

Pastry with Purpose

Sweet, Savory, and Seasonal Innovation



more about annie

- Leads our Concepts brand
 - sustainable event design department
 - floral
 - conceptual menus & edible styling
 - food & beverage styling
 - curated wares
 - specialty signage
 - custom fabrication
 - creative R&D
- Creativity is the perfect tool for tackling climate change



more about andrea

- Connected to ingredient sourcing and unique flavor profiles
- Personally gravitates toward desserts that aren't overly sweet
- Building out Chowgirls' pastry program beyond desserts



Chowgirls

about chowgirls

- Founded in Minneapolis in 2004 with a focus on sustainability and Triple Bottom Line of
 - People
 - Planet
 - Profit
- Scale
 - \$9 million in sales in 2025
 - 1,000 events
 - 200 employees
- Brands
 - Classic
 - Concepts
 - By-the-Box
 - Cordial





**sustainability is more than a commitment.
it's our operating system.**
— from the Chowgirls mission statement

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WHAT SUSTAINABILITY MEANS TO US

local

organic

seasonal

**fair
trade**

**bio-
diverse**

**food
rescue**

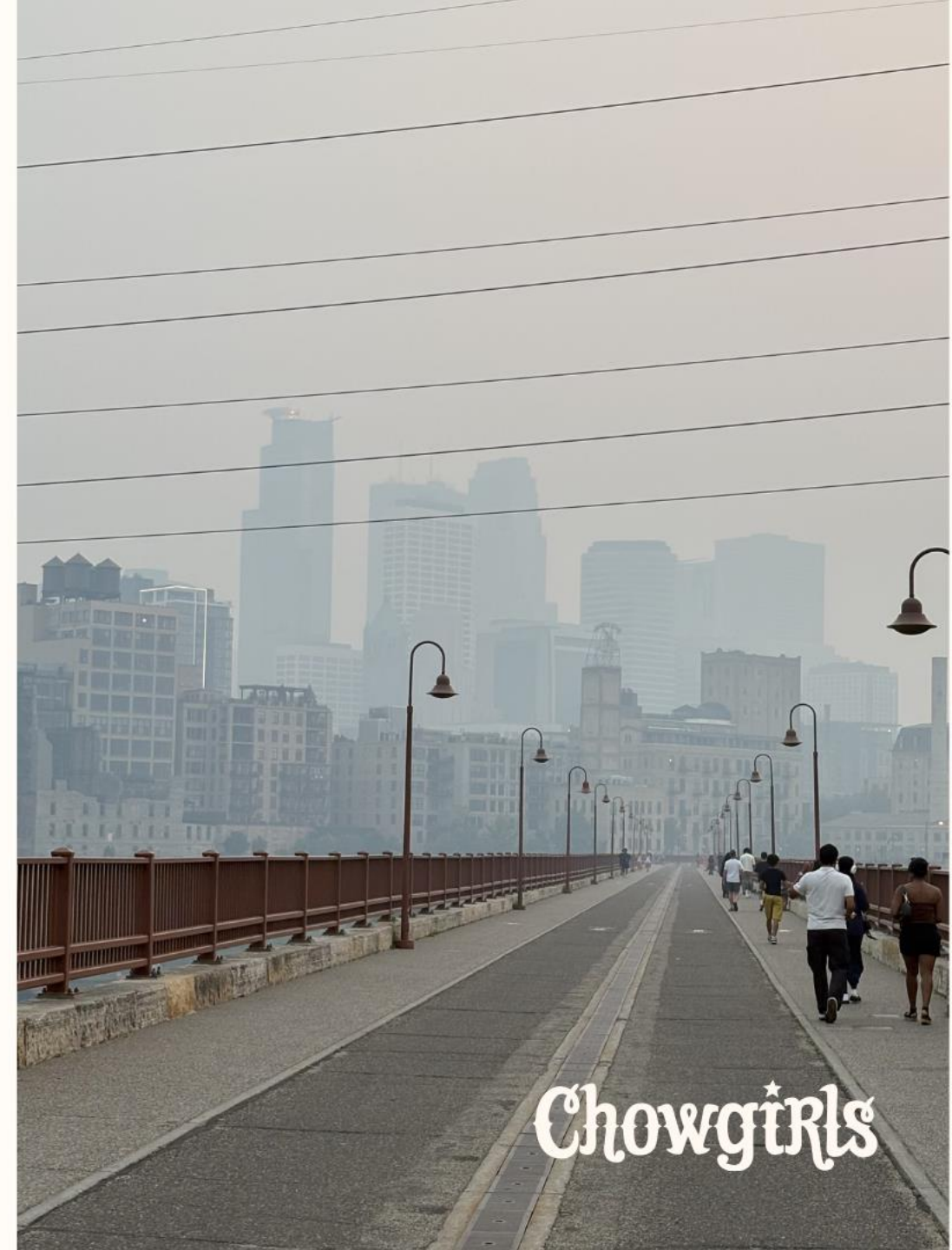
**zero-
waste**

