

The Little French Bakery Cookbook

SWEET & SAVORY RECIPES AND TALES FROM A
PASTRY CHEF AND HER COOKING SCHOOL

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Chapter Five

PASTRIES





Story: March to the Poubelle

My first course, *Pâtisserie de Base* or Basic Pastry, was in the intensive format, meaning we took three to four classes each day instead of one. It condensed twelve to fourteen weeks of curriculum to just three. It truly was intense. We would be in the lecture room then immediately run downstairs to the kitchen to prepare at least one or all of the recipes the chef had just demonstrated, and then back to the classroom. The days started at 8:00 am, and went until 8:00 pm. Some days included a free time block to run an errand, or in our case to do a little shopping and/or eating. Both activities were highly encouraged. After all, how else were we to learn what great pastries looked and tasted like?

The chefs at Le Cordon Bleu worked a French workweek (35 hours), so we had to have a combination of chefs to cover our long days. Our main pastry chef instructor was off for the evening and bid us farewell. His replacement, who happened to be a Cuisine program chef, was going to oversee our kitchen preparations. All the chefs were very distinguished and impeccably dressed. Our new babysitter chef was even more so. He exuded an air of confidence and importance that had us more nervous than usual. Add to this, the rumor that cuisine chefs have little time

for pastry chefs, (too much weighing and measuring) let alone pastry students in their *first* course.

It was early in the course, and we had seen pastry cream prepared, and made it ... once. The chef suggested we divide the main recipe and each make a component as if we were working together in a restaurant. One or two people would make a sponge cake, another the mousse, and another the *crème pâtissière*. This sounded very reasonable. We quickly divided the duties between the members of our small group, carefully increasing the amounts so each of us would have the perfect amount for our individual dessert.

We carefully completed our *mise en place* (gathered our ingredients) and went to work. Our Chef walked about the room watching us, and helping with any questions and offering help with locations of ingredients. We had the feeling there were about a million other places he'd rather be, and he had more or less drawn the short straw to teach late that night. Every time he passed by my work station, I got a whiff of his amazing cologne and a stern glance that made me even more nervous. My French was caveman at best, so as he'd pass by, I'd muster a "bonjour Chef" and offer a nice Wisconsin smile. He smiled back, but looked like he had just tasted something sour.

My contribution to our group was the pastry cream. We needed four times the recipe for four students so I had to separate sixteen eggs. It went fine. No broken yolks, and no spills. I gathered the milk, sugar, flour, cornstarch and eggs and headed over to the stove. I combined the ingredients in the order and technique from my notes and memory. Or so I thought. I stood at the cooktop stirring and stirring, smiling away at the Chef as he approached. He stood beside me, and watched me stir. I had nothing to contribute to a conversation so I kept stirring and nervously smiling. Finally, he broke the silence with "Qu'est ce que c'est?" I'm sure I looked at him with a blank, panicked stare. "Qu'est-ce que tu fais?" (what are you making?), he asked. I thought to myself, what is wrong with him? Surely he's seen someone make pastry cream before. "Crème pâtissière, Chef", I said, hoping that he'd move on. But no. Then came the moment. The belly flop in front of your swimming class moment. In one motion, he flicked his head up and to the

side, made THE tisk sound, and picked up my saucepan. “Suivez-moi”, he said. I looked behind me where my classmates stood paralyzed watching and hoping one could translate. “He wants you to follow him”, one piped up. So off we went from one end of the kitchen to the other. It felt like the distance of a football field, but it was really about fifty feet. I was about three steps behind, wondering where could we be going. We arrived at our destination, a gleaming stand holding a perfectly attached garbage bag. Why couldn’t we just use the garbage can at our end of the room? He stepped on the foot pedal with his gorgeous French, perhaps Italian shoes and up went the lid. He stretched out his arms, lifted the pan over his head and slowly dumped the gooey, wallpaper paste mess from the pan into the garbage. My pastry cream was poubelle. Garbage.

“Répéter,” he said as he put the pan in a nearby sink. I made the walk of shame back to my workstation. My friends were pale, very sympathetic and trying not to make eye contact. They had busied themselves with things to do that required crouching behind the workstation on the other side. I willed myself not cry. After all, he didn’t yell and scream. But now what? I had no idea what I had done wrong.

“Je vais vous aider à faire de la crème pâtissière”, he said. I will help you make pastry cream. I gathered a new set of ingredients. He stood beside the entire time. Part of me wanted to crawl in a hole, and the other part felt like I had a pro at my side who wasn’t going to let me screw this up again.

