

The cult of canneles

These unusual, addictive French pastries require beeswax, special fluted molds and determination. But for the brave baker, the payoff is brilliant.

Cannelés are a study in contrasts. These French cakes are petite but sturdy, crunchy but custardy, shiny dark brown on the outside and golden inside. A forgotten specialty of the Bordeaux region that was resurrected in the 1980s, cannelés are deceptively tricky to bake, even though their crepe-like batter, perfumed with rum and vanilla, can be thrown together in all of 10 minutes.

I first tasted cannelés years ago, when I worked in the test kitchen of a lifestyle magazine. The food editor, who had final approval over recipes, was often away from the office, and we

were to save portions of everything we made so she could taste it all when she was available. The day came for her to assess the cannelés, but she didn't see any. "Where are the cannelés?" she asked, as I cowered in the corner, silent and guilty. There were no cannelés. I'd eaten them all.

Cannelé obsession is a slippery slope. They're the perfect all-in-one dessert, needing no accompaniment except maybe a strong cup of tea or coffee. Chewy, crisp and eggy, cannelés satisfy every manifestation of a sweet tooth's craving. That cannelé (say it *CAN-uh-lay*) molds and the beeswax used to line them can be challenging

Please see **CANNELES**, Page FD4

Cannelés: Challenges only add fuel to fans' fire

Continued from Page FD1

to locate, much less use successfully, only fuels the fervor of cannelé fans. The great news is that you don't have to seek out beeswax and obscure fluted molds to enjoy cannelés: two bakeries in the Portland area, Ken's Artisan Bakery and St. Honoré Boulangerie, make cannelés daily to satisfy customers' yearnings, and they do it expertly.

A mind of its own

"Cannelés are a little tricky," says Dominique Geulin, founder and owner of St. Honoré in Portland and Lake Oswego, in what some might find a bit of an understatement. "It's got a mind of its own. The temperatures that you work the ingredients together is very critical, very important. The resting time, and also the oven — there are a lot of factors that will affect the end product."

Geulin knows a thing or two about baking — in 1990, he earned the prestigious M.O.F., or *Meilleur Ouvrier de France*, the country's highest certification for bakers and other artisans. But no matter your credentials, cannelés can still be a formidable undertaking. "Baking cannelés is a little bit like bread," Geulin says. "You learn something every time you do it. That's why I enjoy it."

When I spoke to Ken Forkish, the owner and founder of Ken's Artisan Bakery in Northwest Portland, he laughed good-naturedly at the concept of home bakers tackling cannelés. "It's one product I would recommend people not try," he said. "If you get cannelé right the first time, you're really lucky. It took us a quite a while of doing it at the bakery every day before we had it to where I was happy."

The cannelés at Ken's Artisan Bakery are quite dark on the outside, the color of bittersweet chocolate or strong black coffee. "I prefer the cannelé to be more cakelike in the middle," Forkish says. "The custardy

ones don't make any sense to me, because you're getting unbaked flour — unbaked gluten — which sits really heavy in your stomach." His recipe uses less sugar and more flour than other formulas, as well as almond meal and lemon zest for additional flavor.

St. Honoré's cannelés are blonder than Ken's, with softer interiors. Both bakeries' versions are worth trying; their differences are their merits, indicative of the multiple interpretations of modern-day cannelés.

Lost and found

Another piece of the cannelé's appeal is its shroud of mystery. "We know that it's from the Bordeaux region," Geulin says, "but we don't even know who invented it. Some say that nuns in the convent came up with a recipe that was the beginning. It's also tied up with the wine-making process in Bordeaux. For the filtration part of winemaking, they were using the egg whites, and they would end up with all those yolks. Part of the history tells us that the winemakers would give the yolks to the sisters so they could come up with ways to feed the poor, and somehow they came up with a dessert."

That's only part of the story, though. "The cannelé is associated with the crew of people in the Bordeaux region who, in the 16th, 17th century, detached themselves from pastry makers and formed their own corporation," Geulin continues. "There was a license that you had to get to be a *canaulier*. One of the main things to authorize a *canaulier* to operate was they could not utilize any milk or sugar in any of their products, because that was reserved for pastry makers."

But sugar eventually found its way into the cannelé; Bordeaux was a significant port, and since imported items like sugar, rum and vanilla beans from the tropics made a landing in Bordeaux, local bakers would have had primary access to these items.

And then the cannelé went underground. "The cannelé totally disappeared in the French Revolution," Geulin says. "Some baker at some point went back and found traces of the recipe."

In 1985, at the peak of the French

A cannelé by any other name

There's more than one accepted spelling for cannelé, as well as a small handful of (to American ears) homophones. Here's a glossary to keep you straight.

Cannelé: French for "fluted" or "channeled"; refers to the shape of the fluted molds cannelés are baked in.

