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READERS ASK CAROLINE DIPPING

A goat cheese cheesecake? Great googly moogly!

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Great goat cheese cheesecake at Napa Valley Grille in Horton Plaza. Do you have an in to get this recipe?

Irene Batch, San Diego

Equipped with nothing more than my sensational phone personality, I was able to get the cheesecake recipe fairly easily from executive chef Michael Rubino. He says this dessert is so beloved by Barry Goff, president of Tavistock Restaurants, which owns Napa Valley Grille, that it has never left the menu in the restaurant's 16-year-history.

Laura Chenel Chevre Cheesecake

Makes 10 single-serving cheesecakes

ZINFANDEL COULIS

2 cups zinfandel wine or any full-bodied red wine

CHEESECAKE

1 whole vanilla bean

2 pounds cream cheese, at room temperature

1 1/2 cups powdered sugar

4 large eggs

1/4 cup Laura Chenel soft goat cheese

1/4 cup sweetened condensed milk

3 ounces (6 tablespoons) sour cream

3 ounces (6 tablespoons) heavy cream

SOUR CREAM TOPPING

3 ounces (6 tablespoons) sour cream

4 tablespoons granulated sugar

Reduce the 2 cups of red wine in a saucepan on medium heat until syrupy. Once the wine has reduced by three-quarters, reduce heat to low to avoid burning. When wine is syrupy, set it aside.

Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Cut vanilla bean in half lengthwise. Using the back of small knife, scrape out seeds. Set aside the husk and seeds separately (see note).

Blend cream cheese, powdered sugar and vanilla seeds in a large mixer with a paddle attachment until smooth. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition.

In a separate bowl, combine the goat cheese, sweetened condensed milk, sour cream and heavy cream, and whisk until smooth. Combine both mixtures until well incorporated.

Form cheesecakes in 10 2 1/2-inch-high by 4 1/4-inch-wide stainless steel ring molds. Seal one end of each mold with heavy aluminum foil so the cheesecake batter can be poured in without leaking out. Spray inside each aluminum foil-lined mold with cooking spray. (Test first by sealing one of the molds and pouring in batter to see if there is any leaking.)

Place the molds into a casserole dish. Fill the molds with batter to within 1/2 inch from the top. Put the casserole in the oven carefully. Add water inside casserole dish two-thirds of the way up the sides of ring molds. Avoid pouring any water inside the ring molds. Bake for 40 minutes, or until centers are firm. Remove casserole dish from the oven carefully. Let molds sit in the water (if there is any water left) for 5 minutes before removing with a flat spatula.

As cheesecakes cool, whisk the sour cream and sugar for the topping vigorously until frothy. With a spoon, top each cheesecake with sour cream mixture to the top of the mold. Place in refrigerator until completely chilled before removing mold. For best results, leave foil on until you are ready to plate.

Serve the cheesecakes with some of the Zinfandel Coulis drizzled around each plate.

Note: Chef Rubino says the de-seeded vanilla bean can be combined with 2 cups of granulated sugar in a mason jar to make vanilla sugar for baking or adding to mixed drinks.


(From chef Michael Rubino of Napa Valley Grille.)

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