

THE BOSTON GLOBE WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24, 2022 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/FOOD



## I tried every mochi doughnut shop in Boston. Here's everything you need to know.

JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

Above: mochi doughnuts at Pon de Joy in Allston. They are a cross between mochi — a Japanese rice cake — and a fried doughnut, and they come in many pastel colors and Asian-inspired flavors such as yuzu and taro along with more familiar tastes such as Oreo or funnel cake.

By **Serena Puang**  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**I** love mochi. I love doughnuts. (I mean ... I'm only human.) And when I took a gap year in Taiwan, I regularly enjoyed a dessert that married my two loves into one amazing treat: the mochi doughnut.

For the uninitiated, a mochi doughnut is a cross between mochi, the Japanese rice cake, and a fried doughnut. They come in many pastel colors and flavors ranging from Asian-inspired ones like yuzu and taro to others like Oreo or funnel cake. They have their roots in fried poi mochi, or little fried taro balls mixed with mochi flour, in Hawaii. But their most common style —

a ring formed of eight interconnected balls of chewy goodness — was popularized by the chain Mister Donut, which is dominant in Asia but actually has local roots. Founded by Harry Winokur, brother-in-law of Dunkin' founder Bill Rosenberg, it got its start in Boston.

Within the United States, mochi doughnuts are available mostly in major cities — not in my college town in Connecticut, and definitely not in my hometown in Arkansas. Lucky for me, they've gained a local foothold in the last few years. So when I prepared to move to Boston, I was ready to patronize independent bookstores, visit iconic museums, and watch boats along the Esplanade — but more than anything else, I

DOUGHNUTS, Page G5

## For these adult beginner cooks, the dinner bell just rings a little later



INA GOUVEIA/ADOBE STOCK

By **Lindsay Crudele**  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**E**veryone remembers their first meringue. I buried mine — pot and all — in the backyard, right next to Frank, my first goldfish. Not everyone is born a chef.

Like anyone schooled in parental forensics, the freshly turned soil gave up my fourth-grade crime scene immediately. The kitchen still reeked of burnt sugar and citrus, and my abysmal lying skills gave me no cover. For one thing, I wasn't supposed to use the gas stove when left alone. Some wait decades to try their hand at advanced recipes like souffles and hollandaise. I couldn't wait for my parents to leave for the PTA meeting before I got to work.

There are many good reasons to wait. The mother sauces aren't everyone's idea of weeknight meal prep, and without early practice or inspiration, the joy of cooking remains shrouded in mystery. But reasons to start outnumber excuses: creativity, hospitality, nutrition, identity, and connection all beckon. For the adult beginner cook, the dinner bell just rings a little later.

"I'm Filipino-American, and for a very long time there weren't any Filipino restaurants in the area (now the closest is in Somerville, Tanam)," said Trish Fontanilla, who chronicled her New Year's resolution to learn to cook at the age of 30 in a blog, tackling a new recipe every week.

"I started doing some pot lucks with friends because Filipino food is essentially like Italian food," she said. "There's no

BEGINNERS, Page G5

## Giulia won a neighborhood's heart with Italian fare. Can Moëca do the same with seafood?



CARLIN STIEHL

By **Devra First**  
GLOBE STAFF

Moëca is at 1 Shepard St. in Cambridge.

**S**eeing and being seen is a very different thing from place to place. In L.A., we expect to spot movie stars and music moguls in the city's restaurants. In D.C., it's politicians: Was that or wasn't that Ted Cruz wolfing wagyu at an area steakhouse? In Boston, we get all worked up over the Ben Afflecks, the Steven Tylers, anyone with the last name Wahlberg — folks with the local connect. Many of our most notable celebrity sightings occur at the famous Boston hot dog restaurant Fenway Park. Not to knock the knackwurst, but there's not always a correlation between

notable diners and culinary excellence. But across the river in Cambridge, where being smart can make you famous, things are a little different. Which is to say: *Oh my goddess is that Elizabeth Warren eating dinner at Giulia?* (Whatever, we all get excited over different things. I won't mock your boyfriend fandom if you let me kvell when I spot the favorite law professor I never had because I forgot to go to law school.)