circular



why sustainable

- Events are very wasteful
 - The average wedding in the US produces 400 lbs of trash
- Climate change's effects on events
 - extreme heat
 - air-quality alerts
 - increased ingredients costs
 - more unpredictable growing seasons
 - ingredients going extinct
- A sustainable product is a better quality product
 - more flavor
 - better visual aesthetic
 - more memorable



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A photograph of four cakes decorated with frosting, arranged on a table outdoors. The cakes are pink, white, brown, and blue. The background is a grassy field. The text "our pastry program" is overlaid in the center.

our pastry program

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our pastry program



CHOWGIRLS
Classic

our pastry program



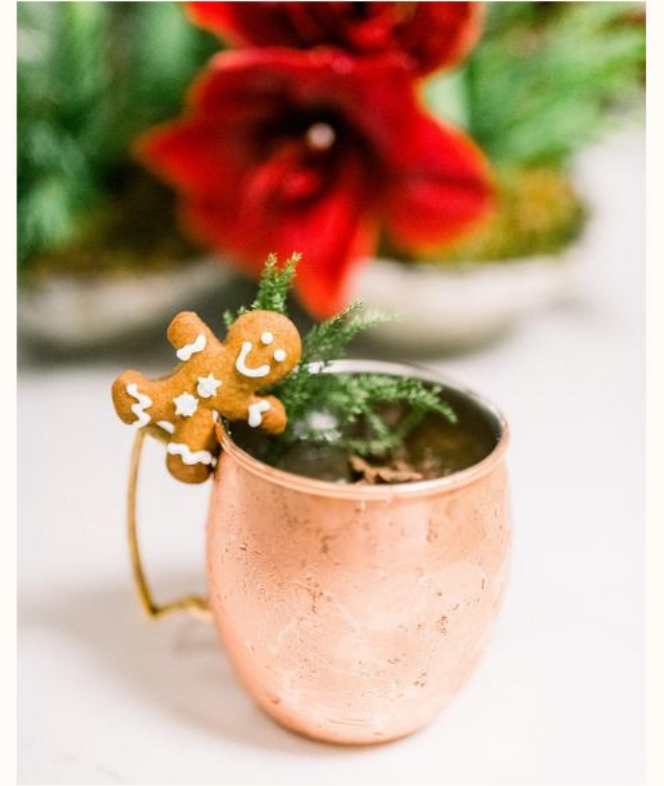
CHOWGIRLS
concepts

our pastry program



CHOWGIRLS
BY  **BOX**

our pastry program



CHOWGIRLS
cordial

creative collaboration

- Pastry is a great place to experiment with sustainable design
 - often shelf stable
 - mostly cold or room-temp foods
 - more flexibility
 - at every event
- R&D; creating safe spaces to fail



