGHT

Marie and Markus Stolz moved from Germany to Hawai‘i Island four years ago.



The Germans are credited with baumkuchen, but there’s evidence that ancient Greeks and Romans made similar layered cakes. According to Stolz—who’s done extensive research on the dessert—the first version of a baumkuchen recipe was mentioned in 1426 in an Italian cookbook. The first recipe in the German language is from around 1450. It wasn’t until centuries later—in the 1800s—that the process evolved: The dough was no longer wrapped around a stick but added, layer by layer, over a rotating rod. This was also around the time the cake was referred to as “baumkuchen,” Stolz says. It was popular with kings—Germany’s Wilhem I made a baker from Salzwedel, famous for its baumkuchen, his royal court supplier of the cake—and other European countries had their own versions of it.



