



Vanilla-Bean Sablés

IN THE AMERICAN WORLD OF COOKIES, the chocolate chip is the icon. In the French world, it's the sablé, a simple shortbread cookie notable for its fine texture—snappy around the edges, cakier in the center—its fresh butter flavor and, often, its bit of saltiness. While the French have hundreds of cookies, half a hundred of them are probably based on the sablé. Chocolate chip? Just add chips. Lemon? Orange? Hazelnut? Caramel? Ditto. It's the tabula rasa of French cookiedom. It also happens to be my favorite cookie.

Sablé, which means “sandy,” is both the cookie's name and the adjective that best describes its characteristic texture. To get the sandy-ish shortbread texture, you need to mix the dough at low speed so you don't add air to it and, most important, once the flour goes in, you've got to work quickly and gently—you want to beat the dough as little as possible. Often I'll add the flour, pulse the mixer on and off to get the blending going and then do the rest of the mixing by hand. Whether you continue with the machine or with hand power, the key is not to overdo it.

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| 1/3 cup (67 grams) sugar | 1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt |
| 2 moist, fragrant vanilla beans
or 2 teaspoons pure vanilla
extract | 1 large egg yolk |
| 2 sticks (8 ounces; 226 grams)
unsalted butter, at room
temperature | 2 cups (272 grams) all-purpose
flour |
| 1/3 cup (40 grams) confectioners'
sugar, sifted | |

Real vanilla beans are worth the splurge.

Put the granulated sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, or in a large bowl in which you can use a hand mixer. If you are using vanilla beans, cut them in half lengthwise and scrape the pulp over the sugar. (Save the pods for another use or stash them in a canister of sugar to make vanilla sugar.) Using your fingertips, rub the vanilla pulp into the sugar until it's fragrant. (If you're using extract, you'll add it later.)

Add the butter, confectioners' sugar and salt to the bowl and beat on low speed until the mixture is smooth and creamy (you don't want it to get light and fluffy), scraping down the sides and bottom of the bowl as needed. Drop in the egg yolk and beat for 1 minute. If you're using vanilla extract, beat it in now. Add the flour all at once and pulse the mixer on and off to start incorporating it into the dough. Mix on low speed just until the flour has disappeared (or do this last little bit by hand with a flexible spatula).

Turn the dough out onto a work surface and divide it in half. Shape each

Scrape down the paddle as well.

I only got 28 cookies and I cut them using a ruler.

Makes about ~~36~~ cookies

SERVING: I think of these as tea biscuits, café cookies, after-school treats, grown-up nibbles and midnight snacks—I serve them anytime.

STORING: You can wrap the logs of dough airtight and keep them in the freezer for up to 2 months; coat them with the egg wash and sugar just before baking. Once baked, the cookies will keep at room temperature in a closed container for about 1 week.

Make sure you break up all the butter so there are no hidden chunks.

Freezing
the dough
works
beautifully.



half into a log about 9 inches long. (To learn how to get really tight logs, see page 61) Wrap the logs in parchment or plastic film and refrigerate for at least 3 hours. *(If you'd like, you can wrap the logs airtight and freeze them for up to 2 months. Let the logs sit at room temperature for about 10 minutes before cutting and baking; no need to fully defrost.)*

WHEN YOU'RE READY TO BAKE: Position the racks to divide the oven into thirds and preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats.

Add a splash of cold water to the yolk and mix with a fork to blend. Brush each log with this egg wash and roll it in sanding sugar until it's evenly coated. Using a sturdy knife, trim the ends of the logs if they're ragged, then cut the dough into 1/2-inch-thick rounds. Place them on the baking sheets, about 2 inches apart.

Watch these
cookies once they
go in the oven—
mine only took 17
minutes.



Bake the cookies for 18 to 22 minutes, rotating the baking sheets from top to bottom and front to back at the midway point. The cookies are baked when they are brown around the edges and golden on the bottom. Carefully transfer them to a cooling rack and cool to room temperature. These really shouldn't be eaten warm; they need time to cool so that their texture will set properly.

Bonne Idées

This recipe can be the base of several other cookies or the recipe you can build your own cookie dreams on. Here are a few suggestions.

LEMON SABLÉS: Keep the vanilla bean or extract, and rub the grated zest of 1½ lemons into the sugar.

