

FRENCH CUISINE

DIVINE DISHES

MAY 2021

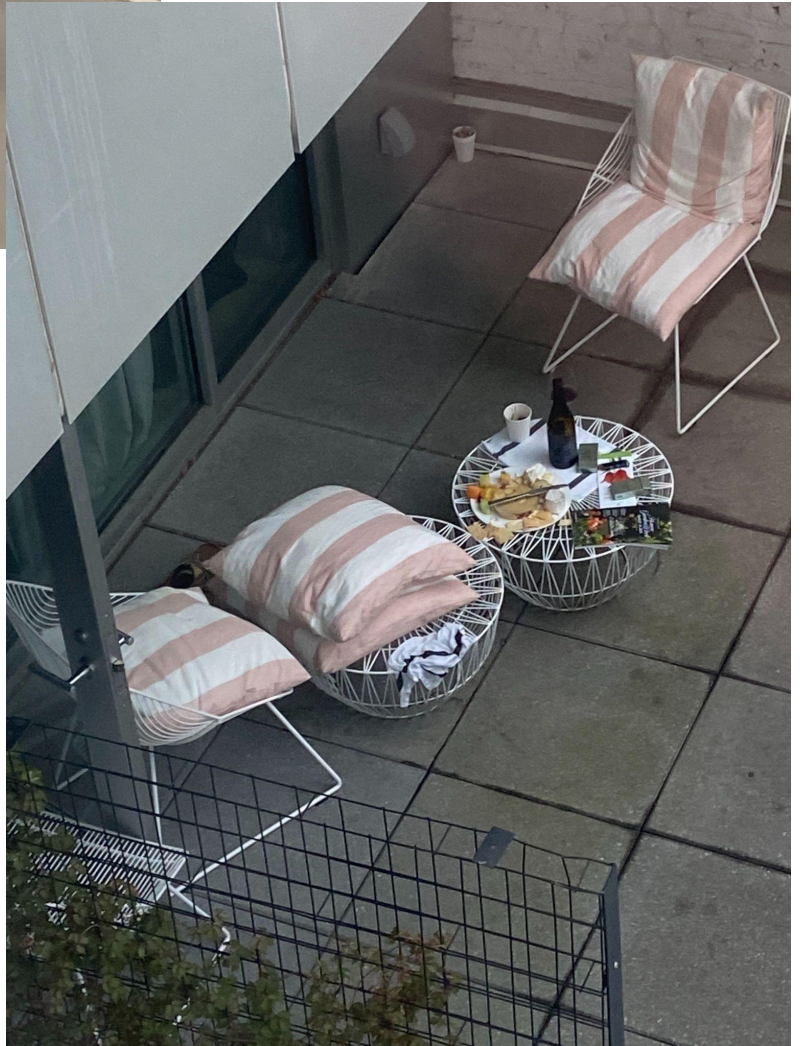


CHEF'S NOTE

Ever since I was little and baked chocolate chip cookies with my parents, I have always enjoyed baking. I had decided to make my independent study focus on French cuisine after years of French class and my newfound joy of baking over quarantine. I decided to present my knowledge in this format to provide a fun and pleasing view of French cuisine.

I have learned many things over this process, from the small details in making puff pastry to the perfect amount of time to get stiff peaks in your egg whites. In the beginning, I set out to learn more about how to bake, but I have gotten to know much more. I started knowing some simple baking basics, but over this course, I have gotten to test my knowledge and grow. By reading cookbooks and learning new techniques, I now know how to use a kitchen knife properly, brush butter on a souffle ramekin to best aid the rise of the dish, and much more. One of the things I am most proud of in my baking was creating a couple of my very own recipes. I learned how difficult it was through trial and error to get a recipe right.





UN REPAS TYPIQUE DE GASTRONOMIE EN FRANCE

In France a typical *repas gastronomique* consists of seven courses: *l'apéritif*, *l'entrée*, *le plat poisson*, *le plat viande*, *le plat fromage*, *le dessert*, and *le cafe* or *le digestif*. *L'apéritif* typically consists of an alcoholic beverage and a small snack. *L'entrée*, different from the American English entree, is the appetizer where escargot, oysters, and others are served. Next, *Le plats de Poisson* and *le viande* will serve meat and fish like roast chicken or salmon. The fifth course is *le plat du Fromage*, where regional french cheeses will be served. *Le dessert* will have different tarts and cakes served. Finally will be the *digestif* or *cafe*, serving a drink or coffee.

