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Donutste donut-slays | Review

OM my Gawd, Donutste Doughnuts are pillowy, plant-based perfection.



Vegan supermodel: Donutste's Key lime pie glazed doughnut, wearing its Biscoff crumble-dehydrated lime like straight-up runway fashion. (Amy Drew Thompson/Orlando Sentinel)

By **AMY DREW THOMPSON** | amthompson@orlandosentinel.com | Orlando Sentinel
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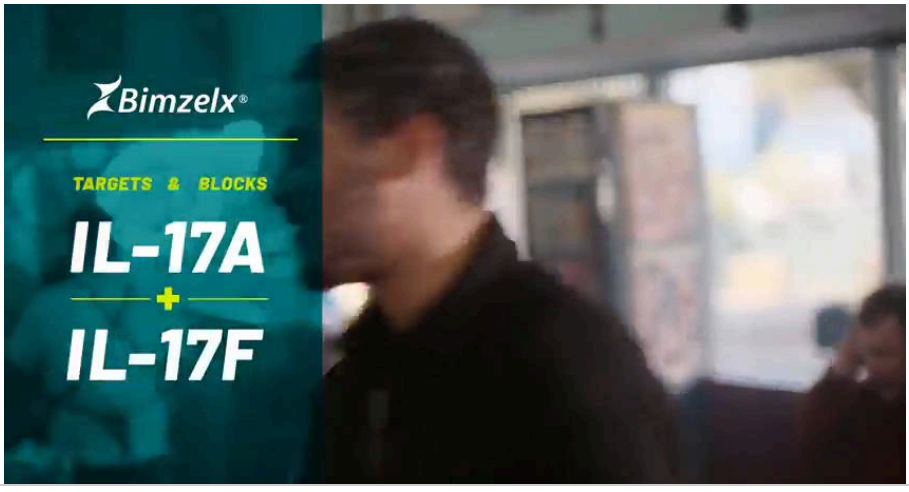
The first rule of Donutste is you may as well talk about Donutste. Because everyone else is.

I've been stalking them on Instagram for the better part of a year now, since before they took their plant-based doughnut operation — which was selling out by the hundreds at local markets around the metro — to a pre-order/pick-up business model.

For ages, these big, bodacious beauts eluded me. Because fans would buy them all before I managed to make it to the website.

And then, like torturous clockwork in the wake of each Thursday and Saturday pickup, posts on every platform would feature devout doughnut disciples, sinking their fangs into preposterous pillows stuffed with custard and laden with crumb, awash in technicolor glaze and adorned with food-fashionable accoutrements.





Vanilla creme brulee. I'm telling you, the custard game here is Capital S "Strong." (Amy Drew Thompson/Orlando Sentinel)

Oh, how I wanted one. Two. All. Whatever I could get, really.