ORANGE SABLÉS: Keep the vanilla bean or extract, and

rub the grated zest of 1 orange into the sugar.

COCOA SABLÉS: Reduce the amount of all-purpose flour to 1¾ cups and sift it with ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder. Use just 1 vanilla bean or 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract and, if you'd like, mix in 2 ounces finely chopped semisweet or bittersweet

chocolate once the flour is incorporated.

NUT SABLÉS: Lightly toast ½ cup hazelnuts (skin them while they are still warm), almonds, pistachios or other nuts, finely chop them and mix them into the dough once the flour is incorporated.

SPICE SABLÉS: Whisk your favorite spices into the

flour before adding it to the dough. Try ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon, ¼ teaspoon ground ginger and a pinch of ground cloves for holiday cookies; or just use ¾ to 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon. Reduce the vanilla to ½ to 1 bean or ½ teaspoon extract.



Petite Apple Croustades

CROUSTADES, which tiptoe along the line that separates tarts and pastries, are beloved in many regions of France, but for me they'll always be Gascon, since I first learned about them and tasted them with a chef who was the pride of Gascony, the late Jean-Louis Palladin. It was the end of the 1980s, and Jean-Louis, who was the chef at the Watergate in Washington, D.C., was making food that was spinning the heads of every great chef in America and France. To say that he was avant-garde wouldn't put him far enough ahead of the pack. But the dessert that we were talking about was very old, and it was one he loved dearly.

For our croustade adventure, Jean-Louis chose Armagnac-soaked prunes (although he said that apples would be wonderful too) and, in place of the traditional dough that depended on fat from either ducks or geese, he used phyllo. He brushed each layer with butter and sprinkled it with sugar. Every two layers of stacked buttered-and-sugared phyllo were run under the broiler until caramelized. It was gorgeous.

Yet as gorgeous and delicious as it was, I never made it again—the process was too complicated. It wasn't until recently when I saw beautiful croustades in a neighborhood bakery in Paris that I tried my hand at them. Now, I make them just as they're done in the pâtisserie: simply. I cut strips of phyllo, butter and sugar them, stack them to make pouches, fill them with caramelized apples and seal them like beggar's purses. I bake them in muffin tins—the perfect molds.

A WORD ON SPIRIT AND SIZE: I use Armagnac to flavor the apples, but you can use brandy, Cognac, applejack or Calvados instead. You can also omit the alcohol. As for size, since the recipe is a construction, it's easy—and mathematically unchallenging—to adjust it for more or fewer.

FOR THE FILLING

- 1½ tablespoons (¾ ounce; 21 grams) unsalted butter
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 3 apples (about 1½ pounds; 681 grams), such as Gala, Fuji or Golden Delicious, peeled, cored and cut into 1-inch cubes

You'll have plenty of phyllo dough, so it's worth doubling the recipe.

You can use a melon baller to scoop out the cores

- 1½ tablespoons Armagnac or 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract (optional)

FOR THE CRUST

- ½ stick (4 tablespoons; 2 ounces; 57 grams) unsalted butter, melted
- 9 sheets phyllo dough, each about 8 × 14 inches, thawed
- Sugar, for sprinkling
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

Use fully thawed phyllo. If you try to unroll or cut partially frozen dough it will tear.

Makes 6 servings

SERVING: Croustades are most delicious when they're warm, but they are still very good at room temperature. If you'd like, you can reheat them on a parchment-lined baking sheet for about 10 minutes in a 350-degree-F oven before serving. Depending on when you're serving them, perhaps as a midday snack or an after-dinner dessert, the croustades can be enjoyed plain, with ice cream or with Vanilla Crème Anglaise (page 441) poured around them.

STORING: You can make the apple filling up to 2 days ahead and keep it covered in the refrigerator. The croustades are best served shortly after they're made, but you can bake them a few hours ahead of serving—in which case, it's nice to reheat them briefly (see Serving).

Bonne Idée

BERRY AND CREAM

CROUSTADES: Once you know how to construct croustades, it's easy to think of different ways to fill them. Almost anything that you'd bake in a tart or pie can be made into a croustade. One of my favorite things to do is to put Vanilla Pastry Cream (page 430) in the bottom of the croustade, cover it with blueberries, raspberries and blackberries (or one kind of berry—but not strawberries, which are too watery) and then draw the bundle together. If you'd like, instead of pastry cream you can use Almond Cream (page 432). And, instead of fresh fruit, you might go totally Gascon and use prunes soaked for a few hours in Armagnac and hot water, or soaked in strong black tea.

