

Lifestyle/ Travel & Leisure

Dolly Parton, George Washington and a herd of bison – what unites them? They all appear on a baker's pies, one for every US state

Stacey Fong has captured the essence of 44 states in pie fillings over four years, but must wait until the coronavirus pandemic ends to nail the last six. Colorado's pie contains bison stewed in beer and broth, Nevada's is divided into eight slices and flavours, while that for New York is made with good old apple.

**Delle Chan**

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Stacey Mei Yan Fong is living a life of pie as she creates different flavours for all the US states. For Tennessee, she created a savoury ode to singer Dolly Parton.

There's nothing quite as American as apple pie, or so the popular saying goes – but Stacey Mei Yan Fong begs to differ. The avid baker is striving to create a different pie for every US state (yes, all 50 of them), translating the identity of each into a distinctive flavour.

It's more than just a pie-in-the-sky fantasy for Fong, who has dreamed up 44 unique creations over the past four years and is well on her way to completing her ambitious 50 Pies/50 States project, documented in a blog of the same name.

Born in Singapore and raised in Hong Kong – she lived in the Tai Tam/Stanley area in Southern district on Hong Kong Island and attended Singapore International School and South Island School – Fong moved to Savannah, Georgia for university, and has lived in the United States ever since.

Today, she lives in New York, working as a freelance handbag and accessory designer.



Stacey Mei Yan Fong was born in Singapore and raised in Hong Kong. She moved to the US for university, and has lived there ever since. Photo: courtesy of Stacey Mei Yan Fong

The unusual endeavour helps the 33-year-old to better understand the country she now calls home. “I have travelled to many places in the US and lived in a few states, but I wanted to take a deep[er] dive. And what better way to learn more about a place than through its food and its people?”

“I chose to focus on pie because it is synonymous with America and American culture. Pie is also the perfect receptacle since it is a blank canvas – it can be sweet, or it can be savoury.”



I think it's so beautiful that in one country, there are so many different cuisines, landscapes and so on. America is truly a melting pot
Stacey Mei Yan Fong, baker

Fong's creations run the gamut from a classic peach custard pie, for Delaware, to a highly unconventional corn dog casserole pie, for Minnesota. According to Fong, it takes her anywhere between a week and a month to fully flesh out the recipe for each pie, as doing so involves extensive research about each state's culture and cuisine, as well as the occasional field trip.

Once the pie is baked, Fong personally delivers it to a resident of the state – usually a friend or loved one, sometimes a stranger – as “a token of affection”.

As such, the project is on hold because of [Covid-19](#) restrictions, and it's unclear when the citizens of Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming (she's been tackling them alphabetically) will see their state immortalised in pastry.



Colorado is the home of Coors beer and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: Getty Images

The 50 Pies/50 States project is essentially a celebration America's multifaceted identity, says Fong. "I think it's so beautiful that in one country, there are so many different cuisines, landscapes and so on. America is truly a melting pot."

Also, by baking the unique charms of each state into her pies, Fong says she wants to give their recipients a little reminder that "there is still good" in America, despite what's been happening politically. Like many of her fellow countrymen, she is taking heart from the election of [US President Joe Biden](#).

"I have seen the American people step up and be proactive in fighting for democracy and their country," she says. "It makes me hopeful for the future."

Here, she shares the cultural and culinary inspiration behind seven of her most notable pies.



Fong's Colorado pie contains chunks of bison stewed in Coors beer and broth.

Colorado pie

While Colorado has no official state foods, it is the home of Coors beer and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, across which roam majestic herds of bison. This prompted Fong to create a pie containing chunks of bison stewed in Coors beer and broth.

In keeping with the theme, she adorned the herb-crustured pie with bison-shaped pastry cut-outs, glazed with espresso for a dark brown finish.



The Missouri pie is a frozen custard confection embedded with pieces of Ooey Goopy butter cake.

Missouri pie

For this pie, Fong wanted to pay homage to two Missouri icons: Ted Drewes (a family-owned frozen custard company based in St Louis) and Ooey Goopy butter cake (a flat, dense dessert made with wheat flour and dusted with powdered sugar). The ensuing confection is a frozen custard pie embedded with pieces of Ooey Goopy butter cake and topped with rainbow-coloured hundreds and thousands.

According to Fong, Ooey Goopy butter cake is such a beloved staple in Missouri that some families have it instead of traditional pecan pie at Thanksgiving.



Think Nevada and what often comes to mind are the grand, glittering casinos that line the Las Vegas Strip. Photo: Getty Images

Nevada pie

Think Nevada and what often comes to mind are the grand, glittering casinos that line the Las Vegas Strip. Many of these are renowned for their extravagant, all-you-can-eat buffets – a feature that Fong sought to encapsulate in this bake. This ambitious pie is divided into eight slices – four sweet and four savoury – each with a different flavour. These include Caesar salad, shrimp cocktail, chocolate mousse, cheesecake with strawberry glaze, and cookies and cream sundae – dishes one would typically indulge in at a casino buffet.

As Fong explains, her Nevada pie is “like having everything you want in one pie ... it's the state where you can have your cake and eat it too”.



For New York, Fong made 150 mini pies, which she shared with the New Yorkers in her life.

New York pie

For her adoptive state, Fong went with good old apple pie, albeit jazzed up with a coffee cake crumble. “New York [the city] is known as the Big Apple, so I had to oblige,” says Fong.

However, she decided to make not one, but 150 mini pies, which she shared with the New Yorkers in her life – friends and colleagues as well as the staff at her favourite provision store, tattoo shop and Bikram [yoga](#) studio. It was, for Fong, an apt tribute to the place in which she has lived in for 10 years and counting.

A melting pot of cultures, and food that melts in the mouth

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South Dakota pie

South Dakota is home to several Native American tribes, including the Dakota, Lakota and Nakota peoples. For the state's pie, Fong took inspiration from the award-winning cookbook *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* (2017), by Sean Sherman, a renowned chef of Oglala Lakota descent.

The result is a creation that draws heavily on indigenous ingredients and flavours: a wild rice pudding pie featuring sunflower milk and a home-made blue corn crust, topped with a bergamot berry compote and pumpkin seed crunch.



Among the many singers to have come from Tennessee is Dolly Parton. Photo: Getty Images

Tennessee pie

Among the many singers to have come from what is widely regarded as the birthplace of country music is Dolly Parton, whom Fong declares is “the love of my life”. As an ode to the musician, Fong invented a pie based on the popular Southern breakfast dish of biscuits and gravy – purportedly one of Parton’s favourite foods – featuring pork sausages from Swaggerty’s Farm, a local institution. And, of course, the crust is topped with an image of the singer – voluminous blond curls and all.

Washington, DC pie

Strictly speaking, Washington, DC is not a state, but it may soon become one under the Biden administration. Nevertheless, Fong felt obliged to bake a bonus pie for the district – which is, after all, the nation’s capital. To celebrate the city’s presidential ties, as well as its picturesque springtime cherry blossoms, Fong whipped up a [cherry pie](#) with a portrait of George Washington – the first president of the US, and after whom the city is named – emblazoned on its crust.

The pie also alludes to the popular myth surrounding Washington, who, as a child, was said to have used a hatchet to cut down his father’s favourite cherry tree.

It was baked, quite fittingly, on Election Day 2016. What a long time ago that now seems.