Canelés: The chosen spelling of the brotherhood of *canelés de Bordeaux*, the group formed in 1985 to resurrect and preserve the Bordelaise tradition of cannelé baking.

Cannelle: French for cinnamon; unrelated to cannelés, which are traditionally flavored with rum and vanilla.

Quenelle: A small, elliptically shaped forcemeat, often of poultry or seafood. Unrelated to cannelé.

Cannoli: Sicilian tube-shaped pastries filled with sweetened ricotta cheese; absolutely unrelated to cannelés.

cannelé renaissance, a number of Bordeaux pâtissiers formed a *confrérie*, or brotherhood, to establish standards for what could be sold as an authentic *canelé de Bordeaux*, going so far as to remove an "n" from the spelling "cannelé" so that their product would stand out as the real thing. (According to Paula Wolfert, an authority on the foods of southern France, *cannelé bordelaise* is the generic term for cannelés made outside of Bordeaux.) The *confrérie de canelés de Bordeaux* keeps their exact methods and ingredients secret.

"I've seen multiple spellings of cannelé in France and in French books, and the reason I chose the double 'n' spelling is that we're not part of the guild, and it's kind of an honorific thing," Forkish says.

"Not perfect, but still good"

I show Geulin one of the homemade cannelés I'd baked, a squat little thing that was just a bit too waxy on the outside, and we proceed to di-

agnose critical steps where I might have gone wrong.

"The most complex part was to figure out the right conditions to bring the ingredients together — the temperatures, not overmixing the batter," Geulin says about his bakery's learning curve. "At first, sometimes we'd find a big hole in the cake, or sometimes you'd have the crust and you'd open it up and all of the batter would be sitting on the bottom." To Geulin, a perfect cannelé would "have a nice, open, consistent batter from top to bottom." Geulin wasn't totally happy with the way the cannelés at St. Honoré turned out that day; their interiors had some holes a little too large for his liking. "They're not perfect," he said, "but they're still good."

Both Forkish and Geulin bake their cannelés in copper molds in convection ovens — "you get a better distribution of heat," Geulin says. He shows me one of their copper tins; while some cooks covet copper for the rosy metallic warmth it imparts to a kitchen décor, these copper beauties are all but unrecognizable, bearing a baked-on sooty black char that betrays not a hint of gleam. Geulin and Forkish both assured me that the waxy coating on the baked cannelés' exteriors lessens over time as the interiors of the molds become seasoned.

"I don't know the origins of the beeswax," Geulin says, "but it's used for two main reasons: It offers a lubrication agent for removing the product from the mold, but also gives that caramelized aspect to the crust."

A very active but tiny and far-flung blogging community is constantly debating the merits of silicone molds over metal and posting photos of their amateur cannelé attempts (after looking at a few, I immediately felt more confident about my own homemade cannelés). But two very important pieces of information were missing in a lot of the posts I read: To get the most authentic cannelés, beeswax and metal molds are essential. At least that's what I think. You have to become your own sleuth and tinker around to find the combination of elements that works best in your kitchen.

That's the joy of cannelés, really — the process of discovery, and the ability to learn from an occasional flop. Happily, even a flop of a cannelé is still irresistible, and in lieu of that, you can always leave it to the pros and head to the bakery.

Cannelés

Makes about 20

Depending on the size or material of your cannelé molds (see note), you may need to increase or decrease the baking time. If using silicone molds, count on doubling the baking time or your cannelés will be pale and undercooked. Beeswax (see note) gives cannelés their characteristic chewy exterior. You can bake cannelés in molds greased with just non stick cooking spray or butter, but for superior flavor and texture we recommend seeking out beeswax. It's difficult to line flexible silicone pans with the beeswax, so we give alternate directions for brushing them with a beeswax-butter mixture.

Hot beeswax is messy. The best way to melt it is to use an unlined empty metal can set in a saucepan halfway full of gently simmering water. The best way to rid saucepans of waxy residue is to boil water in them. It's very important to bake the cannelés on a rimmed sheet; copious amounts of simmering wax and butter ooze out of the molds as they bake.

- 4 cups whole milk
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped
- 2 cups granulated sugar (12 ounces)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 4 egg yolks
- 1 3/4 cups cake flour (6 1/2 ounces)
- 3 tablespoons dark rum
- 4 ounces beeswax (or 1/2 ounce beeswax and 1/2 cup unsalted butter; see note)

In a small saucepan combine the milk, 6 tablespoons butter and the vanilla bean plus seeds. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the butter melts. Set aside until mixture is warm to the touch. Remove the vanilla bean and discard, or rinse and save for another use.