Brush gently,
the phyllo is
fragile and
tears easily.



TO MAKE THE FILLING: Melt the butter in a medium skillet, preferably non-stick, over medium-high heat. Sprinkle the sugar over the butter and stay nearby. As soon as the sugar starts to color around the edges of the pan, grab a wooden spoon and begin making little circles all around the edges of the pan, blending in the colored sugar. Continue to make larger circles, drawing in the caramelized sugar, and soon you will have worked your way to the center of the pan. When the sugar is a pale caramel color, toss in the apples, turn the heat to high and stir and toss the apples until they are coated with mahogany-colored caramel and cooked through but not mushy, 5 to 7 minutes. Pour in the Armagnac, if you're using it, and cook until it evaporates. Or, if you'd like, you can flambé the Armagnac—just turn off the heat and stand back!

Scrape the apples into a heatproof bowl. If you're using vanilla extract, stir it in. Set the apples aside to cool until just warm or at room temperature. (*Once they are cooled, you can pack the apples into an airtight container and keep them in the refrigerator for up to 2 days; drain off the excess liquid and stir before using.*)

TO ASSEMBLE AND BAKE THE CROUSTADES: Center a rack in the oven and preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. If you have a 6-cup muffin tin, great; if not, use a 12-cup tin. Using the melted butter, coat 6 muffin cups. If you're making 6 croustades in a 12-cup tin, use every other muffin cup, so that you have extra room to lay out the phyllo strips and so the croustades will bake more evenly.

Put a large piece of plastic film on the counter, lay the sheets of phyllo on top and cover with another sheet of film. Keep the phyllo you're not working with covered like this.

Lay a few sheets of phyllo out on the counter, with a short side toward you, and, using a pizza wheel or a sharp knife, cut each sheet in half from top to bottom. Then cut each half in half again from top to bottom. You'll have 4 strips, each 2 × 14 inches, from each sheet.

You'll be using 6 strips for each croustade: Place one strip on the counter (I line the counter with a piece of parchment), brush it with melted butter and sprinkle it with sugar. Lay it in a muffin cup, buttered side up. Butter and sugar a second strip and lay it in the cup perpendicular to the first strip. Continue buttering and sugaring 4 more strips, laying them into the cup so that they crisscross each other and cover the sides completely. Spoon in a portion of the apples; they should come about three quarters of the way up the sides of the cup. Carefully reach under the overhanging strips and gather them together the way you would a bouquet, to enclose the filling. Squeeze the strips together and, if you'd like, give them a gentle twist. The phyllo is fragile, so the edges may break off—it's okay; ragged is very pretty. Brush and/or sprinkle the top of the croustade with melted butter—do the best that you can with the uneven top—and then dust with confectioners' sugar, using a sugar duster or strainer.

Repeat until all 6 croustades are assembled.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the croustades are a gorgeous toasty brown. Transfer the muffin tin to a rack and let the croustades cool for about 5 minutes, then gingerly lift them out of the tin and place them on the rack. Cool to warm or to room temperature.



Marquise au Chocolat

THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES were good times for French pastry chefs. Kings still reigned, aristocrats were scattered around the country and everyone with a title who could afford sugar and a chef wanted special sweets. It's likely that the Marquise au Chocolat comes from this period. A frozen chocolate mousse, it starts off as a simple sweet, but in the hands of someone's chef, it could become baroque. Even at home, the possibilities for getting fancy with this sweet are just about limitless.

Traditionally, the marquise is packed into a loaf pan, frozen and then sliced just before serving. This is exceedingly practical, since you can make the dessert weeks ahead; use what you need and keep the rest in the freezer for the next dinner party. The mousse also lends itself to being made in mini loaf pans or even small ramekins—when unmolded, these look very professional.

Similarly, the marquise can be plain or surprising. Often you'll find pieces of Petit Beurre or Biscoff (speculoos) cookies inside it, or the mousse might rest on a cookie or crumb base. Truly, anything that goes with chocolate (and that can stand up to freezing) is fair game for an addition.

A WORD ON THE EGGS: The yolks in this recipe are not cooked, so it's important to use very fresh eggs, preferably organic and/or from a trusted local source.