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A top-down view of a rustic wooden table set for a winter gathering. In the center, a round wooden platter holds several round cookies, some topped with a slice of blood orange. To the left, a hand in a grey knit glove holds a single blood orange slice. To the right, a hand in a black knit glove reaches for a cookie. The table is decorated with pine branches, pinecones, and a small bowl of pistachio cookies. In the bottom left, a white plate is partially visible with a green napkin. In the bottom right, two clear glasses and a gold fork are set. The background shows a snowy outdoor setting with a person wearing a brown jacket and a fur-lined hat.

savory, sweet, seasonal

why seasonal

- We support our community by sourcing from nearby farms and co-ops in Minnesota and Wisconsin
- Buying seasonally lets us prioritize fresh, organic ingredients
- Seasonal, local sourcing means less gas and refrigeration to get food from farm to plate
- The result is a lighter environmental footprint from farm to table



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MENUS



SPRING



SUMMER



FALL



WINTER

menus built around the seasons

- Clients aren't selecting specific flavors
- Instead, they trust us to choose the best ingredients of the season
- Felxible recipes
 - crumb bars
 - seasonal shortcake
 - blondies
 - scones
 - tartlets
 - macarons



seasonal sourcing challenges

- We live in a cold place where nothing grows for about half the year
- Fruit has a very short growing season
- Garnish limitations
- Lack of color in the winter



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seasonal sourcing solutions

- Leaning into veggie-forward sweets when fruit is unavailable
 - squash ganache
 - pear parsnip cake
 - beet berry crisp
- Preservation
 - freezing
 - jams & jellies
 - pickling
 - drying garnishes
- Baked items allow for more flexibility
- Incorporating unexpected flavors — maple syrup is fresh in March



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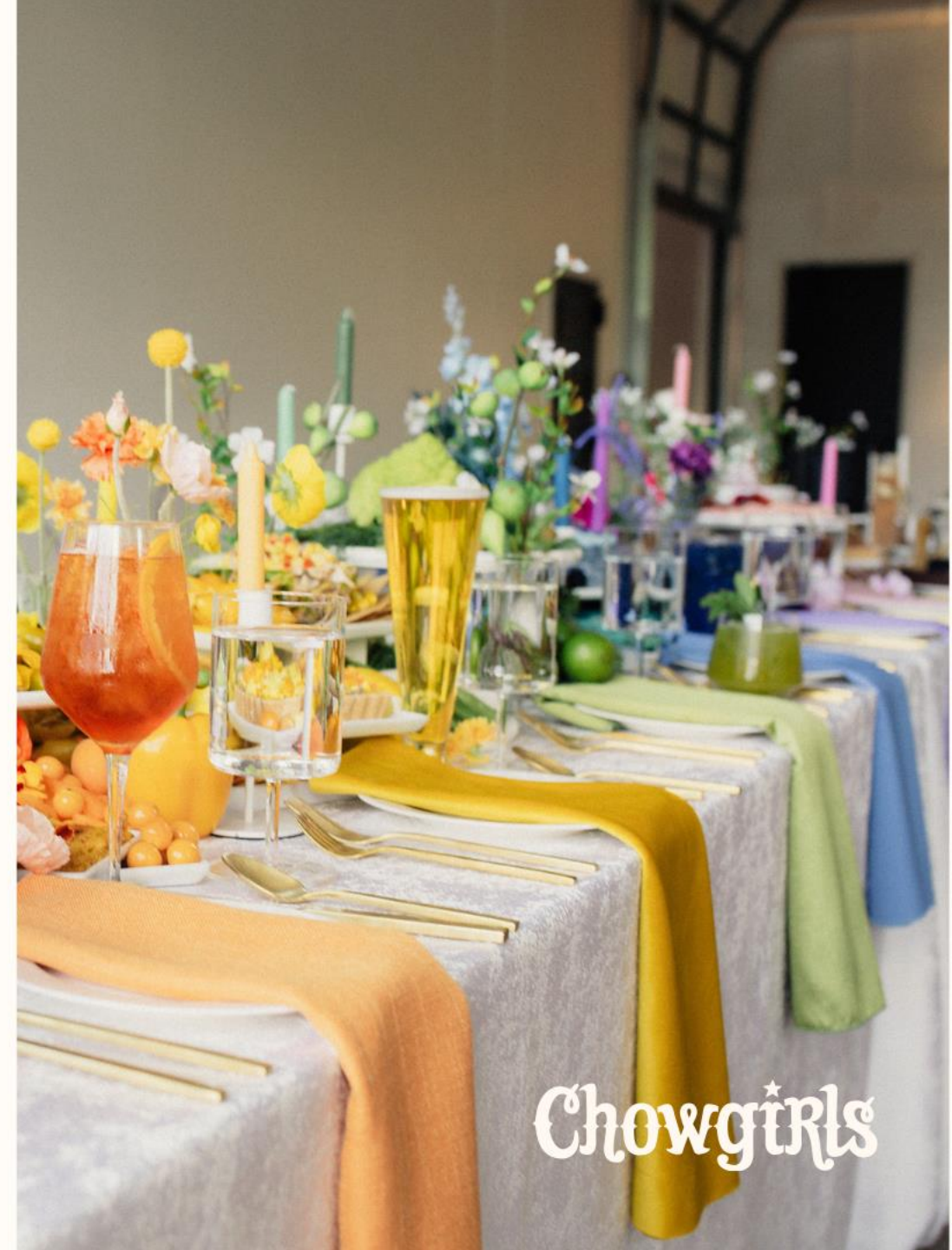
A long table is elegantly set for a meal, featuring a white tablecloth and a variety of colorful floral centerpieces. The table is flanked by clear acrylic chairs. The place settings include white plates, gold cutlery, and folded napkins in shades of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The centerpieces are composed of fresh flowers, fruits, and greenery, creating a vibrant and sophisticated atmosphere.