In a large bowl, combine the sugar and salt; whisk in the egg yolks to make a thick paste. Add the flour and whisk until well incorporated. Whisk in the rum, then gradually whisk in the milk-butter mixture (don't worry if the batter looks a bit lumpy). Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 day and up to 4 days.

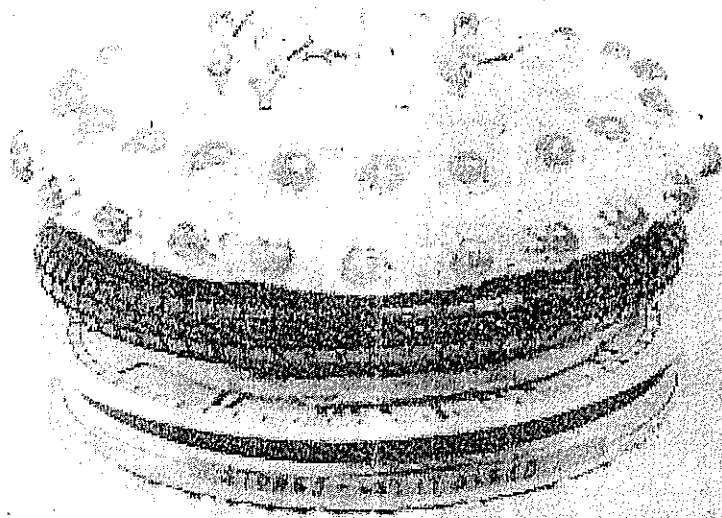
At least one hour before baking, remove the batter from the refrigerator. Heat the oven to 425 degrees. If using individual metal molds, melt the beeswax and line the molds by filling the molds about a third full with wax, rolling to coat all surfaces, and pouring the excess beeswax back into the metal can.

If using silicone molds, melt 1/2 ounce beeswax and 1/2 cup butter together in a small saucepan over low heat. With a small pastry brush, coat the inside of each cannelé mold thoroughly with the beeswax-butter mixture (mixture will set up thick and waxy on the inside of the molds; that's OK).

Line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and fold up the edges so that any spilled beeswax won't leak out. Space the cannelé molds at least an inch apart on the baking sheet. Vigorously whisk the cannelé batter (it will have separated during its rest) and fill each mold within 1/4 inch of the top. Bake, one sheet at a time, until the surface of the cannelés are dark brown, about 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 hours for metal molds and 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 hours for silicone molds. Remove from oven. Place a cooling rack over a baking sheet lined with foil to catch the melted beeswax and, using tongs, unmold cannelés immediately (be careful not to burn yourself with the hot wax). Gently pry the cannelés out with a paring knife if they cling to the mold. Cool completely. Cannelés are best served the day they are baked.

Note: Find cannelé molds at Williams-Sonoma (tin-lined copper and silicone) and Sur La Table (aluminum and silicone). Or try www.amazon.com or www.eBay.com.

Note: Beeswax can be purchased from Ruhl Farms (ruhlbeesupply.com) and GloryBee Foods (glorybeefoods.com) in either 1-ounce or 5-pound blocks. To clean up persistent beeswax, boil water in the saucepan you melted it in until the saucepan is free of any waxy residue. (Be sure to only use food-grade wax.)



INSTANT CAKE!

Mick gets props for imagining a disaffected wife's terrible cooking, though we doubt he has ever had to literally feed a family.

Satan's Taco

Where are all the great rock songs about food?

Every issue of *Bon Appétit* magazine has a list of songs or CDs to play during your fashionable little tapas party or cocktail get-together. It's in the spirit of fun, but the suggested music always has more to do with coming across as clever or trendy than with, well, food. Or, for that matter, music.

That makes sense. You can't play music that's too intense or awesome when your guests are nibbling on frenched lamp chops with mint-cilantro pesto, because great music demands all of your attention. Perhaps that's because there are precious few rock songs about eating or cooking.

Actually, the role of food in pop music is symbolic. Food stands in for lust, humor, wealth, tradition, corruption, family togetherness and good old-fashioned fun. But rarely are food-related lyrics merely about how tasty food can be.

Movies, art, love affairs, politics and great literature all inspire bands to write songs. Why not a once-in-a-lifetime perfect slice of pizza? Or a multicourse festival of top-notch gluttony at the French Laundry? What about the pancakes your dad made once a month on Saturdays when you were a kid?

There are lots of songs that mention food, sure, but they're not *about* food. The B-52's "Quiche Lorraine" is not about the iconic bacon-laced French egg tart, but a runaway poodle. "Mother Popcorn" is not about James Brown's favorite buttery movie-theater snack.