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| 1 stick (8 tablespoons;
4 ounces; 113 grams)
unsalted butter, cut into 16
pieces | 4 very fresh large egg yolks,
preferably organic, at room
temperature |
| 13 ounces (369 grams)
bittersweet chocolate,
coarsely chopped | 1/3 cup (67 grams) sugar, plus
3 tablespoons sugar |
| | 1/4 teaspoon fleur de sel or a
pinch of fine sea salt |
| | 1 1/2 cups (355 ml) very cold heavy
cream |

Line an 8½-×-4½-inch or 9-×-5-inch loaf pan with plastic film, leaving some overhang to make unmolding easier.

Put a large heatproof bowl over a pot of simmering water. Drop in the pieces of butter, cover with the chocolate and heat slowly, stirring occasionally, until the ingredients have melted; don't let the chocolate get too hot. When the chocolate and butter have melted, you should have a thick, velvety mixture. Transfer the bowl to the counter and let cool for 15 minutes.

Working in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, or in a large bowl with a hand mixer, beat the yolks, 1/3 cup of the sugar and

Makes 8 to 10 servings

SERVING: The best way to slice the marquise is to use dental floss or a warm knife—run a long-bladed knife under hot water and wipe it dry. Cut the marquise into slices that are a scant 1 inch thick. If you can serve the slices on cold plates, so much the better. Traditionally the marquise is served with vanilla crème anglaise (page 441), a lovely match. If you're rushed for time, you can serve it with faux crème anglaise: melted premium-quality vanilla ice cream. It is also good with whipped cream or crème fraîche.

STORING: Wrapped airtight, the marquise will keep in the freezer for up to 1 month.

Aim for a generous overhang on all four sides, which comes in handy later when you are wrapping the chocolate (wrapping this well protects it from freezer burn).

Bonne Idée

If you'd like to add another texture to the marquise, you can include some cookies in the mousse.

Petit Beurre (homemade, page 270, or store-bought), LU Cinnamon Sugar Spice, Biscoff and arrowroot cookies all work well. Use a knife to cut them into pieces of any size and, as you're spooning in the mousse, scatter in some cookie bits. If you'd like, you can be more orderly and make layers of cookies and layers of marquise. Or make a base for the marquise: After the mousse is in the pan, use a spatula to smooth the top and lay or sprinkle cookies or graham crackers, graham cracker crumbs, homemade Petit Beurre crumbs or Cocoa Crumbs (page 426) over the mousse, pressing gently to secure them.

Another Bonne Idée

To give this grown-up dessert a kid-like finish, pour some hot Hard-Crack Chocolate Sauce (page 445) over the loaf or bring a pitcher to the table and let your guests pour as much as they'd like over their own portions. Do that and they'll have the fun of watching it harden as soon as it hits the frozen dessert.

the salt at medium speed until the mixture pales and thickens slightly, about 2 minutes. Turn the yolk mixture out onto the chocolate and butter and, with a flexible spatula or a whisk, gently fold together. Don't worry about being thorough now; you're going to fold again soon.

Wipe out the mixer (or mixing) bowl and pour in the heavy cream. Whip the cream until it shows the first sign of thickening, then slowly and steadily add the remaining 3 tablespoons sugar and beat until the cream holds firm peaks. Spoon it onto the chocolate and very gently fold it in.

Spoon the mousse into the prepared pan, pushing it into the corners and smoothing the top. Fold the edges of the plastic film over the mousse and then wrap the pan in more plastic film. Freeze the marquise for at least 6 hours. (*The marquise can be frozen for up to 1 month.*)

To unmold, unwrap the pan, pull the edges of the plastic film away from the marquise and tug on the plastic to release the marquise. If the marquise is recalcitrant, dip the bottom of the pan in hot water for about 15 seconds, then try again. Turn the marquise over onto a platter or cutting board and serve immediately. (If it's more convenient for you, you can unmold the marquise and return it to the freezer for a few hours before serving.)

Use the whisk attachment again.

Be gentle but thorough so everything gets fully blended and there are no streaks. Be sure to incorporate all of the chocolate mixture into the whipped cream—some chocolate make stick/linger in the bottom of the bowl.

A mini offset spatula comes in handy—you can tap the loaf pan a little to make sure there are no air pockets and once the plastic wrap is folded over top, you can gently press on it to push the mixture into the corners.