In my french meal, I prepared an adapted french family dinner. I decided to prepare flavors that would work well with our spring season: a light salmon with mango chutney, cauliflower souffle, haricots verts with pistachios. I also decided that I would serve the appropriate beverages along with the dinner: for the adults, I paired the fish and souffle with Prosecco. For those below age, I made a sparkling lemonade with berries and peaches. While making my souffle, I utilized my skills I have learned, like knowing when to stop whisking egg whites to get stiff peaks, but not overbeat whites.





CAULIFLOWER SOUFFLE

This is my own adapted recipe from Mimi Thorisson's French Country Cooking recipe book

Ingredients

- 2 heads of cauliflower
- 5 ½ tablespoons unsalted butter, and more for the ramekins
- ⅔ cup of all-purpose flour, and more for the ramekins
- 2 cups of whole milk
- ~ 1 ⅓ cups of gruyere or any semi-hard cheese
- Sea salt and black pepper
- 4 large egg whites
- 4 large egg yolks

To make the souffle: Clean the cauliflower heads by taking off the jacket leaves and separating the florets. Cook the cauliflower in boiling salted water until tender or until you can pierce the florets with a fork with ease, about 10 minutes. Drain the water and use a stick blender until smooth.

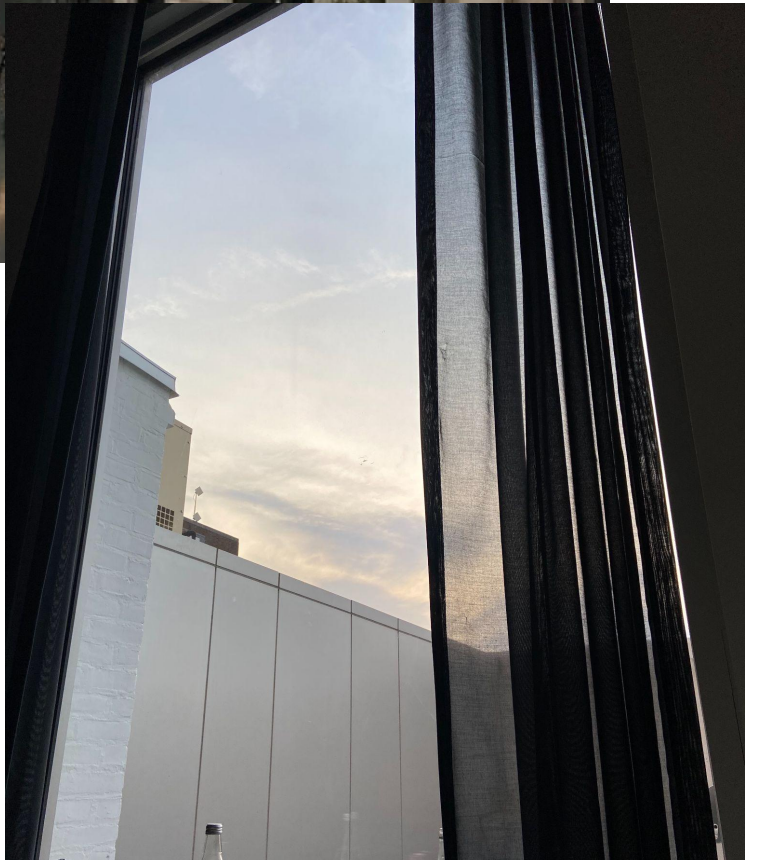
Butter and flour about six ramekins, then put them in the freezer—Preheat the oven to 400 degrees celsius.

In a large saucepan, melt the butter on low heat. Whisk in the flour all at once and cook, still whisking, until combined. Slowly add in the milk, continuing to whisk. Add the cauliflower and cook, stirring, until the mixture thickens and coats the back of a spoon, about 5-8 minutes. Add in the cheese, stirring until it melts, and then season with salt and pepper. Take off the heat and allow it to cool slightly.

Using an electric mixer and the whisk attachment, whip the egg whites into stiff peaks, be careful not to over whip the eggs. Next, stir the yolks into the cauliflower mixture, then fold in the egg whites using a rubber spatula.