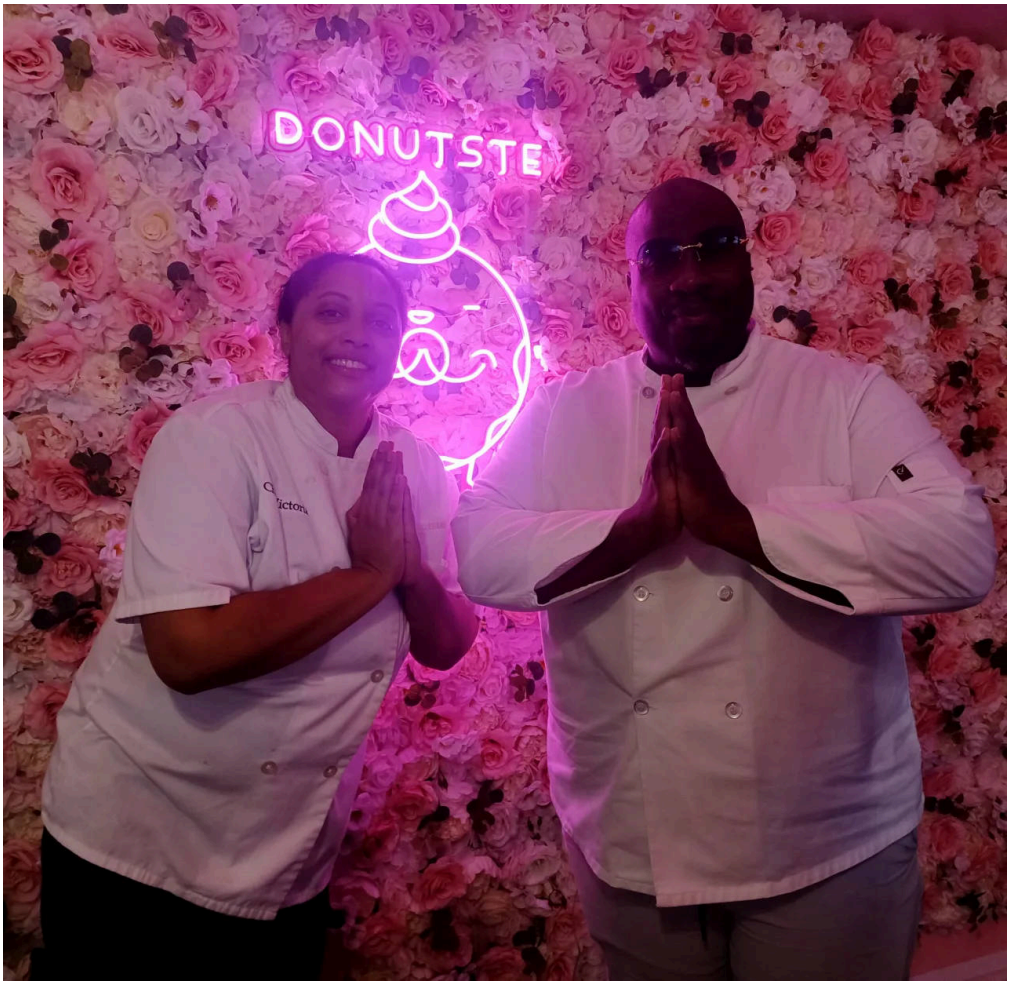
This week, it finally happened. And that's when I learned the second rule of Donutste, which is to keep the box closed when you leave the building.

Because Donutste Doughnuts, both yeast and cake, are so unbelievably light, they might actually float away.

"Wooooooow," says Jacob "Chef Shalom" Buchanan, his wife and partner, Victoria, laughing as he does so. "If you write that, you might actually change our lives."



Their doughnuts might actually change yours.



Donutste co-founders Victoria and "Chef Shalom" Buchanan at their Lake Mary cottage bakery. (Amy Drew Thompson/Orlando Sentinel)

They could become your guiltiest pleasure — plant-based does *not* mean low-calorie — but at the very least, they might morph your perception of just how decadent and spot-the-hell-on vegan food can be when it's crafted at this level.

Full disclosure: neither of the Buchanans are vegans. However, every single doughnut, cinnamon roll and croissant creation at their glowy little cottage operation is.

"I was never thinking about competing with other vegan doughnuts," he says of the process that took long weeks of experimentation in the couple's small New York kitchen. It was after the pandemic that they decided to make



The ube velvet doughnut, overstuffed with gorgeous, creamy not-too-sweet ube custard, is a revelation. Doubly so for being entirely plant-based. (Amy Drew Thompson/Orlando Sentinel)

"I was working off this craze, this emergence of large, high-end, luxury doughnuts in New York, like Dough and Doughnut Plant. I just wanted to make a great doughnut, the best doughnut, that was plant-based. It was a reverse mindset."

Later on, investors marveled that they'd never gone out and sampled vegan products in the same space.

"It was a level of patience that was unique," he says of the process. "I'm not sure I could do it again. But, I wasn't leaving that kitchen until I made something great."

This was a time before Miyoko's Butter, he points out. "Before Just Egg. Before Impossible Meat. This was before we had the slew of vegan products that any baker could go grab and enhance their product. We had to think old-school. We had to think smart. We had to think innovative. We had to think in different spectrums."



Ube cinnamon rolls are baked, not fried, and weighty with a nice balance of both flavors. (Amy Drew Thompson/Orlando Sentinel)

Speaking of, the colors in that case — that you'll see on the website's pre-order page — are spectacular. Dragonfruit pinks. Crackly caramel-brown brûlées. Ube purple as deep as the classic riff from "Smoke on the Water."