By Cambridge measures, the hottest

MOECA, Page G4

## Inside

### BY THE GLASS NOT-SO-SECRET SUPER POWER

Greek winegrower uses a native black grape to make a vibrant white pour

G3



### SEASONAL RECIPES SWEET AND SPICY END OF SUMMER

Spoon this peach salsa beside grilled chicken or tuck it into tacos

G4



# Sampling the city's mochi doughnuts

## ►DOUGHNUTS

*Continued from Page G1*

wanted a mochi doughnut.

But not all mochi doughnuts are created equal.

According to pastry chef and recipe developer Catherine Zhang, the key to a good mochi doughnut is texture. She tested many recipes to try to replicate a Mister Donut-esque mochi doughnut for her new cookbook, “Mochi, Cakes and Bakes,” which is out in November. According to Zhang, the ideal texture can vary according to personal taste, but there are a couple of factors to keep in mind.

One is the base. According to Zhang’s research, Mister Donut uses tapioca starch for its doughnuts instead of glutinous rice flour. It’s what gives them their chewy, bouncy texture. Glutinous rice flour (a.k.a. mochi flour) can make doughnuts “a bit stodgy,” she said.

In Boston, some mochi doughnut vendors belong to chains that use proprietary mixes that probably contain at least a little bit of both — at least, I think. In my quest for Boston’s best mochi doughnut, I talked to general managers, cashiers, and owners. Most couldn’t tell me what is in their doughnuts.

As Will Oh, assistant general manager at Paris Baguette, said of their recipe: “It’s very confidential. Even if I could give it to you, I have no idea.”

To me, the ideal mochi doughnut is chewy and has consistent structural integrity. The icing has hardened on the top, and you can pull apart each of the eight balls with ease. The flavor of mochi doughnuts largely comes from the icing, but the balance between icing and doughnut should be such that you can taste both.

In the name of journalism, I sampled 26 mochi doughnuts at seven outlets around town. Here’s what you need to know about each one.

## The trailblazer: Coco Leaf

The first mochi doughnut in Boston was at Coco Leaf, a local dessert café with two locations. It started selling mochi doughnuts in 2017, before they gained popularity in other parts of the country, which meant Coco Leaf often had to educate people about what mochi doughnuts are.

“We had to warn them about the texture before they tried it, because they’d see a doughnut, and they’re expecting a traditional cake doughnut,” said Somath Om, one of the co-owners. “Then they bite into it and it’s like a marshmallow-y, gooey texture.”

The doughnuts here look like traditional American-style doughnuts, and they are in limited supply. They’re only available on the weekends. Because mochi doughnuts are so labor intensive, said Om, Coco Leaf makes only a couple dozen of them, and they usually sell out in two hours.

The doughnuts are topped in a white chocolate glaze and coated in Oreo crumble, matcha, or Fruity Pebbles. (The matcha was great!) They’re made with a glutinous rice flour base, which makes them chewier than most other mochi doughnuts. But it works — an

evocation of the bouncy texture known as QQ, found in boba and other chewy Asian desserts.

Note: The Dorchester location will be closed until the end of the month for renovations, but it will be back in September with new Vietnamese street food items such as papaya salad with beef liver and fried chicken.

1480 Dorchester Ave., Dorchester, 617-506-0010, and 305 Newbury St., Back Bay, 857-991-1719. [www.cocoleaf-boston.com](http://www.cocoleaf-boston.com).

## Most creative: Neighborhood Donut Society

For Canton resident Anna-Li Claiborne, mochi doughnuts were a pandemic-era pivot. She was a server for the past 25-plus years, but the shutdown gave her and her college-aged kids time to experiment with recipes. The complex recipe they came up with is gluten-free (other mochi doughnuts often include flour); she makes the doughnuts for her pop-up outfit at the Dorchester location of Coco Leaf, where she also helps prep their doughnuts (made from a different recipe).

Neighborhood Donut Society’s doughnuts (like the ones at Coco Leaf) are shaped like traditional American doughnuts, and they’re super dense. They’re like a cross between the fruity Japanese candy Hi-Chew and a doughnut.