color without compromise

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why synthetic dye-free

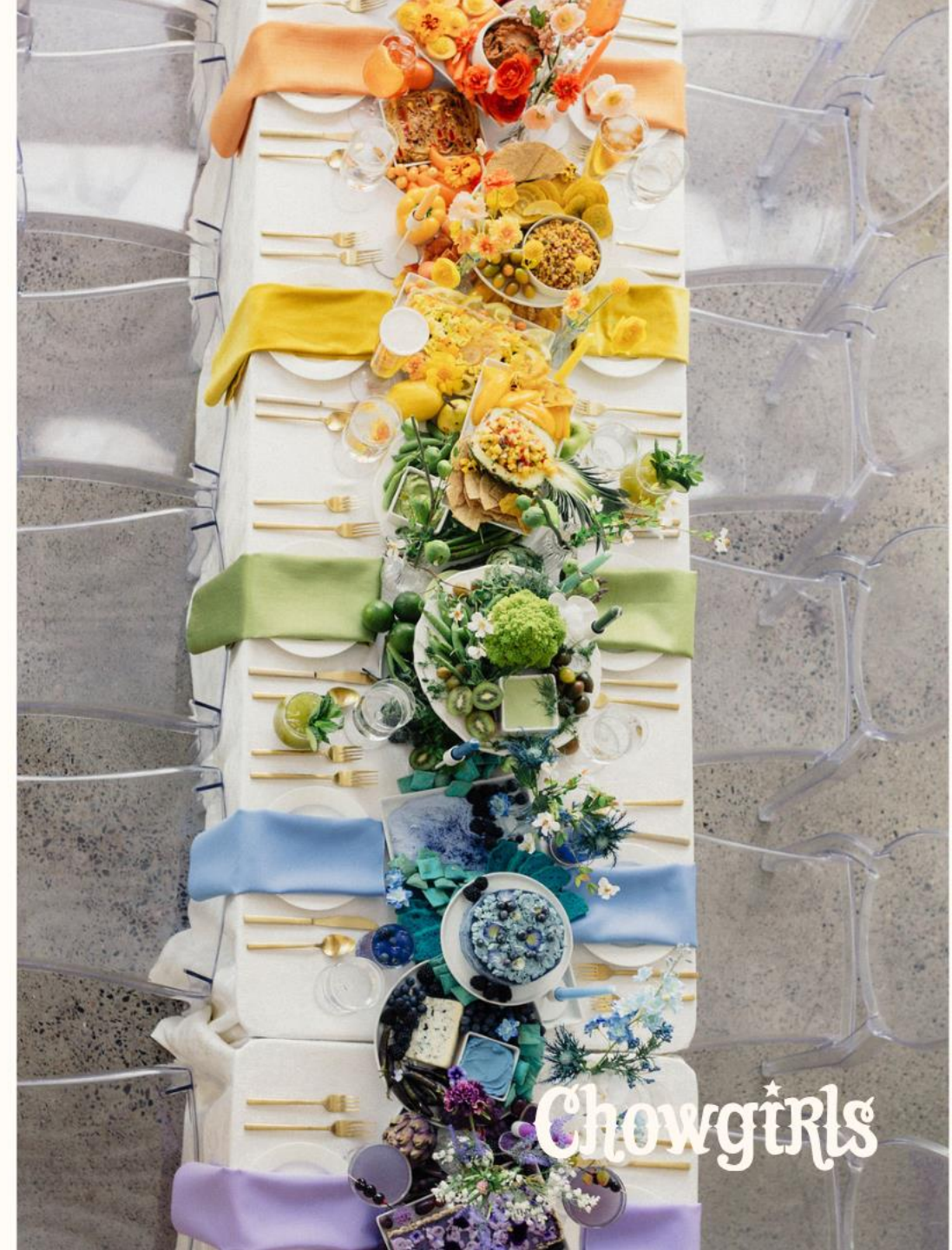
- It's a fun creative challenge!
- Synthetic dyes are petroleum-derived
- FDA revoked Red No. 3 in 2025; the rest are phasing out soon
- Several states now restrict dyes, especially in schools (CA, VA, UT)
- Big brands are already reformulating