We went to the stove together. I don’t know what I did wrong the first time and never will. The second batch required very little time at the stove. “Aller vite,” go fast, he said, motioning with his arms so I knew just how fast to go. Our pastry cream was perfect. He held the plastic wrap-lined pan as I plopped the rich, dreamy vanilla custard into the pan. “Vous avez fait un bon travail ce moment.” You did a good job that time. No hugs and back slaps, but a slight warmth in his eyes to let me know it was okay.

To this day, I think of him every time I make pastry cream. It’s not good, it’s great, and I have him to thank. Merci beaucoup, Chef.

While I can’t stand beside you, I can walk you through the steps of making crème pâtissière. Perfect pastry cream.



CRÈME PÂTISSIÈRE (PASTRY CREAM)

Ingredients:

1 liter milk (whole or 2%)	250 grams sugar (1 $\frac{1}{3}$ cups), divided
1 vanilla bean, seeds scraped (see Chapter 1)	60 gm all-purpose flour ($\frac{2}{3}$ cups)
8 egg yolks from large-sized eggs	60 gm cornstarch (6Tbsp + 1 tsp)

1. Line a 13 x 9 inch baking pan with plastic wrap. Make sure the ends of the wrap extend at least eight to ten inches past the ends of the pan. Set aside. Be sure you have a space for the pan in your refrigerator. The bottom of the refrigerator is best since it's the coolest. Be sure it's not too close to any perishable items such as mayonnaise.
2. Pour the milk and one half of the sugar into a large sauce pan. Add the vanilla seeds and pod. Heat the milk mixture to a low simmer. There should be steam and small bubbles. Using a skimmer or spatula, remove the vanilla bean pod from the milk.
3. While the milk is heating, place the egg yolks in a medium/large bowl. Whisk to loosen. While gently whisking, add the remaining half of the sugar.
4. Whisk until thoroughly combined. Whisk in the flour and cornstarch until combined. The mixture will be stiff.
5. Make sure the pastry cream has your undivided attention. Have your lined pan within reach. This is the grand finale!
6. At the stove, carefully pour one third of the milk into the bowl containing the egg mixture. Whisk/stir well to loosen. Return the saucepan to the heat. Heat briefly to a rolling simmer. Pour the milk/egg mixture from the bowl into the saucepan whisking constantly and very quickly taking care to whisk in the bottom corners of the pan. The mixture will quickly become pastry cream.
7. Whisk over heat just until you see a large bubble "plop" up to the surface. Whisk as you pour the cream into the plastic-lined pan.
8. Cover the pastry cream with the plastic wrap which is extending over the ends of the pan. Place in the refrigerator for at least three hours, or until cool throughout.