Claiborne says running a pop-up with preorders and not a brick-and-mortar store allows her to experiment and do more flavor combinations than she otherwise would.

“My husband’s a big gardener. And I’ll see things, and I’m like, ‘Oh, let’s try this! Let’s do strawberry basil,’” she said. “I am able to use different toppings and do different things with them.”

From drink-inspired doughnuts like “dirty chai” to her twist on a black sesame mochi doughnut (more savory than your average doughnut), these are worth a try. If you’re into cereal-topped doughnuts, the Thai iced tea with fruity crunch is the one to order.

Neighborhood Donut Society can be a little hard to track down, but watch its Instagram for new flavors and pop-ups (most frequently in Tokava in Jamaica Plain and MacaBoston in Somerville’s Bow Market).

For pop-up/preorder information, go to [www.instagram.com/neighborhood.donut.society/](http://www.instagram.com/neighborhood.donut.society/)

## Spice of life: Pon de Joy

Pon de Joy is a mochi doughnut maker located in the Super 88 food court in Allston. Owner Heather Kim lived in Boston for more than 20 years but is currently based in Los Angeles. During her time in California (where mochi doughnut franchises truly took root), she fell in love with mochi doughnuts in the “pon de ring” style — the official name for the flower shape popularized by Mister Donut.

“My biggest motivation was to bring something that didn’t exist in Boston that I thought was a really great prod-



PHOTOS BY JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

**Top: At Mochi Dough on Newbury Street, flavors include (top, left to right) Oreo, taro, and glazed, and (bottom, left to right) churro, strawberry, and Fruity Pebbles. Above: the counter at Mochi Dough.**

uct,” said Kim.

Pon de Joy’s doughnuts are made from a Hawaiian mochi doughnut mix that contains both tapioca starch and rice flour, and the batter is tweaked to Kim’s personal preference. On any given day, doughnut lovers have a choice of 14 flavors, such as cherry-lime and rose milk tea, and every week the shop brings out one or two new kinds from an ever-growing bank of more than 60 flavors.

Compared to other pon de ring-style doughnuts in Boston, these are probably the most dense, and the icing never really hardens the way I want it to. While the density is not my preference, flavors like mango Tajin and “everything but the bagel” are fun and inventive, and the packaging — inspired by Korean bojagi (wrapping cloths) — is beautiful. I can see why these are so Instagrammable.

1 Brighton Ave., Allston, 617-208-8885, [www.pondejoy.com](http://www.pondejoy.com)



**Pon de Joy owner Heather Kim with a selection of doughnuts.**

## Most polarizing: Mochinut/OneZo

Mochinut is run by an elusive boss known to employees simply as “Panda.” The Allston location shares space with bubble tea outlet Gong Cha and feels like a minimalist coworking space. When I told people about my mochi doughnut journey, this place kept coming up. Their impressions were overwhelmingly positive, but the vibes just aren’t what I’m looking for.

Mochinut has locations across the United States and in Asia. Its doughnuts come in 16 flavors, and while these vary from location to location, they don’t rotate at the Allston spot. My favorite doughnut here was the yuzu. It didn’t taste anything like citrus, but I was still into it. For those looking for a less-sweet doughnut experience, black sesame was also good. In terms of icing consistency, Mochinut is probably the most similar to mochi doughnuts I’ve had in places like Los Angeles and Taiwan, but the texture of its dough varied widely from doughnut to doughnut.

I wish I could give you more concrete information on these doughnuts, but after four phone calls, an e-mail to Mochinut headquarters, and a conversation in Mandarin with someone in the kitchen, I could not get in touch with Panda. (Panda, if you’re out there, I just wanna talk.)

Mochinut is also working to expand into Chinatown. Starting at 2 p.m. daily, a partial selection of Mochinut flavors is available at Chinatown bubble tea spot OneZo. That location is pretty busy and

definitely a grab-and-go kind of place.