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dye-free approach

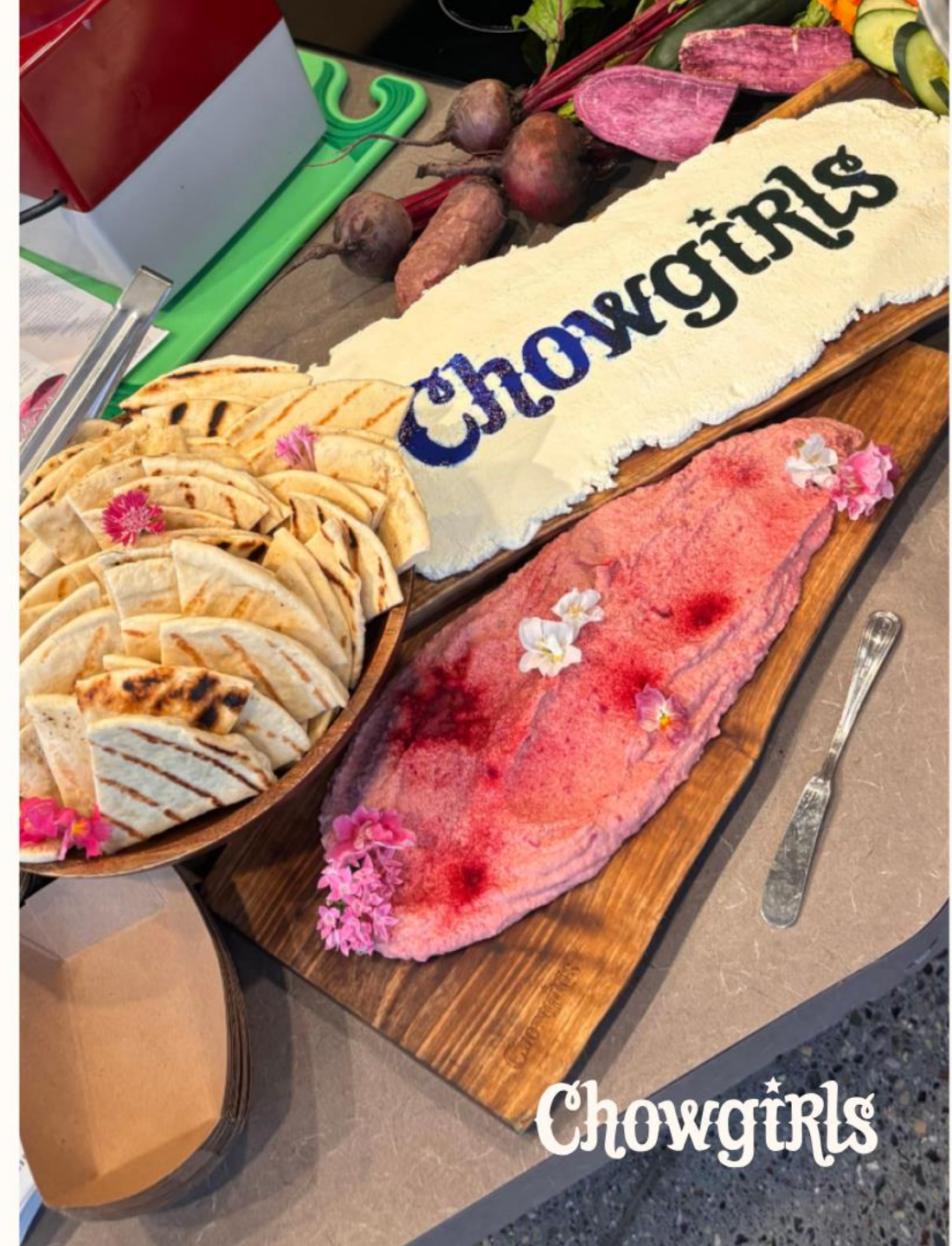
- Trying to be synthetic dye-free when possible
- Making sure the food is as flavorful as it is colorful
- We will use dye as a last approach
- Using food waste as dye