Evidence exists that rockers like food. "Joanna Newsom ate here the other night," my friend who works as a chef at a trendy—and expensive—Chicago cafe informed me. Kara Zuoar's cookbook *I Like Food, Food Tastes Good*, which came out earlier this year, collects recipes from dozens of indie rocker

types, the sort of folks who spend a great deal of time eating grease-laden bar food served at the venue they happen to be playing that night. But Zuoar's contributors offer dishes that are hardly tour food; see current critics' darlings Battles' preparation of roasted marrow bones accompanied with crisped duck fat, hearth-baked bread and fleur de sel.

And yet we have no influential food-centered concept albums or Billboard smash hits about Taylor's Automatic Refresher. Is food not arty enough, or is arty food too pretentious to fit nicely into the sweaty confines of an unbridled rock song? Think about the often contrived wankery of molecular gastronomy—sea urchin foams and gelatinized pork belly extracts—then think about how much the last Oneida album jammed. Nope, doesn't click at all, though the nuance and mastery of great cuisine and fine musicianship come from the same overdriven, obsessed nerve center.

In all but the most stoic of restaurant kitchens, a battered boom box, caked with a sticky film of vaporized grease, is the heart and soul of the kitchen, the electric coxswain that dictates a steady rhythm in an otherwise frantic zone, where the nightly battle is chef vs. time.

Cooking and rocking out go together hand-in-hand. But eating and rocking out? Not so much. Rock is the fast food of the music world: 100 percent American in origin, instantly gratifying, available anywhere. But there has to be a bona fide culinary rock song out there somewhere.

Country, being the suffering-fixated genre that it is, tends to lament the scarcity of food rather than celebrate its presence, as with Little Jimmy Dickens' 1957 "Take an Old Cold Tater and Wait," whose main story arc concerns getting only the neck and feet from a shared chicken. Dolly Parton, a woman who came from humble means,

wrote about the hunger of her youth in her autobiographical "In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)," a song in which hard labor still does not ensure adequate nourishment: "We've gone to bed hungry many nights in the past / In the good old days when times were bad."

Merle Haggard later added a verse in his own version of the song: "And I've walked many miles to an old country school / With my lunch in the bib of my overalls." That's not a very big lunch.

In blues and soul, food can likewise be indicative of class. What does Annie of Tony Joe White's "Poke Salad Annie" eat? Pokeweed, a wild plant whose toxic leaves must be boiled prior to ingesting. She was so poor that "that's about all they had to eat, but they did all right."

Hip-hop, a genre that rarely shies away from an opportunity to rhapsodize over decadence and physical pleasure, has been the most fertile genre for the celebration of food in song. If something tastes good, your friendly neighborhood MC is gonna say so, as with Sir Mix-a-Lot in "Buttermilk Biscuits": "Don't make a difference what food you make / Use buttermilk biscuits to clean your plate."

And, of course, food is symbolic of sex. In Paul Revere & the Raiders' 1967 hit "Hungry" (penned by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil), it's not a bacon double cheeseburger Mark Lindsay is singing about. Nope, he's "Hungry for that sweet life, baby / With a real fine girl like you."

The Pixies' "Cactus" presents a much sloppier metaphor, in which a lovesick and homesick Black Francis requests his faraway paramour to send him her food-stained dress: "So spill your breakfast and drip your wine / Just wear that dress when you dine." Suzanne Vega's "Caramel," as wistful and resigned as a sigh, smoothly longs after the unattainable, be it burnt sugar or acknowledgement from her beloved.

Food, particularly the multicultural street food of L.A., crops up not infrequently in Beck's songs, as both a reflection on the delirious muddle of class and ethnicity in Southern California and as mechanism for painting offbeat images of postmodern American pop flotsam. The near-apocalyptic opus "Satan Gave Me a Taco" ("The chicken was all raw and the grease was mighty thick") is at once about gluttony, starvation and indifference—after all, Beck still accepts the repulsive taco Satan offers him ("There was aphids on the lettuce, and I ate every one / And after I was done, the salsa melted off my tongue").

The Rolling Stones' "Mother's Little Helper" is equally horrific but more realistic, an indictment of the cardboard cuisine set out by the medicated housewife in the song: "So she buys an instant cake, and she burns her frozen steak / And goes running for the shelter of her mother's little helper." Props to Mick for the insight, but I doubt he's ever had to face the crushing monotony of feeding an indifferent, finicky family day after day.

"Savory Truffle," written by George Harrison, is perhaps the most rollicking of food rock songs. Supposedly, Harrison wrote it as a nod to his friend Eric Clapton's chocolate fixation, and the verses tick off a list of sticky-sweet bon-bon fillings, ending of course with "But you'll have to have them all pulled out / After the Savory truffle."

"Them" is your teeth, which will rot away after too many candies; the fictional food of song still has potent drawbacks. Primary among them are that there's not enough of it, guaranteeing that *Bon Appétit* play lists will remain mediocre for the indefinite future.