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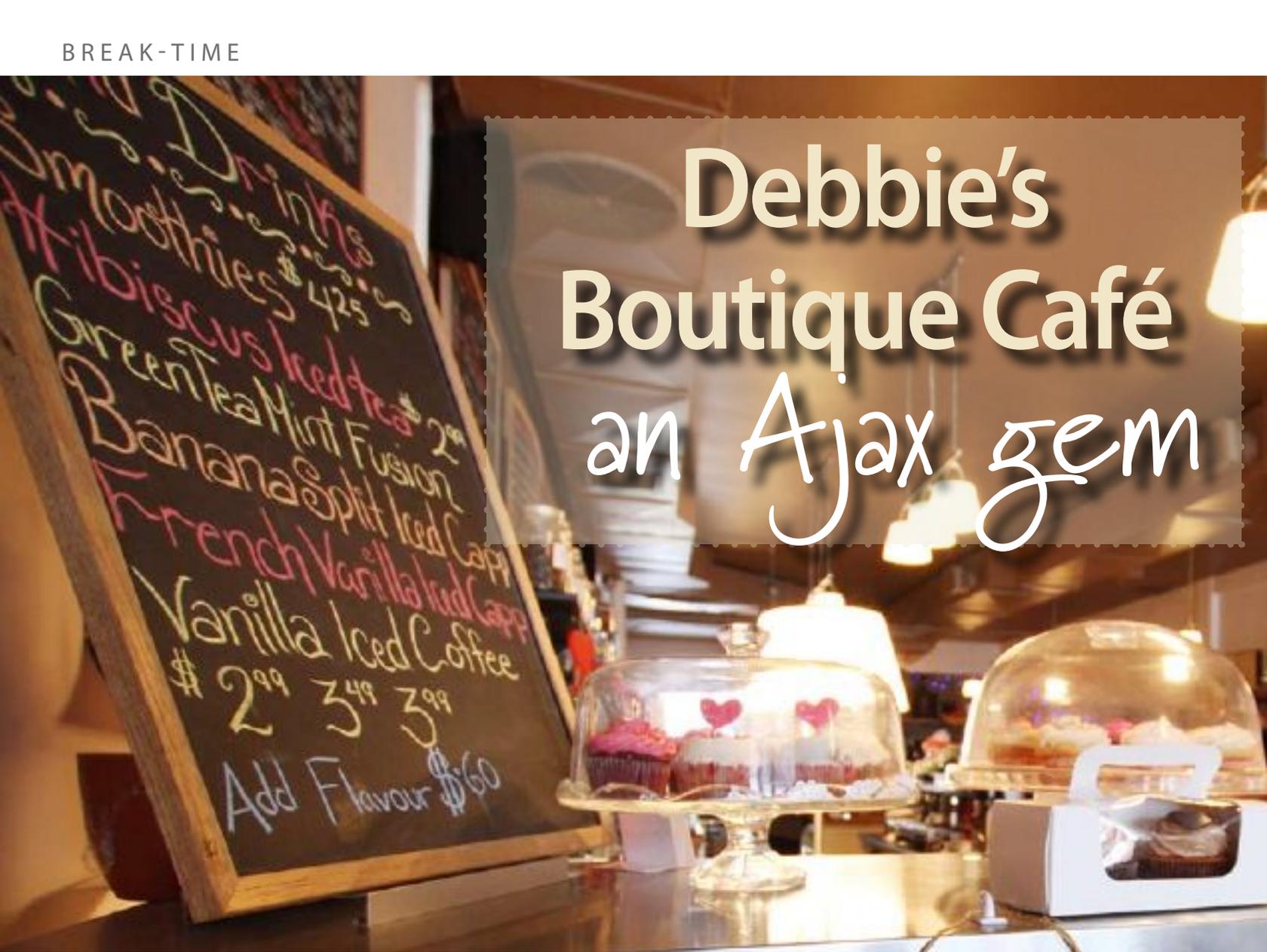


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Debbie's Boutique Café an Ajax gem

STORY BY **Deborah A. Rankine** PHOTOS BY **Jason Chow**

Debbie's Boutique Café is a gem in the heart of Ajax, featuring upscale lunch cuisine, personable service and plenty of treats to choose from.

LIVING IN SWITZERLAND NURTURES respect for natural beauty, in the land- and mountainscape, and in its wellspring of artisanal foods. Rated among the top 10 most expensive countries in which to live, Switzerland provides the perfect proving ground for creative minds to dream up ways in which to have it all without breaking the bank.

