

Gingerbread houses incite festive spirit

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A mixture of holiday spice and sweetness wafted through the air as a delectable fog. Dr. Seuss's, "How the Grinch Stole Christmas!" played on the television in the background to enhance the festive spirit. Laughter and small talk resonated in the room as pieces of homemade gingerbread were delicately assembled into small houses and decorated.

Multitudes of Christmas traditions are passed around each year as the holiday season closes in. Assembling gingerbread houses has been one for quite some time, prompting families to enjoy their time together while also building a tasty and aesthetically-appealing treat. Often, kits are purchased from the store, complete with everything possibly needed to complete one's own gingerbread house.

For this issue's staff review, Spilled Ink decided to construct homemade gingerbread houses, beginning by baking a recipe from scratch.

The hunt for an adequate gingerbread house proved quite easy and took almost no time. With the help of a Google search and a peek at a few reviews, the choice was soon made, and it was off to the store for ingredients. At this point, the excitement began brewing, with jars of thick molasses and a hunt for holiday spices furthering the warm feeling.

As the dough was being prepared, comments flooded in from family about how good the kitchen smelled, and how they couldn't wait to taste the final product. Admittedly, some stress and underlying pressure appeared during the baking process, with a slight worry that the pieces may not have turned out looking as professional as their factory-made counterparts. When the little cookies were out of the oven and cooling, it was a proud moment to stand back and admire each carefully-measured work of art.

As far as taste goes, the staff enjoyed the recipe, finding that the gingerbread provided a great blend of spicy and sweet flavors. Some of the staff even got to try gingerbread for their first time, which proved an exciting experience for them. The fourth-of-an-inch thickness the recipe called for was also a good

move, as thin and crispy pieces of gingerbread may have made it difficult to have a structurally-sound final product.

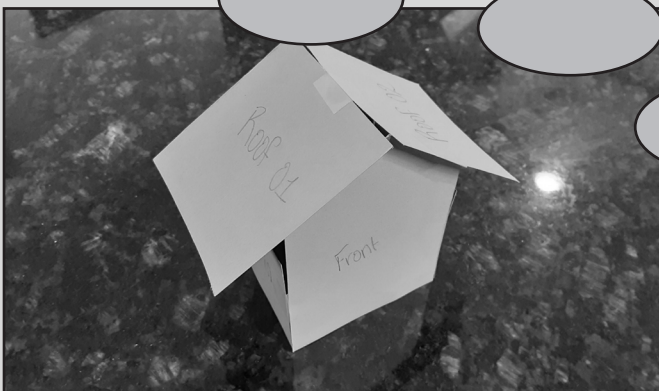
While the finished parts and the aromatic cherry on top were satisfying, the true fun came with the group assembly of each "cozy cottage." As everyone gathered around the table and set down their chosen candies, it was a fulfilling moment to hear their compliments on the cute look and delicious smell.

When the construction process began, the air in the room was instantly filled with a sense of home. Compliments were handed out to each interpretation of the assembly process, and the table was very quickly covered in the effects of creative chaos.

Multiple approaches to the basic assembly were taken, but the best involved first using basic frosting to glue pieces before going over that with melted white chocolate. The white chocolate acts as fast-drying adhesive where needed, but it is important to keep the chocolate warm to prevent it from drying and clumping. This made the houses especially sturdy, even after they were weighed down by more frosting and decorative candies.

After everyone had proclaimed themselves satisfied with the final product of their labor, the group stood back to admire the tiny village of homes. Each was different in its own respect, and may have lacked the aesthetic appeal of commercial houses, but it proved to be the experience of it all that mattered most.

From an excitement-filled trip to the store, all the way to standing back to admire the finality of a homemade gingerbread house, this festive take on a classic holiday tradition was an experience to remember.



Top left: Editor Italia Caro works to assemble her house. Top right: A paper model of a house was constructed to measure dimensions prior to baking. Bottom: The staff assembled a village with the finished houses. Photos by Rebekah De Priest and Sadie Buggle