Pour the mixture into the ramekins until they are about ¾ full. Put them on a baking sheet and bake until golden and well risen; for about 15 minutes, be careful to have a set middle. Serve immediately.







FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: FRENCH CHOUX PASTRY PUFFS, CHIFFON LAYER CAKE, ANGEL FOOD CAKE WITH CHANTILLY CREAM, RICOTTA PUFF PASTRIES, CHICKEN AND DUMPLINGS WITH A FRENCH BROTH, FRENCH YOGURT AND CITRUS CAKE.

FRENCH PUFF PASTRY



Puff pastry is a simple staple in patisseries all across France. However, their process, is anything but simple.

Some of the more notable tips I have learned about creating puff pastry relate to the circumstances in which one prepares full puff pastry. For example, *The Joy of Cooking* says that you must first roll your dough away from you and then towards you, always starting in the middle of the dough. If you've successfully rolled it out and folded it twice, you've completed two turns (one fold = one turn); puff pastry is traditionally made with six turns.

The creation of puff pastry and desserts like croissants entails many layers of butter and dough that, while being baked, the butter melts and steams, pushing the dough layers up. To the left, you can see my first ever attempt at making croissants from scratch. I could tell eating them that though they did have some distinct layers, they were very dense, and the bottoms of the croissants were a bit soggy while baking. Next time I make puff pastry from scratch, I will pay more attention to cooling the pastry and butter between turns. As I was turning the dough, the butter melted, so when I baked the croissants, the butter mainly just melted and soaked the dough instead of steaming. In the end, the croissants still baked fully, but some layers were soggy and dense.



BASIC PUFF PASTRY

From King Arthur Baking

Dough

- 4 1/4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cold
- 1 1/4 cups water, cold

Butter block

- 1/2 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 3 1/2 sticks unsalted butter, at room temperature

To make the dough: Combine the flour and salt in a large mixing bowl. Cut the butter into small pieces and drop them into the bowl with the flour. With a pastry blender or your fingertips, cut or rub the butter into the flour until it resembles cornmeal. Next, add the cold water to the bowl and mix gently with your hands, a fork, or a dough scraper until you have a rough, slightly tacky dough that pulls away from the sides of the bowl. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead it until it's smooth and the gluten has developed somewhat 2 to 3 minutes. Pat the dough into a 9" square and wrap it in plastic or a reusable wrap. Refrigerate the dough for at least 30 minutes.

To prepare the butter block: Mix the flour and butter until they're well blended and smooth. You can do this with a mixer, a food processor, or by hand with a spoon. Pat the butter/flour mixture into an 8" square on a lightly floured piece of parchment or waxed paper. Cover it with a second sheet of paper and refrigerate it for at least 30 minutes.

To laminate the dough: Remove the dough from the refrigerator and put it on a lightly floured surface. Gently roll it into a ~12" square. Place the chilled butter in the center of the dough at a 45° angle, so it looks like a diamond in a square. Fold the corners of the dough over the butter until they meet in the middle. Pinch and seal the edges of the dough together. Turn the square over and tap it gently with your hands into a rectangular shape, continuing to keep it lightly floured.

Roll the dough into a 20" x 10" rectangle. Turn the dough over from time to time to keep the layers even. When the dough is the right size, brush any excess flour off the top, fold the bottom third of the dough up to the center, and the top third over (like a business letter).



Line the corners up as neatly as you can; dab them with a bit of water to help them stick together if necessary, and turn the dough package 1/4 turn to the right, so it looks like a book ready to be opened. If the dough is still cold and relaxed, do another rolling and turning the same way. If it begins to feel too soft or wants to resist being rolled, cover it, put it on a small baking sheet, and refrigerate it for 15 minutes to chill and relax. Continue refrigerating it every two turns (or more often if necessary) until all six turns are completed. Keep track of how many turns you've made. When all six turns are done, put the dough in the refrigerator for at least an hour (preferably 3 or 4 hours).

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough until it's a rectangle about 12" x 18". Trim 1/4" off the edges of the dough all the way around with a very sharp knife or a pizza wheel. This removes the folded edges, which would inhibit the "puff." Next, cut and shape the *pâte feuilletée* as your recipe suggests.



Above: Black Cherry Clafoutis- traditional french bake
Below: Traditional French Vanilla Ice Cream