Enter Debbie Douglas-Werner, a well-travelled, well-spoken entrepreneur with a mind that sparks creative whimsy 24/7. This forward thinker knows what her clients crave. She's a seer of trends long before they come into being. And then she makes them happen.

A case in point is her latest venture, Debbie's Boutique Café—Durham's first—in Ajax, Ontario, a cosy, laidback European-inspired haunt part artisanal bakery, part art gallery, part jazz coffee house, part home décor Utopia. Suffice to say, at Debbie's, one can truly have it all... high tea, unique gifts, lunching with the ladies, pick-me-up imported chocolates, decadent desserts and a cornucopia of organic Fair Trade coffees and teas the likes of Fuzzy cloud, Durham Dazes and Hot Chocolate Delight.

Says Debbie, "I love home décor; I reinvent my home every season. In Switzerland where I used to live that became really expensive so I sewed all my own home furnishings." Deb goes on to tell me that her creations became so popular that she started selling them online at habitatdesigns.com.



Debbie Douglas-Werner, a well-travelled, well-spoken entrepreneur

net, the demand keeping her hopping day and night.

The café's boutique features a variety of Debbie's soft goods as well as other local artists' wares... handcrafted greeting cards, hats and handbags; unique gift baskets; and a fabulous collection of trendy children's ware by local seamstress artist, Rosemary Parrish. All this in addition to value-added fine Swiss chocolate sweets and Malaysian and Thai silk pillows.

The walls of the café are adorned with original works from local art gallery, Cultural Expressions, and the fine consortium of artists within Pickering's Pineridge Arts Council. The collection changes every other month and rivals anything NYC's Soho community has on offer.

Where the café truly outdoes itself is in its food and beverage service... perfectly grilled paninis, made-to-order sandwiches tethered to the specific dietary needs of those who are lactose and/or gluten intolerant. Coupled with hardy du jour house made soups, breakfast sandwiches and incredibly fresh salads the likes of perennial faves Spinach, Caesar and Summer, the café also features an Asian inspired salad of marinated chicken, shredded cabbage, carrots, scallions and radishes on a bed of romaine topped with house made Asian-Sesame dressings and sliced almonds and a Mediterranean offering



that includes vine ripened tomatoes, briny kalamatas and earthy feta. On the sweet side, Debbie's in-house bakery showcases from scratch cakes and pastries, cupcakes and tarts made with fresh, season fruits, heavy cream, buttery caramel and rich European chocolate. Beverages include lattes, cappuccinos, hot apple cider, loose leaf teas and exotic fruit smoothies.

Hard-pressed to pick just one sandwich and just one dessert to feature in this story, Debbie—ever the giver—generously offered up her two best sellers, the café's grilled Pesto Chicken Panini and signature Red Velvet Cake.

Read the recipes below, gentle reader, and you will discover as I did, that one can have one's cake and eat it too. 🍰

Debbie's Boutique Cafe
94 Harwood Avenue South
Ajax, ON
905.239.6721
www.debbiescafe.ca



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Debbie's Boutique Café's Signature Red Velvet Cake (makes 1)

Cake:

2 tablespoons Dutch processed cocoa powder

2 tablespoons red food colouring

1 cup whole (3.25MF) milk

1 tablespoon white vinegar

1 ½ cups granulated sugar

1 cup unsalted room temperature butter, divided

2 eggs

4 teaspoons pure vanilla extract, divided

2 ½ cups All purpose flour

1 teaspoon EACH baking powder and baking soda

½ tsp salt

8 ounces room temperature cream cheese

4 cups sifted icing sugar

- Preheat oven to 325°F (180°C). Grease one round cake pan 8- or 9-inch baking pan. Set aside.
- In a small bowl, stir together cocoa powder and red food colouring. Set aside.
- In another small bowl, combine milk with vinegar and allow mixture to rest for 5 minutes.
- In a separate bowl, beat together granulated sugar and ½ cup of butter until light and fluffy, then beat in eggs one at a time.
- Beat cocoa powder mixture and 1 teaspoon vanilla into butter mixture, then gently stir in dry ingredients in thirds alternating with milk mixture, scraping down bowl as you go.
- Pour batter into prepared pan and bake on centre rack in preheated oven 40 to 45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in centre of cake comes out clean. Allow cake to cool in pan for 10 minutes before removing and transferring to a wire rack to cool completely and slicing horizontally into three even layers.
- Meanwhile, beat together cream cheese and remaining butter until light and fluffy.
- Beat in icing sugar and remaining vanilla until well combined. Use icing to frost between cake layers and to cover top and side of cake. Keep cake refrigerated until ready to serve.