



ROBIN SUMMERFIELD

WINNIPEG

Signature Recipes FROM THE *City's Top Chefs*

Cooks

FOREWORD BY *Vikram Vij*



Lilac Bakery

CHRISTOPHER ATKINSON

OWNER

LINDA ATKINSON

HEAD BAKER

FOR CHRISTOPHER ATKINSON, a kid growing up in Winnipeg, every Saturday meant a trip downtown to Eaton's department store with his mom, Linda — and every visit included a pit stop at the third-floor bakeshop. That's where Christopher would press his nose against the glass case and eye up a tart, slice, or cookie. He never left empty-handed. Eaton's is long gone, but the sweet memory of those trips remains. Today, his Lilac Bakery is a loving re-imagination of the experience.

Christopher, along with his sister Jennifer and mom and chief baker, Linda, have created a menu where — no surprise — butter, cream, and sugar rule the pantry (you'll never see margarine here). Like a classic bakery, Lilac is tops for cookies, cupcakes, pies, and cakes, all of which are listed on an enormous chalkboard dominating the back wall. Unlike places where finicky, orchestrated decorating is the name of the game, Lilac's goodies are all about a dollop, a smear, and devil-may-care sprinkling. This is grandma's kitchen, not Martha's, and old-timey slices spark the nostalgic taste bud. "It's almost like a lost art," Christopher says.

That artistry is on full display with the Dream Cake, a divine temptress loaded with cherries, coconut, and walnuts and topped with pink frosting. When Lilac opened in 2008, it sold eight different slices. Now, 27 varieties stock the cases and the Dream Cake outsells them all. Linda, a baker by trade, came up with the first eight recipes. Every slice since then has been faithful to the bakery's manifesto: "Sweet classic baking that your grandmother and mother used to make." Five full-time bakers turn those conceptions into concoctions. Inside Lilac, you'll battle with self-restraint while deciding between Apple Blondies or the Lemon Slice. But wait, there's also Pineapple Coconut, Raspberry Dreams, or Hello Dolly, a graham wafer-crumble slice with coconut, walnuts, chocolate chips and, Lord help us, condensed milk. And just like on those long-ago trips to Eaton's, Lilac's sweet spread defies anyone to leave empty-handed.