

CHOCOLATE

pudding Pots

A classic, chocolaty bistro dessert from Bouchon Bakery



These pots de crème are made with high-quality dark chocolate and topped with Chantilly cream. (David Escalante)

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"From an emotional point of view, pots de crème remind me of when I was a kid and we ate that pudding from a box," says Thomas Keller, chef and restaurateur. "Anything that reminds you of childhood moments like that makes people happy."

Keller has a new cookbook, *The French Laundry, Per Se (Artisan)*, celebrating the beautiful food served at his two *Wine Spectator* Grand Award-winning restaurants. But every time I speak with him I am reminded of how down-to-earth he is. My impression is that he wants to inspire joy at the table more than anything else.

The tenor of his restaurants Ad Hoc and the Bouchon bistros and bakeries is more casual but still focused on joy. Bouchon Bakery pastry chef Nick Bonamico supplied this recipe, which he says is omnipresent at those restaurants: "It's a classic bistro dessert. We have six or so desserts in constant rotation and this is one."

While the dining room may be more relaxed, behind the scenes Keller's team still holds to the highest standards. Just because it looks like chocolate pudding doesn't mean it came in a box. In fact with so few ingredients they have to be the best quality. "We concentrate on ingredients," Bonamico says. "When you use great butter and eggs you have to use great chocolate too. You should use the best you can afford and get your hands on."

At Keller's restaurants that would be K+M Extravirgin (kellermannni.com, \$15 for 2.5 ounces), the line of chocolates he produced with Italian olive oil producer Armando Manni. Now I taste a lot of chocolate, and there is rarely anything truly new in that field. New producers, sources, bars, flavors, sure, but it's rare to find something fundamentally new. K+M is that. They use Manni's oil as one of the fats in the bars, which no one else has done that I know of. And it isn't just for novelty or strange flavors; the bars are staggeringly good and the flavors classic, with a touch of surprise to them.

Bonamico recommends using K+M bars in this recipe. He even says that each time you make it you could use a different origin bar, or their new citrus-flavored bar, to see how the flavors differ.

For his part Keller recalls that he simply wanted to find "a better way to make chocolate, and develop a unique chocolate," but also admits that he loves chocolate so much that he'll "eat pretty much any chocolate in a pinch."

Dark Chocolate Pots de Crème

Adapted from Bouchon by Thomas Keller (Artisan, 2004)

3 bars K + M Extravirgin Dark Chocolate, or other best-quality bars such as

Valrhona

1 cup whole milk

1 cup heavy cream

5 egg yolks

1 1/2 teaspoons sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1. Chop the chocolate into small pieces.
2. Put the whole milk and heavy cream into a small pot over medium heat. Bring them to a simmer, whisking occasionally to prevent scorching.
3. In another bowl, whisk together the egg yolks and sugar.
4. Once the milk mixture is at a simmer, slowly pour half of the hot milk into the egg yolks and sugar, whisking constantly. Whisk for 30 seconds, then pour back into the pot with the remaining milk.
5. Using a heat resistant spatula to continuously scrape the bottom of the pot, cook over low heat until an instant read thermometer reads 85° C.
6. Remove from the heat and stir in the chopped chocolate. Using a small whisk, whisk this mixture until all of the chocolate is melted and dispersed.
7. Using an immersion blender, blend the chocolate mixture together until the entire mix is homogenous.
8. Strain the custard through a fine-mesh strainer into a pitcher with a pouring spout.
9. Pour the custard into 6 small ramekins, around 4 ounces / 100g per ramekin.
10. Chill in the refrigerator until the custard is set, around 4 hours.
12. Top with Chantilly cream (recipe follows).

Chantilly Cream

1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons heavy cream

2 1/4 teaspoons powdered sugar

1/2 vanilla bean, split lengthwise

Keller uses a high-fat cream (40%) for the whipped cream—do use it if it's available to you—and also recommends powdered sugar because it dissolves more easily than granulated sugar. It's best to whip the cream just before you need it; although you can whip it in advance, it tends to break down in the refrigerator. But taking cream from liquid to soft, silken peaks is a matter of less than a minute.

1. Place the cream and powdered sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment.
2. Scrape the seeds from the vanilla bean and add them to the cream.
3. Whisk at medium speed until the cream holds a shape when you lift it on the whisk and if you will be piping it, is just stiff enough to be piped through a pastry bag; do not overwhip.
4. It is best to spread or pipe the cream immediately after whipping. *Makes 1 1/2 cups*

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