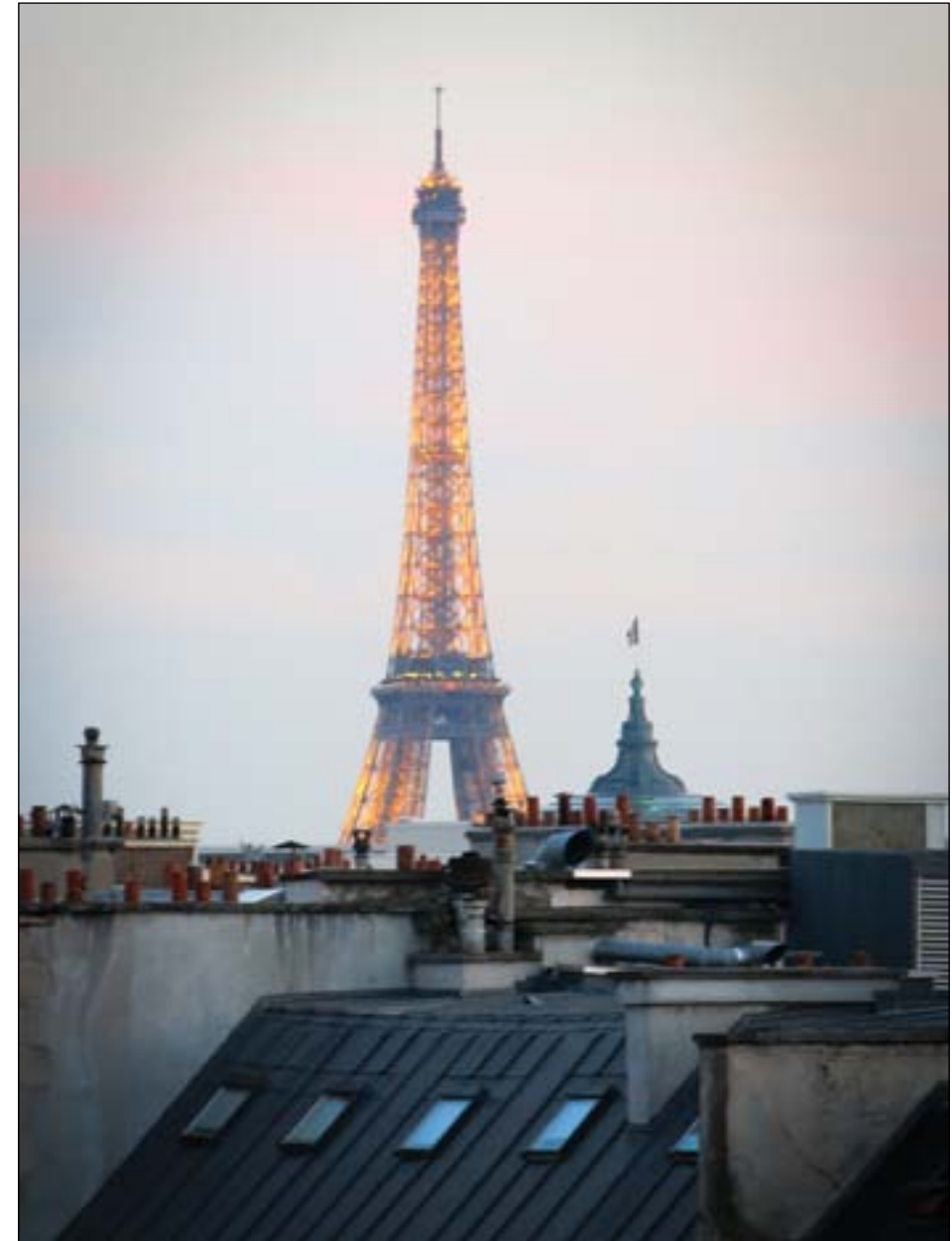
Olive and Dexter

Shortly after I started teaching cooking classes, I added birthday party classes for small bakers. Most of the younger children don't bake in class. Instead we decorate small cakes together. Each child decorates a two layer six inch cake. I decorate a big cake for the treat after class. The little six inch cakes are filled with icing, stacked together, frosted, decorated more, then placed carefully onto a cake board with a fancy doily then into a real cake box tied with a bow.

Some of my little cake decorators are now high school graduates, college graduates, and are even brides and grooms. Each party has fond memories.

One of my parties didn't involve cake. Meet Olive. She was turning ten years old and didn't have an interest in decorating cakes. She wanted to bake. Not just anything, she wanted to make real French pastries. Her mom and I discussed options and passed a few ideas past Olive. Eclairs were a hit. The day of the party arrived. Olive and her friends were bright, happy as could be, and adorable. Trailing behind with his dad was Dexter, Olive's little brother. The plan was to have Dexter and his dad go off on an adventure while the girls and mom baked and celebrated the big day. Dexter soon learned of his imminent departure and had other ideas in mind. He quickly dissolved into tears. Weepy to be exact; begging to stay. My heart was melting. The adults were making eye contact trying to think of a plan. Wanting to keep Olive's party little-brother-free, and feeling his pain, I made the proposal. What if Dexter stays and works as my helper? He won't bake with the girls, but he'll stand beside me and help me. Olive seemed okay with the idea, and Dexter was all in. We all put on our aprons including four year old Dexter. As I explained how to make *pâté à choux*, whipped cream and pastry cream to the girls, Dexter stood at my side holding spoons, spatulas, and beaming as my class assistant. The pastries were beautiful. The party was a great success. A few days later an envelope arrived in the mail.

It was a note from Dexter in his best four year old penmanship. It was many years ago, and I still have his note. We had a great day, and I know I'll remember the day, and I hope he and Olive to do too. Make your own party with some delicious eclairs!





PÂTÉ À CHOUX

Makes about 24 4-5 inch eclair shells

Ingredients:

250 grams water (1 cup)	5 grams salt (1 tsp.)
100 gram butter, cut into pieces (1 stick minus 1 Tbsp.)	150 grams all-purpose flour (1½ cups)
20 grams sugar (1⅔ Tbsp.)	4 large eggs

1. Preheat your oven to 375 degrees F.
2. In a medium saucepan, add the water, butter, salt and sugar. Heat until the butter melts and the water is steamy and at or just about to boil.
3. Turn off the heat for a moment, and add the flour all at once. Place the pan back over low heat. With a wooden spoon (or similar spoon), stir quickly to combine. The mixture will pull completely away from the sides of the pan and looks a lot like mashed potatoes. Continue stirring until a film of dough appears on the bottom of the pan, about 2-3 minutes.
4. Transfer the dough to a mixing bowl. Stir in one egg at a time. Be sure to incorporate the eggs completely before adding another. Stir until the mixture is smooth and glossy. Be careful not to add all the eggs. You may not need all four. The choux should slowly fall from the spoon, similar to thick lava.