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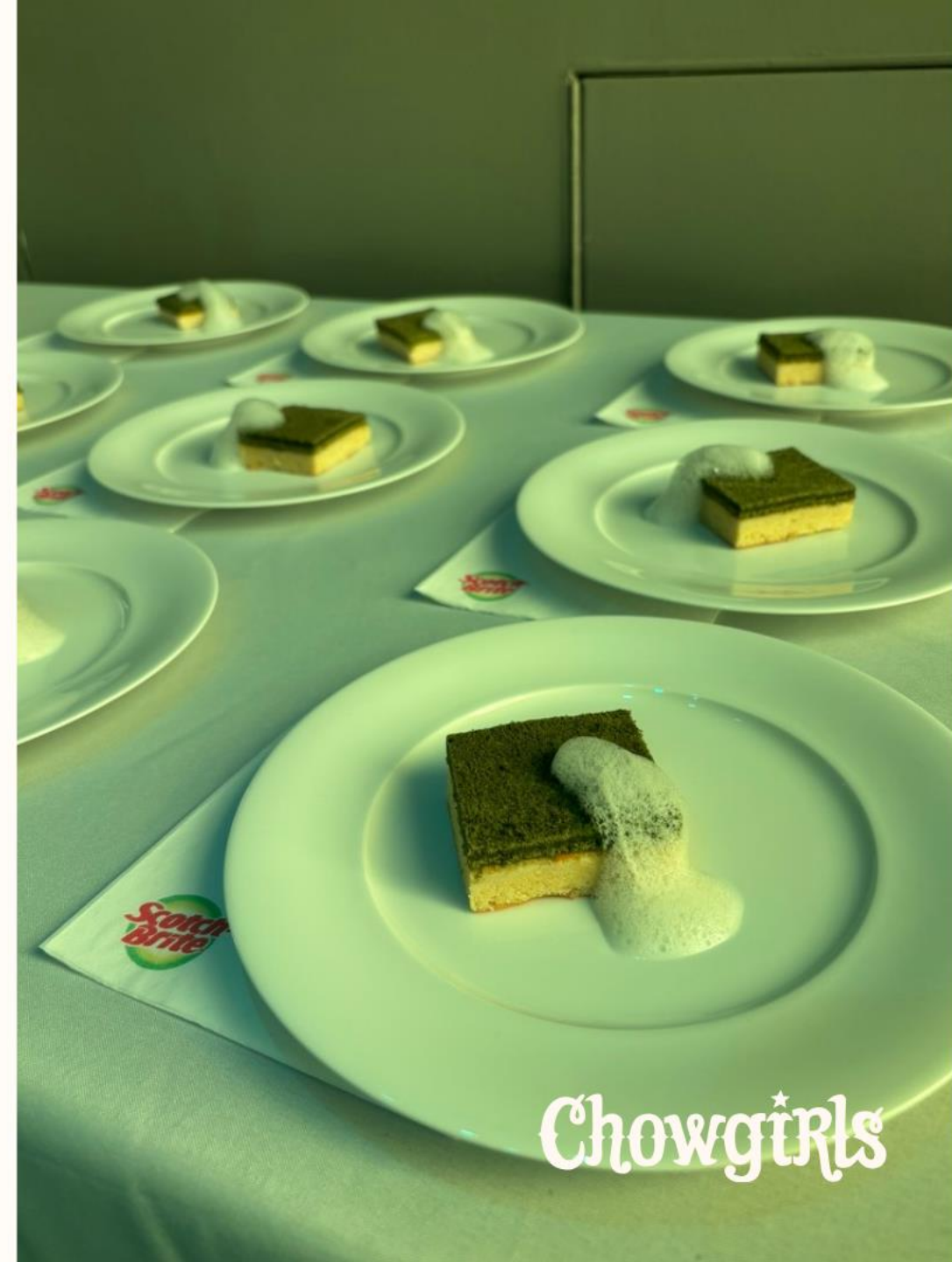
dye-free challenges

- Science!
- Natural dyes change more in baking
- Ingredient reactions
 - example: butterfly pea flower + lemon = purple
- Altering the flavor
 - example: turmeric works great as yellow dye, but can't be used for yellow macarons because it alters the flavor
 - green spirulina with garlic is great!
 - green spirulina with vanilla gets weird



dye-free solutions

- Creativity!
- Instead of leaning on dye, choosing ingredients that are naturally colorful
 - example: Scotch Brite brand party — we recreated a sponge with no dye
- Understanding what's most important to the client
 - purple cookie or purple in general
- Partial dye — helping reduce dye usage
- R&D — taking a look at a few things we've tried



red

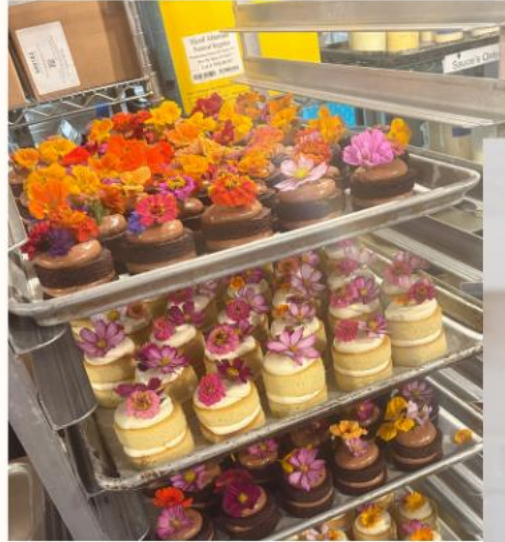
- Red pepper purée
- Raspberry powder
- Beets or powder
- Red yeast powder
- Cranberries
- Hibiscus concentrate
- Red garnish
- Paprika
- Tomato purée



