

MONT BLANC

(from *The New York Times*)

for the meringue discs:

4 large egg whites (122 grams)
⅛ teaspoon cream of tartar
1 + ⅓ cups (240 grams) granulated sugar

For the mocha cremeux:

4½ ounces milk chocolate, chopped into ½-inch pieces (about 1 cup)
¼ teaspoon fine sea salt
4 egg yolks (63 grams)
1 tablespoon cornstarch
2 teaspoons instant coffee
¾ cup whole milk

for the chestnut topping:

⅓ cup (60 grams) brown sugar
Pinch of fine sea salt
1⅓ cups (200 grams) chopped canned or vacuum-packed chestnuts
1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened

for the whipped cream:

1 cup (233 grams) heavy cream
½ cup (112 grams) mascarpone cheese, softened
¼ cup (30 grams) powdered sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Make the meringues: Heat the oven to 225 degrees and line two large baking sheets with parchment paper. On one sheet of parchment, trace a 7-inch-wide circle and a 6-inch-wide circle. On the other sheet of parchment, trace a 4-inch-wide circle and a 2½-inch-wide circle. Flip the parchment papers upside down so the marks are underneath.

Place the egg whites in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Using an electric mixer, whisk the egg whites until frothy, 30 to 60 seconds. Add the cream of tartar, then, with the mixer on medium-high, gradually add the granulated sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time. Continue to beat until glossy and stiff peaks form, scraping down the bowl once or twice, 10 to 15 minutes. Spoon about 1 ½ cups (175 grams) of meringue into the 7-inch circle and, using circular movements with the back of a large spoon, shape a 1-inch-deep divot in the middle. Use the remaining meringue to fill the smaller circles, spreading about ½ cup (70 grams) into the 6-inch circle, ¼ cup (30 grams) into the 4-inch circle, and about 2 tablespoons (10 to 15 grams) into the 2½-inch circle. These three remaining meringues should be about ½ inch thick and fairly flat for neat stacking once baked.

Bake meringues for 1½ hours, until crisp and dry to the touch. Turn off the oven and leave the meringues inside with the door slightly ajar until completely cool, at least 2 to 3 hours but overnight if possible.

Meanwhile, make the mocha crèmeux: Combine the milk chocolate and salt in a small bowl and set alongside the stove, along with an empty medium heatproof bowl. Whisk together the egg yolks, cornstarch and instant coffee in a small

heavy-bottomed saucepan until smooth. Gradually whisk in the milk. Take care to make sure it's well combined, giving extra attention to the edges of the pan as you whisk.

Cook over medium heat, whisking continuously, until the mixture comes to a gentle boil and thickens to a pudding-like consistency, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn the heat down to low and whisk rapidly as the mixture gently simmers for 30 seconds longer. Immediately turn off the heat and whisk in the milk chocolate and salt until the chocolate is melted and the mixture is glossy. Immediately pour the *crèmeux* into the heatproof bowl and cover with plastic wrap or parchment paper directly against the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Once cool to the touch, transfer to the fridge to chill completely and set, about 2 hours minimum.

Make the chestnut topping: Combine the brown sugar, salt and ½ cup water in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil and cook for 1 minute, then turn off the heat and leave to cool for about 10 minutes.

When the sugar syrup has cooled, blitz the cooked chestnuts in the food processor for about 30 seconds, until finely ground, then slowly pour in the cooled sugar syrup while the motor is running. Blend until completely smooth, 1 to 2 minutes, scraping down the sides of the food processor bowl as necessary. Add the butter and blend until incorporated. The purée needs to be smooth and soft enough to pipe easily without breaking. If the chestnut mixture doesn't seem smooth, pass it through a fine-mesh sieve. Set aside until ready to use.

When you are ready to assemble, make the whipped cream: In a large bowl, whip the cream, mascarpone, powdered sugar and vanilla until very stiff peaks form, about 1 minute. To build the dessert, place the 7-inch meringue onto a serving plate. Using an offset spatula, spread a thin layer of whipped cream (½ cup) across the base, pushing it up and over the sides of the meringue so it slightly overhangs the sides. Give the mocha *crèmeux* a quick stir, then dollop it into the hollow (it should fill it completely), smoothing it level with the cream.

Place the 6-inch meringue disk on top, pressing gently. Spread a thick layer of whipped cream over the meringue and top with the 4-inch disk. Repeat with another generous layer of whipped cream, then add the smallest disk. Finish with a final helping of the remaining whipped cream, shaping it into a conical peak with an offset spatula. Chill the Mont Blanc in the fridge for about 1 hour, until the cream has firmed up enough to support the chestnut strands you'll add on top (be sure to give it a wide berth in the fridge).

When the Mont Blanc has finished chilling, transfer chestnut cream to a piping bag fitted with a 2-millimeter-wide round tip. Starting from just above the overhang of cream at the base of the Mont Blanc, pipe the chestnut strands horizontally around the Mont Blanc, gradually working your way upward to cover the "mountain" completely with several layers of chestnut strands to create the look of a craggy mountain.

Store the Mont Blanc in the fridge until ready to serve: 2 to 4 hours is best, but up to 24 hours.