For ube fans, there's a lot to love.

The star, for me, was the ube velvet ($9), a gorgeous fluffy square packed with lavender-colored custard that peeks from its cream cheese-glazed cradle. The moisture in this (and similarly, the vanilla crème brûlée doughnut, $8.75) makes it one that will last a couple of days if you can't finish it, which is likely.

And that custard? *Damn.* This sumptuous, soy milk-based stuff (the vanilla, too) would FLY out of the grocery store in a Kozy Shack-style container.

There's a lot of anti-gravitational stuff going on here.

"This is ... Wow. This is really, *really* good."

This from a friend who an hour earlier told me she didn't like ube.

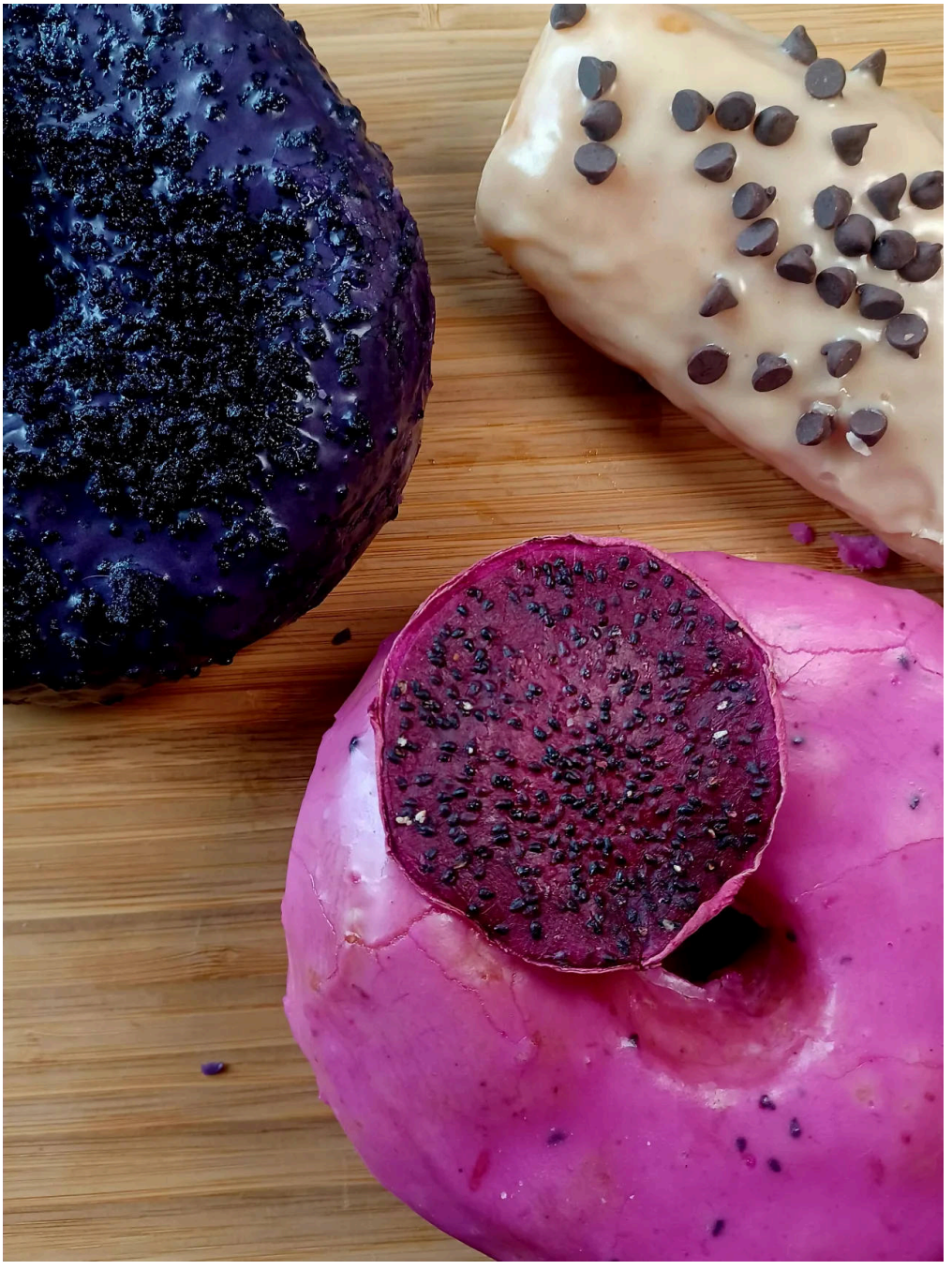


The strawberry pop tart donut draws inspiration from the aesthetic of the classic toaster pastry. (Amy Drew Thompson/Orlando Sentinel)

I sent her home with a sample platter, pieces cut from the many I had on hand. That one was my favorite. Hers was the strawberry Pop-Tart ($9), which copies the fun aesthetic of the classic toaster pastry while offering up a luxe, jelly-doughnut experience, its yeasty shell piped full of lightly chunky imported preserves.

I felt the same. That ube velvet was the perfect example. Its most sugary element, the pretty glaze on top, struck a beautiful balance with the less-sweet cake and custard, which enabled me to taste each one individually *and* together.

“Balance!” cries the self-taught Shalom, whose earlier cheffing days fell far more on the savory side of things.



“I think most bakeries, and American palates, lean sweet, sweet, sweet,” he says. “It’s rarely sweet, bitter, salty … We are deliberate about how we attack this. Let’s leave sugar out of the picture. What other elements can we include?”

Shalom tells a story of his mother’s baking skills, her study of Julia Child’s recipes, her gifts as a baker. And also that she wouldn’t teach him the ways of the yeast.

“It was almost like she was taunting me,” he says. “She told me I had to learn it on my own. I think she might have felt like it was something that couldn’t be taught. Like, you have to learn your relationship with it.”



Fritters! Gooey heritage peach below, organic blueberry-lemon on top. (Amy Drew Thompson/Orlando Sentinel)

Yeast is stubborn, he tells me.