154 Harvard Ave., Allston, 617-208-8561, and 83 Harrison Ave., Chinatown, 617-982-6985. [www.instagram.com/mochinut\\_bos\\_allston/?hl=en](http://www.instagram.com/mochinut_bos_allston/?hl=en)

## Best for the indecisive: Paris Baguette

Paris Baguette, the bakery just outside of Korean market H-Mart in Central Square, has a lot of different pastries. It doesn’t specialize in mochi doughnuts. According to assistant general manager Oh, they only account for 5 to 10 percent of sales. But their texture is satisfyingly light.

As I mentioned before, Oh makes the doughnuts but doesn’t know what’s in them. The company formulates its recipes in South Korea and distributes the mix to each franchise location.

Here’s what he does know: All of the North American Paris Baguettes use the same mix, and they have four flavors. They always carry sugar and matcha mochi doughnuts, and the other two flavors change seasonally.

Before you e-mail me, I know, I know — Cambridge is not Boston. But hear me out: Paris Baguette’s matcha doughnuts are particularly notable because they are dusted with matcha powder, so they actually taste like real matcha. They have limited options, which saves you from choice paralysis, and a quality product. So if you’re in the area, check it out.

581 Massachusetts Ave., Central Square, Cambridge, 617-714-3062, [www.parisbaguette.com](http://www.parisbaguette.com).

## Best overall vibes: Mochi Dough

Hanging out at Mochi Dough, all I could think was, “This is the dream hangout spot I would have designed when I was 14.” The pink-and-teal color scheme plus the wall covered with kawaii doughnut photos makes it an atmospheric place to chat with friends, and the deep-cut One Direction and Britney Spears soundtrack brought me back to a simpler time. (I wasn’t far off base. Owner Huy Nguyen says his three kids, two 15-year-olds and a 17-year-old, helped him pick out the decor.)

I know I said I like a hard icing, but Mochi Dough on Newbury Street is an exception. Even though its icing doesn’t quite harden, the dough is great and consistent from doughnut to doughnut. It offers eight flavors every week, pulled from a bank of more than 100. Taro is the most popular.

Mochi doughnuts don’t exist in a vacuum. They’re usually a part of an entire ecosystem of Asian foods and drinks. Every mochi doughnut place in Boston exists inside or within walking distance of a boba shop — and in my opinion, this one is the best. It’s tucked into a basement level near Ten One Tea House, and shares a space with Vietnamese restaurant Pho Real, which draws on Nguyen’s family recipes. So you can get lunch, boba, and mochi doughnuts all in the same trip.

If you’re looking for my recommendation on one doughnut to try from them all, it’s the churro doughnut from this place. It’s always available.

279 Newbury St., Back Bay, Boston, 617-602-1080, [www.instagram.com/mochidoughboston/?hl=en](http://www.instagram.com/mochidoughboston/?hl=en)

*Serena Puang can be reached at [serena.puang@globe.com](mailto:serena.puang@globe.com).*

# Seeing the kitchen in a new way

## ►BEGINNERS

*Continued from Page G1*

pasta-for-one recipes out there, and it’s just a waste of time and energy to not make things big batch.”

In her blog, Fontanilla explained how the wins piled up as she continued to learn: avoiding food waste, finding fearlessness for approaching food tasks at the nonprofit where she volunteered, discovering her appreciation for going out to eat, and that cooking for herself forced her to practice focus, resulting in “zen time.” By the end of the experiment, she cooked more than 130 new-to-her recipes.

For some, rediscovering the kitchen proved redemptive for body and soul alike.

“I was living alone, heartbroken from a sudden divorce, and taught myself cooking as a way to take daily pleasure in something — and to eat more healthily as I had just recently begun boxing and my fitness journey,” said Jonathan Stucky, a Medford-based consultant. At 30, he recalled his father’s good cooking, intuitive method and seasoning through trial and error, and added a knife skills class to his repertoire.

“Somehow I avoided a lot of errors and had many early successes, which encouraged me to continue,” he said. “I

now also not only cook for my wife and son, but also my dad sometimes, so that’s been cool to come full-circle.”

But just cooking something doesn’t seem to equate with being a cook. I “cooked” about a dozen eggs that first day in the kitchen, and somehow my head remained toque-free. The meal ticket might be that someone has to enjoy what’s made, even if it’s the cook themselves.

