

# Crème Gourmet

Eugenia Theodosopoulos is Greek, but she bakes like the French

Text by **Karen Fernau** \* Photo by Mark **Lipczynski**

**E**ugenia Theodosopoulos makes Phoenix taste a bit like Paris, more croissant than tortilla.

As owner of Essence Bakery and Café on Indian School Road in Arcadia, she's also more classic than trendy.

Let others push the limits. This Francophile prefers a straightforward quiche and, for dessert, her signature macaroons.

"I feel it's important to stick

with craft, not change what you know best. There's no need for me to get wild and crazy," she says.

Theodosopoulos was 26 and working in Boston's tech industry when she moved to Paris to study pastry at L'École Lenôtre.

"I started baking pies when I was a kid working seven days a week in my family's Greek diner. I wanted back in the kitchen to bake, so I followed my heart."

In Paris, she felt at home in the hard churning, well-

disciplined kitchens. French chefs shared the values of Theo's, a no-frills diner her grandfather opened in 1931 in Ohio.

Work hard. Use only the best ingredients. Waste nothing. Teach others.

At Essence, she buys from local organic farmers. Leftover melon rinds become chicken feed.

And she teaches young women, many from nearby Camelback High School, to bake like a French woman.

"I love to mentor

and teach, give other women a craft that lasts their lifetime. It's my way of giving back," says Theodosopoulos, who along with husband, Gilles Combs, plans to open a cooking school next door.

When not up to her elbows in flour, she follows the advice of her 90-year-old parents and talks with customers.

"Our customers want to feel a sense of community, feel like they know us. Their smiles are my reward."





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