Tip! If you stick your index finger in the dough, swirl it around and pull it out, the dough should look like a bird's beak off the end of your finger. Most of the time, I only need to add three to three and a half eggs.

5. Transfer the choux paste to a piping bag fitted with a ½ inch open tip. Line a baking sheet with a silicone mat or parchment paper. Using a ruler or pencil as a guide, pipe ½ – ¾ inch wide by 4 inch long lines of choux paste.
6. When all the dough has been piped, whisk the remaining egg and brush on the dough. Be very careful not to let the egg drip over the edge of the dough and onto the baking sheet. This may keep the dough from fully puffing in the oven.
7. Then, dip a fork in a cup of water and run the back of the tines gently lengthwise down the dough.

8. Place the baking sheet in the oven and bake for 20-25 minutes until the pastry is golden brown. The creases in the pastry should also be golden brown. If under-baked, the puffs can collapse, or be wet and doughy on the inside.
9. Remove the pastry from the oven and immediately transfer to a wire rack to cool. If you are planning to make eclairs, poke the bottom of the pastry with the end of a clean small paint brush, or skewer in two places, about $\frac{1}{3}$ from each end.
10. When cool, fill a pastry bag fitted with a narrow tip. Insert the tip into the holes you made in the bottom and gently fill with cream. Don't overfill. You should just feel a change in the weight of the pastry. Place the pastry back on the wire rack until ready to dip.
11. Prepare the chocolate glaze. Hold the eclair on the side, and press the top into the chocolate. Lift from the chocolate, still upside down, wiping against the edge of the bowl to catch any excess. Carefully turn the eclair over and place in a paper pastry cup or onto a serving platter. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Serve well chilled.

STRAWBERRY OR RASPBERRY MOUSSE CAKE (CHARLOTTE)

Makes one Charlotte

Ingredients:

One recipe Ladyfinger Sponge cake	4-5 gelatin leaves (3 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp powdered gelatin)
300 gm frozen fruit puree	
30 gm lemon juice	450 gm heavy cream (1 pint)
100 gm sugar ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) –or to taste	Fresh berries for garnish

1. Place the gelatin leaves in cold water to soften. If using powdered gelatin, dissolve in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cold water.
2. Whip the cream to medium peaks and place in the refrigerator.
3. Prepare the ladyfinger sponge cake as in the Chocolate Caramel Mousse recipe.
4. In a saucepan, place $\frac{1}{2}$ of the fruit puree, lemon juice and sugar.
3. Heat until the sugar and puree has melted. Squeeze the water from the gelatin leaves and place in the warm mixture. If using powdered gelatin, add the dissolved gelatin & water to the saucepan.
4. Mix well to melt and incorporate the gelatin throughout the mixture. Cool slightly.
5. Place the remaining cold puree in a large bowl. Mash with a fork to break up any large frozen pieces.
6. Add the warm puree mixture to the cold and mix. The mixture should begin to thicken. Allow the mixture to continue to cool (but don't place in refrigerator), until thickened to the texture of loose pudding.
7. Fold in $\frac{1}{3}$ of the whipped cream to lighten the mixture. Continue adding and folding in the whipped cream until for mousse is well combined.
8. Spoon the mousse into the ladyfinger ring. Add a layer of sponge trimmings or a disk of sponge cake to help fill the middle, then fill to the top with the remaining mousse. Smooth with an offset spatula. Or, spoon into small dessert bowls. Garnish with fresh fruit. Place in refrigerator until ready to serve, or two hours. This will allow the gelatin to completely set the mousse.



MADELEINES

Madeleines instantly take me to Paris. The ingredients are simple and combine to make this sweet little cake. Left open to the air, they'll become crunchy and more like a cookie. I believe the second bite is always the best. Many cafes in France serve a petit madeleine beside your demitasse cup. The waiters at Restaurant Benoit have been known to appear at the end of a meal with a pan of freshly made madeleines. A sweet treat from the kitchen. Look for madeleine pans at your favorite kitchen supply shop.

