

Cake Makers Hit High Note for the Met

By E. J. DIONNE Jr.

Special to The New York Times

PARIS, May 1 — The question is whether the alliance between Guy Pascal and Fauchon is mainly about pastry or architecture.

Mr. Pascal, the New York pastry specialist, and Fauchon, the Paris food emporium, have teamed up to create a cake to help celebrate the 100th anniversary of New York's Metropolitan Opera May 13. But this is a cake that required architectural drawings and a construction company's sensibilities.

What Mr. Pascal and Fauchon's pastry chef, Paul Berthon, are building is a reproduction of the Metropolitan, 35 inches wide, 43 inches long and 16 inches high. The edible edifice will weigh about 220 pounds.

At one end is the facade of the old Metropolitan building, at the other, the facade of the new Met. One side will be a stage, ruffled curtains and all, the other a kind of modernistic poster boldly declaring that the Metropolitan is 100 years old. All this will be painted with food coloring. The guests at the anniversary party who bite into this particular Met will taste semisweet and white chocolate and a little spun sugar.

The problem was to determine which materials would hold up and which would simply crumble and become Fauchon's answer to the West Side Highway. And all the materials had to be edible.

Last week, Mr. Berthon's kitchens had been transformed into a kind of culinary construction site as Mr. Berthon and his assistant, Joel Boulay, put together the pieces of the cake under Mr. Pascal's eager eyes.

This chocolate opera house is still very much under construction: One side isn't even built — cooked? — yet, nothing is painted and Mr. Berthon is still sculpturing away at the chocolate. One of the fringe benefits of this job is that Mr. Berthon and his assistants can munch on the Valrhona chocolate shavings as they chisel away, creating the broad columns and the delicate curtains. "Good, isn't it?" Mr. Berthon said as he gobbled up a chocolate morsel and offered a piece to a visitor.

Mr. Berthon and two assistants carry out the work as other bakers around them work on lemon tarts and other more ordinary fare. Mr. Berthon, who has other duties at Fauchon, says he gives time to the cake whenever he gets a chance.

The cake was the idea of Carol Connell of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons Inc., which is paying \$150,000 to underwrite the Met gala May 13. She ap-



Kay Reese/Peter Turnley

Guy Pascal supervising the creation of the Metropolitan Opera centennial cake in Paris. Left, Paul Berthon, Fauchon pastry chef. Right, Joel Boulay, his aide.

proached Mr. Pascal, a Frenchman whose shops, Les Délices Guy Pascal, have become popular in New York. Mr. Pascal sketched out his idea, went to an architectural illustrator, Andrew Hikes, who drew the plans, and then sent the plans to Fauchon. Like a designer and his contractor, Mr. Pascal and Mr. Berthon consulted regularly over the phone to make sure the work was progressing properly.

The original intent was to emphasize the international nature of the Metropolitan by sharing the work among chefs from different countries. "We were thinking of Vienna, Milan, London and Paris," Mr. Pascal said.

But for a delicate architectural operation, such a plan posed too many problems, Mr. Pascal said, the ultimate case of too many cooks spoiling the design. "I mean, you can't construct a house with three different architects," he said. So Fauchon's Mr. Berthon got the construction contract. The emporium is contributing its labor for the cake, said Michèle Tapponier, Fauchon's director of public relations. The cost of the cake and travel expenses for the project are being paid for by Mumm's Champagne, a subsidiary of Seagram.

Fauchon, famed for having some of the raw materials for just about any

kind of cooking in the world (where else in Paris can you get Old El Paso Tex-Mex spices?), also boasts a fine pastry shop that Mr. Pascal says has served as a model for him in New York. "Fauchon has always been an idol of mine," he said. "They have all the talent."

Initially, Mr. Berthon and Mr. Pascal had the idea of making the cake out of pastillage, a sugar and gelatin combination that is often used for elaborate pastries. Immediately, the construction deadline got in the way.

"We realized it would take at least two months for the pastillage to become solid, and we didn't have the time," Mr. Berthon said. It would have been like cutting the ribbon for a new building when the cement was still wet.

The solution was chocolate, lots of it, about 90 pounds' worth, with some glucose and syrup. The chocolate was melted, set into large blocks of various sizes and then Mr. Berthon and his assistants went to work with their chisels. "It's exactly the same as sculpture," said Mr. Pascal.

The large blocks of chocolate have been reinforced by pastillage — "It's a kind of plastic that holds things together," said Mr. Berthon — and the large blocks are being worked on, awaiting painting and the process of being put together. The dark choco-

late is covered by the white chocolate, a better surface for the sort of "painting" Mr. Berthon and his colleagues will soon undertake, the chef said.

On the cake will be reproductions of Chagall's "The Triumph of Music" and "The Sources of Music," done on a "canvas" of white chocolate.

This is not the first time that Mr. Berthon has been asked to do unusual things with chocolate. A veteran of the Meridien hotel chain's kitchens — he worked in the Middle East and Central America — Mr. Berthon was asked to create a 2,600-pound Easter egg for the hotel's branch in Egypt. In Martinique, he had to create a more modest 650-pound egg.

Construction is scheduled to be completed by this week and the chocolate opera house will be flown to the real opera house next Wednesday.

Like any conscientious designer, Mr. Pascal worries a lot. When he was asked about the possibility that the cake would melt before it was unveiled publicly, Mr. Pascal's face went ashen.

"Don't even say that," he said. Mr. Pascal added that he had once had such a problem with a similar pastry-construction project and that the chocolate-sugar technology that he and Mr. Berthon had worked out would keep the cake from becoming the latest New York City construction scandal. "There is," he said, "no risk of that."