

# Inquirer

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The result? "Dip-sum Doughnuts" (\$8.50), an open-mouthed Chinese take-out carton spilling irresistibly warm, sweet, yeast mini-doughnuts toward a tray of chocolate, blackberry jam and cream cheese dipping accompaniments.

At Roux 3, near Newtown Square, chef Jay Caputo says the warm, fresh-fried, bite-sized cinnamon-sugar beignets (\$5), served with small scoops of fresh-made banana-pecan praline ice cream, are also an original, the product of brainstorming with pastry chef Sean Fierman. (Even the dough from the holes is wrapped around banana and deep-fried.)

Which brings us to the newest comer, Plate, the latest restaurant (replacing a failed Parisian bistro) to try to make a go of it in a circular, tall-windowed space in Ardmore's stately Suburban Square shopping center.

Pastry chef Angela Tustin says executive chef Tom Harkin — who also heads up Circa on Walnut Street — was smitten with a doughnut dessert he sampled in Seattle and asked her to come up with one.

She'd had something of a head start, being familiar with the bomboloni, the fancy custard-filled doughnut holes that once graced the dessert plate at Avenue B.

But her take (\$6.50), served with a dipping cup of coffee-flavored creme anglaise, is playfully blue-collar, influenced by her high school job as a doughnut-icer at Dunkin' Donuts.

The hot, cakey doughnut holes come to the table in a white paper bag into which a server sprinkles cinnamon sugar, then shakes up and snips open, releasing a cloud of fresh-doughnut aroma.

Eyes across the room lock on and seek out the source.

A basic instinct has been aroused, a hunger to fill — in one big bite — the emptiness that eternally haunts the center.

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## The doughnut's moment

After dinner, the cop's best friend dresses up.

**T**hat the doughnut would one day be accorded minor celebrityhood — or, at least, dessert-menu status — is further proof that a fickle finger anoints Cinderella foods and, having anointed, moves on.

Mashed potatoes (why?) crept up the food chain long before 9/11 re-coronated comfort food.

Iceberg lettuce still pops in for the occasional trendy-spot cameo — wedged and doused with imported blue cheese — before shuffling back to the crisper.

What unshackled the doughnut, I'm not sure. There was certainly a fertile palate hereabouts: Doughnuts, in one form or another, were among the area's first settlers (not counting, of course, the Dunkards).

A diamond-shaped doughnut that dated back to the ninth century was a longtime delicacy in Berks County's rural Mahantongo

Valley.

Potato-dough fastnachts still make pre-Lenten appearances in the exurbs, tastes of tradition glimpsed fleetingly beyond the conveyor belts of neon chains.

I'd thought it might be the haute "doughnuts and coffee" — airy beignets and cappuccino semifreddo (as in, partially frozen) — at Thomas Keller's stellar French Laundry in the Napa Valley that set off the latter-day trend.

But at Old City's Buddakan, pastry chef Sydney Frey says her inspiration was as simple as a craving she got while talking on the phone to a friend in North Carolina who was going to work near a Krispy Kreme factory.

Buddakan's theme being Asian, of course, she had to "Asian up" her creation, she said, adding a touch of five-spice powder to the cinnamon-sugar dusting and ginger to the side of piped cream cheese.