Makes 24 large or 48 small madeleines

Ingredients:

200 g butter (14 Tbsp), plus some for buttering the madeleine pans	1 pinch salt
4 large eggs	10 g honey (½ Tbsp)
170 g granulated sugar (¾ cup plus 2 Tbsp)	5 g baking powder (1 tsp)
	180 g flour (1 ¾ cup plus 1 Tbsp)
	Confectioners' Sugar for dusting

1. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees F. With a pastry brush, brush the pan with softened butter; just in the recessed parts where the madeleines will be. Dust with flour, and tap out any extra.
2. In a clear container, melt the butter and allow to rest until the solids have settled to the bottom.
3. Whisk the sugar and eggs together for at least five minutes, until they are light and pale yellow.
4. Add the salt and honey.
5. Fold in baking powder and flour.
6. Carefully pour in the butter, keeping the milk solids back. Fold to combine.
7. Place the bowl in the refrigerator for about twenty minutes to firm the batter.
8. When the batter is cool, spoon it into a pastry bag fitted with a 1/2 inch open tip. If you don't have one, you can use a plastic zippered bag, with



one corner snipped off. Pipe a strip of batter down the center 1/3 of each indentation.

9. Place in the oven and bake for 6-8 minutes or until puffed and golden brown. The madeleines should spring back when lightly touched.
10. Remove the pans(s) from the oven, and immediately rap the edge of the pan on the work surface to knock the cakes from the pan.
11. Transfer them to a cooling rack. If desired, top with sifted confectioners's sugar when cool.



SALTED CARAMEL APPLE CHEESECAKE TART

Serves 8-10

When the weather turns cool and fall is in the air, there's nothing better than caramel and apples. Paired with cheesecake and a crunchy graham crust, you'll have just the dessert for an autumn dinner or pumpkin carving party.

For the crust:

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| 1 pkg graham crackers (about 12 full crackers) crushed into crumbs | ¼ tsp salt |
| 3 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted | ½ tsp vanilla extract |
| | ¼ cup granulated sugar |

For the cheesecake filling:

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|---|--|
| 1 pound cream cheese (any assortment of full or low fat), at room temperature | 1 large egg yolk |
| 1 cup granulated sugar (192 gm) | 2 Tbsp heavy cream or sour cream |
| 1 tsp vanilla extract | 1-2 Golden Delicious or Granny Smith apples |
| 1 Tbsp all-purpose flour | 1-2 Tbsp granulated sugar (for sprinkling on the apples) |
| ½ tsp salt | a few dashes of cinnamon |

For the caramel layer:

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|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 ½ cups granulated sugar (288 gm) | ½ cup granulated sugar (96 gm) |
| ½ cup water | 2 Tbsp unsalted butter |
| 1 cup heavy cream | Sea salt flakes for garnish |

1. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees F. Line an 8 inch round cake pan lined with foil. The foil should extend slightly over the edge of the pan. Spray the foil with cooking spray or lightly oil.
2. Mix all the crust ingredients together until they feel like wet sand. Press into the bottom of the cake pan. Bake for 10 minutes, remove and cool while you prepare the filling. Keep your oven on.
3. With a mixer, beat the cream cheese to loosen, then add the sugar. Beat until smooth. Be sure to scrape the bowl to combine well.
4. Add the eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Add the cream, salt, flour and vanilla and beat. Pour the cheesecake mixture onto the crust.
5. Peel and core the apple. Cut the apple in half top to bottom, then make thin slices (vertically is easiest). Try to make the slices all one thickness if you can. Layer the slices on top of the cheesecake in two concentric rings. Sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon.
6. Place in the oven and bake for 15 minutes. Reduce the oven heat to 300 degrees and bake for an additional 15 minutes or until the cheesecake feels firm to the touch. If apples begin to brown too much, cover the pan with foil.
7. Remove from the oven, to a cooling rack while you prepare the caramel.
8. In a deep saucepan, add the water and the sugar. Heat over medium/high heat. At the same time, in another saucepan, heat the cream and 1/2 cup sugar to a simmer.
9. Continue cooking the sugar and water mixture without stirring until the mixture is a medium amber caramel color. Carefully pour the cream mixture into the caramel. Add the cream with caution. The mixture will bubble, sputter and steam. Stir gently to dissolve any caramel bits. When the bubbling has subsided, transfer the caramel into a heat proof bowl. Stir in the butter one tablespoon at a time.
10. Pour the caramel onto the apples in a thin layer. You will not use all the caramel. Reserve some for drizzling at the table. Allow the dessert to cool completely. Lift the tart from the pan using the foil to lift. Gently peel the foil away from the sides and slide a plate under the crust.
11. When ready to serve, sprinkle with sea salt flakes. Store the cheesecake in the refrigerator.