

Doctor Gingerbread
(Thomas Satrom, M.D.)

Sierra Madre, December 1996.

Ready...Set...Start fabricating!

When Thomas Satrom, croaker of medicine, and the other eight or so candy craftsmen in his cake crew gather to have fun and beat stress, they do so by constructing gingerbread abodes for the likes of Queen Victoria, Hansel and Gretel, Pocahontas, and Daniel Boone. Often they get going and can't stop.

During one Christmastime marathon they erected as Yule gifts to friends 38 classic specimens of gingerbread craftsmanship in a single weekend.

If every structure he's ever iced together were collected, and all the delectable neighborhoods lined up block for block, Dr. Satrom would be mayor of his own miniature village: elegant, stuffy Victorian mansions trimmed with icing, Gummy Bears and Red Hot cinnamon chimneys, gables, and flower boxes; Black Forest homes dripping with frosted icicles; Tepees straight from Pocahontas glistening with cut jelly beams; fairy-tale Swiss chalets trimmed with spearmint gumdrops; and Daniel Boone cabins embellished with rainbow swirls of M&Ms.

There's no ego-tripping allowed amongst the architects on Dr. Satrom's gingerbread gang. The crew gives due credit to its mentor and artistic director, a 40-year gingerbread maven named Ruth Kawakami, who has an entire gourmet metropolis to her credit.

Proper building materials are also indispensable to the construction process and, in that regard Dr. Satrom – a family physician from Southern California – and the rest of the candy contractors are nobly served by the doctor's

wife, Cindy, whose choice in ornamentation is imaginative and eclectic. It ranges from visits to the neighborhood Ralph's market, (for the garden-variety ingredients), to jaunts to Solvang, (for the Hans Christian Anderson influence), and even as far away as New Orleans, (for the mad candy colors of Mardi Gras).

Gingerbread houses, according to the Satroms, make snappy holiday gifts. Covered in a coating of admittedly unappetizing shellac, they additionally have an indefinite shelf life as holiday decorations.

Sometimes, though, Dr. Satrom is moved to create something special just for himself. Not long ago – after eight hours of drafting blueprints, followed by cutting out and hand-numbering each individual piece (a total of 60) – he set out to raise a storybook Victorian. The design phase was followed by the mixing phase which was followed by the baking stages (six and a half cookie sheets worth of dough) and lastly by prodigious sessions of numbering, modeling, outlining, stenciling, and trimming – two days' worth of decorating in all.

The gourmet structure then was transported, ever so *gingerly*, to its place of honor at the L.A. County Fair, where it was put under public view and the judges' scrutiny.

The panel looked over Dr. Satrom's stunning creation and honored it with a third-place award.

Perhaps Dr. Satrom should have requested a recount, except that the gingerbread gang aren't crabbers.

Merry Christmas! Zalig Kerstmis!