“But now, I am a yeast whisperer.”

They’ve got their processes down, he says. Now, they can train.

Which is going to come in handy as they staff up for their impending brick-and-mortar shop in Winter Park. 1996 W. Fairbanks Avenue is the former home of Busy Bride Wedding Design. Soon, it will be part of the new Winter Park Exchange development. The building's owner, says Shalom, is in his late 90s now.

"And he is just the most amazing soul."

Redevelopment planned for old buildings along Fairbanks Avenue in Winter Park

There were many concepts vying for the space. To rent. To purchase.

"He prayed on it," Shalom tells me.

He also tried the doughnuts.

That's a spiritual experience, too, from the hefty, baked ube cinnamon rolls to the light-as-air maple miso chocolate chip bars ($8) to the heritage peach and organic wild blueberry-lemon fritters ($9 each) I've yet to try.



My editor suggested a shot for scale. So, yeah. This fritter, like many of Donutste Doughnuts' goodies, is as big as my face. (Amy Drew Thompson/Orlando Sentinel)

Okay, so I'm speculating on those, but I feel confident. And lucky. Because I snagged the last one of each. And it's pick-up time. Translation: I gotta wrap this up.

So, until the new shop opens — the Buchanans project that will happen in the next three or four months — I'll leave you with the third and final rule of

Find me on Facebook, TikTok, Twitter or Instagram @amydroo or on the OSFoodie Instagram account @orlando.foodie.
Email: amthompson@orlandosentinel.com, For more foodie fun, join the Let's Eat, Orlando Facebook group.

If you go

Donutste is open only during pick-up hours for pre-order customers only, BUT, interested parties can message the business on Instagram (iinstagram.com/donutstedoughnuts) one hour before pick-up times on Thursday and Saturday mornings to see if they've baked any extra. "We'll usually get back to you within 20 minutes," says Victoria Buchanan.

Donutste Doughnuts: 268 2nd Street in Lake Mary, donutste.com; instagram.com/donutstedoughnuts

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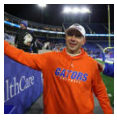

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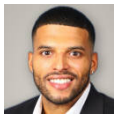

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