“I know it seems like a semantic debate: cooking is just warming things up,” pondered Adam S., of Watertown via Twitter DM. Boxed pilaf and bottled dressing on chicken breast was common fare for him, growing up the child of a single parent who worked long hours, he explained. “When it went from ‘slapping food for sustenance together’ to ‘a delicious and wonderful outlet for creativity’ is when it became cooking for me.”

Cooking television piqued his curiosity, which suggested that complex dishes that seemed out of range might just require the willingness to experiment. He reflected on his grandmother’s cooking.

“She made things that I thought were impossible. As I learned and watched things, I looked back on her recipes and realized that, yes, some were hard, but it’s all just science. And maybe a little art.”

And, a budget. “By my late 20s, I had just enough disposable income to actually try to do things... Once I had enough money to feel like I could buy panko or Brie or a rack of lamb chops and just try, it really shifted for me.”

Dagmar Smith has taught adult be-

ginners cooks their way around the kitchen for more than 20 years, based in several area adult education centers. She holds a place at the table for truly talented cooks with innately sensitive pallets who creatively align and contrast flavors. But for most people, she said simplicity offers more gifts than biology.

What’s her definition of a good cook? “If you’re 14 years old and making your first pizza at home and it tastes good, well, you’re a good cook,” she said. “It’s understanding how to pick quality ingredients and not get really

“The kids have wanted to jump right in ... The adults have a certain amount of hesitance, a big mystique that cooking is hard.”

DAGMAR SMITH, *who has taught cooking to all ages for more than 20 years*

complicated with them,” she said, “and knowing how to bring out the goodness in simple but imaginative recipes. I don’t think you can get away from quality ingredients.”

Resources matter: fresh, varied foods and the means to obtain them remain barriers for many aspiring cooks. At Boston Medical Center’s Teaching Kitchen, medical treatment plans in-

clude cooking class, where students may have recently been diagnosed with a chronic illness, and who arrive bearing a wide variety of cooking experience.

“We focus on sustainability, so how to use the resources you have available, and use them quickly to produce food that you enjoy,” said Olivia Weinstein, the Teaching Kitchen’s culinary nutrition director. “It’s less focused on technique and more, ‘can we help you do this in a way that you can repeat continuously?’”

Instead of culinary skill, Weinstein says the Teaching Kitchen focuses on developing “food agency,” which means building flexibility in the kitchen, and translating recipes into meals that a home cook likes and wants to make. She helps patients reimagine printed recipes as modular, able to be reconfigured with ingredients that may appeal more than the original.

But the blocks are myriad, and struggling with finding time to cook is at the top of everyone’s list. Weinstein tries to keep classes short, and recipes easy to accomplish. Transportation and childcare are also factors, so the program has increased its reliance on technology to deliver lessons. And Weinstein said BMC is trying to make its curriculum more accessible to the diverse population it serves by hiring more diverse educators, covering foods representing more languages and cultures.

Smith observed that her students, while not prescribed her classes, struggle with similar challenges, especially finding time to cook, and she says they rarely practice cooking. She eats many prepared foods.

“They tend to be in their late 20s and early 30s,” she said. “They’re in their first real apartments with their first real jobs and they want to learn how to prepare healthier meals for themselves. . . . I do get older men who for one reason or another find they have to feed themselves for the first time in their lives, and a smattering of people who are trying to feed their children better diets.”

Smith has taught both children and adults, but there’s one major difference between them, and it’s more complicated than being able to reach the top cupboard.

“The kids have wanted to jump right in ... The adults have a certain amount of hesitance, a big mystique that cooking is hard.” They’ve learned, she said, to freeze on the memories of their worst mistakes.

So, for an edgy adult learner, Smith breaks out the knife skills, which she explained will empower their entire experience. And then, the next most important lessons.

“There’s no magic here: taste everything, buy quality ingredients, and you’ll probably be OK. Keep it simple. Wash your hands.”

Of the most common mistakes, Smith cited one above all. “They don’t read the recipe through. They don’t know where they’re going, and they get caught somewhere in the middle.”

That’s the thing about learning to cook later in life: You’re already somewhere in the middle. So, you might as well begin. Good luck. I’ll bring a meringue, just as soon as I learn how to make one.