

San Jose Mercury News



COURTESY OF WATERBAR

Waterbar pastry chef Emily Luchetti takes readers step by step through recipes in her cookbook.

Bakers, don't fear: Luchetti is here

By Jackie Burrell

jburrell@bayareanewsgroup.com

Pastry chef Emily Luchetti, of Stars, Waterbar and Farallon fame, is on a mission. The San Francisco chef is out to turn fearful bakers into fearless ones, with a few baking lessons, a wave of her Baking Fairy Godmother wand and a new cookbook, "The Fearless Baker" (Little, Brown and Company, 288 pp., \$29.99).

The new book, cowritten with Tiburon food writer and food stylist Lisa Weiss, delivers all the usual Luchetti fodder: easy-to-follow recipes for delicious cakes, tempting pies and supremely sinful treats. But the pair have added amusing, helpful and very real exchanges, written out in colorful little thought bubbles, between Luchetti and her

formerly fearful crew — 32 wannabe bakers, who learned to bake with Luchetti at their sides. They included venture capitalists; college students and gallery owners. One was a glassblower, another an aspiring cellist and alpaca farmer. Some were proficient cooks. Others were newbies.

By the end, they were fearlessly toasting nuts and whisking meringue with aplomb. And you, Luchetti says, can too.

Naturally, we had questions.

Q So, why were they so scared?

A It wasn't technique. What they had trouble with was getting over their own fear. If it doesn't work out, you throw it out. The downside isn't that drastic. The major thing people do wrong is

they don't measure accurately or don't know how to measure — or they don't read the recipe through. I'd say, "Well, do you like to follow instructions?" "No." That's explains it right there. Some people get nervous and think the recipe is there to trip them up.

Q Whoa — an evil recipe! There's a concept. How do you view recipes?

A It's a road map to get from point A to point B. Before GPS, you had to look your trip up on a map and figure it out. You'd still go back and look at the map as a guideline during the trip. Use the recipe as a guideline.

Q What about convection oven-phobia or KitchenAid anxiety?

See LUCHETTI, Page 3

Luchetti

From Page 1

You mentioned some people had ovens they'd never opened.

A The minute you bring out an electric appliance, people say, "Oh, my God, this is going to be complicated!" I was surprised by the number of people who have countertop mixers and put them away. You can bake without them — people have for centuries — but baking's a lot easier if you have them.

Q Was terminology a problem too?

A Cream the butter and sugar? If you're not a baker, you don't know what that is. What does "cream" mean? It comes out of a cow and it's a noun, not a verb. I made a point of being really specific. I'd say, beat the butter and sugar and make it creamy. "Cook for 30 minutes" and don't say what it should look like? You need the visual cue — the clean skewer, the golden brown.

Q So your fairy godmother wand was just a metaphor? There's no magic whoosh?

A All I did was give them a few tips, of course, but I also gave them the confidence and pushed them a little. I want to encourage people to bake, because it really isn't hard. We can't eat dessert all the time, but the stuff at the grocery store is just so bad for you. If people take a step back and make something, they can appreciate the time that's spent, rather than wolfing it down and — where did that box of vanilla wafers go?

Q Rumor has it that you don't eat dessert at night. You eat it in *the middle of the day*.

A (Laughs) When I want a dessert, I want my palate to be clean from everything else. When I eat a good meal — salmon or a salad — I feel very content at the end of it.

Q But, ahem, the middle of the day?

A You make it special, you can appreciate it more. I don't even have

Almond Sundaes with Espresso-White Chocolate Sauce

Serves 6

1/3 cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon brewed espresso or strong coffee

5 ounces white chocolate, chopped or broken into 1-inch pieces

Good-quality vanilla and chocolate ice creams
1/2 cup sliced almonds

1. In a small saucepan, heat the cream with the espresso. Place the chocolate in a bowl and pour the hot cream over. Stir a couple of times and cover. Let sit 5 minutes so the cream melts the chocolate. Gently whisk until smooth.

2. Place a scoop of each flavor ice cream into 6 bowls. Top with some of the sauce. (Don't be stingy lest your guests complain.) Sprinkle with almonds.

— Emily Luchetti, *"The Fearless Baker"* (Little, Brown and Company, 288 pp., \$29.99)

to wear a watch. I know when it's 3 p.m. I'm looking around for that piece of chocolate. I've been around sugar too much.

Q We hear humans aren't your only fans ...

A (Laughs) At Waterbar, we have that great patio and people bring their dogs. I saw some dogs out there the other day, and I thought, "I'm going to make some dog biscuits!" They've been very popular. We cut them in shapes — sharks and fish. We try to keep all the Waterbar customers happy.

Q Awww. OK, last thing. What are your three favorite "Fearless" desserts?

A I love the 3 p.m. Chocolate Pick-Me-Up Cookies! The Almond Sundaes with Espresso-White Chocolate Sauce — there's something about warm sauce with ice cream. The Strawberry Tart. You put strawberry jam in the bottom, then sour cream and sliced strawberries. You get that really, really intense, delicious, double strawberry

MORE FEARLESS BAKING

READ: "The Fearless Baker: Scrumptious Cakes, Pies, Cobblers, Cookies, and Quick Breads that You Can Make to Impress Your Friends and Yourself" by Emily Luchetti and Lisa Weiss (Little, Brown and Company, 288 pp., \$29.99).

TASTE: Enjoy pastry chef Emily Luchetti's desserts at San Francisco's Waterbar, 399 The Embarcadero South, www.waterbarsf.com; and at Farallon, 50 Post St., www.farallonrestaurant.com.

MEET: Emily Luchetti and Lisa Weiss will be joining Berkeley's Cooks' Book Club of Fourth Street, from 6-7:30 p.m. May 24. Join the conversation, moderated by Bay Area News Group food editor Jackie Burrell, discuss the book and sample recipes at Books Inc., 1760 Fourth St. Free. Details: www.booksinc.net/cooks-book-club-fourth-street.

Join Luchetti in San Francisco from 6-7 p.m. May 25 at Omnivore Books on Food, 3885a Cesar Chavez St.; <http://omnivorebooks.com>.

HEAR: Catch an interview with Emily Luchetti on "Dining Around with Gene Burns," which airs from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. May 28 on KGO-Radio, AM 810.

flavor. Is that two or three?

Q Three.

A Oh.

Q You can do four.

A The Chocolate-Peanut Butter Bites — those are really good.