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orange

- Carrots
- Red pepper
- Paprika
- Onion skins for savory bakes



yellow

- Cornmeal
- Egg yolks
- Turmeric
- Carrot
- Squash
- Curry powder
- Saffron



green

- Matcha
- Green spirulina
- Pandan
- Pistachio
- Herbs



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blue

- Blue spirulina
- Butterfly pea flower
- Purple cabbage
- Bachelor buttons



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purple

- Blue spirulina + beet powder or raspberry powder
- Ube
- Butterfly pea flower with acid
- Purple sweet potato
- Purple cornmeal
- Blueberry
- Blackberry



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pink

- Raspberry powder
- Strawberry powder
- Beet purée
- Beet powder
- Rhubarb
- Hibiscus



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black

- Black cocoa powder
- Black salt
- Char
- Activated charcoal
- Blackberry
- Black olive



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innovative experimentation

The Power of R&D

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our r&d approach

- Owned by Event Design department
- A lot of this happens at real events!
- Testing in the kitchen as well
- Marketing events are a great place to experiment with lower stakes
- Involving other departments in R&D builds understanding



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progress over perfection

- Better is better!
- We still use dye when we need to
- We'll do chocolate-dipped strawberries out of season for a holiday party if a client is set on it
- We're continuing to learn and improve, and push the boundaries of what pastry can be

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collaboration is key

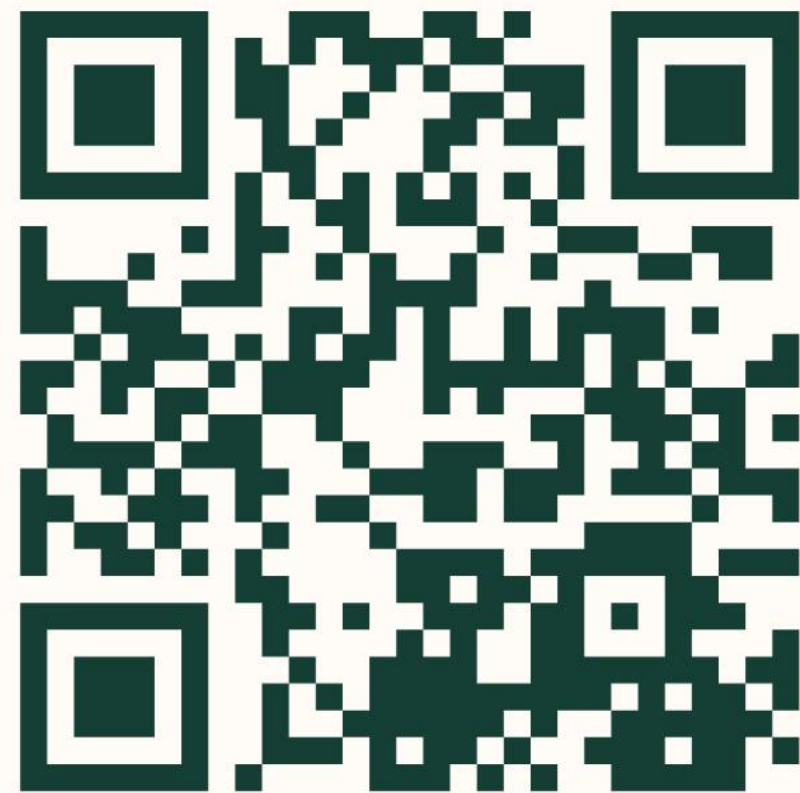
- We feed off each other's ideas!
- Event Design team seeing what pastry creates and then modifying the design
- Pastry creating something for a photo shoot and then modifying to scale for real event

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thank you!



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