

In the early 19th century, Antonin Carême made his own version of this cake recipe, which had originally been created across the Channel a century before. The biscuits surrounding the cake were at that time called *à la cuillère* (spoon biscuits) and the great French pastry chef also swiftly topped his charlotte with a bavarois cream when he served it at grand banquets. He named it, first of all, *à la parisienne* (Parisian style) and then *à la russe* (Russian style) to please Tsar Alexander I. Could the name "Charlotte", as this indulgent cake is called, possibly be a reference to the ruffled bonnet made popular at the time by Queen Charlotte?

Parisian chocolate charlotte

Preparation time:
1 hour
Cooking time:
18 minutes
Chilling time:
4 to 5 hours

EQUIPMENT

8½-inch (22-cm) charlotte mold

INGREDIENTS TO SERVE 6 TO 8

10½ to 12oz (300 to 350g) boudoir biscuits (see page 50)

Custard ½ cup (4fl oz/120ml) whole milk · ⅔ cup (5¼fl oz/160ml) whipping cream (35% fat) · 1 vanilla bean, slit lengthwise and seeds scraped out · 3 egg yolks · 5⅔ tbsp (2½oz/70g) superfine (caster) sugar

Chocolate bavarois cream 10½oz (300g) bittersweet (dark) chocolate (70% cacao), chopped · 6½ gelatin leaves (½oz/12.5g) · 1¾ cups (14fl oz/400ml) whipping cream

Syrup ½ cup (4fl oz/120ml) water · ⅔ cup less 1 tsp (4¼oz/120g) superfine (caster) sugar · ½ vanilla bean, slit lengthwise and seeds scraped out · 3 tbsp (¾oz/20g) unsweetened cocoa powder

For decoration and serving (optional) Chocolate shavings

Make the custard

Heat the milk and cream in a saucepan, add the vanilla bean and seeds, and bring to the boil. Take the pan off the heat, cover it and leave to infuse for 10 minutes. Whisk the egg yolks and sugar together in a mixing bowl until pale and thickened. Gradually whisk in the warm vanilla milk. Return the mixture to the saucepan and stir with a wooden spatula over a medium heat until the temperature reaches 180°F (82°C), taking care not to let it rise above that. Strain the custard into a bowl through a fine sieve or conical sieve to stop further cooking. The custard will coat the back of the spatula and, when a finger is drawn through the custard, it will leave a trace.

Make the chocolate bavarois cream

Melt the chocolate gently in a water-bath. Soak the gelatin leaves in cold water for a few minutes to soften them. Squeeze out the leaves and add them to the still-warm custard, stirring until the gelatin melts. Add the melted chocolate and mix in.

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You can cool the mixture more quickly in a water-bath with ice cubes added. When the temperature drops to about 68°F (20°C), the chocolate cream will start to thicken. Whip the cream and gently fold it in, using a flexible spatula, to make a bavarois cream.

Make the syrup

Heat the water, sugar, ½ vanilla pod, and seeds in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Once boiling, add the cocoa powder, mixing it in with a whisk.

To assemble and decorate

Line the charlotte mold with plastic wrap (cling film) or parchment paper. Dip the boudoir biscuits in the cold syrup and line the base and the sides of the mold with them. Carefully pour in the chocolate bavarois cream. Put the mold in the refrigerator for 4 to 5 hours. Remove the charlotte from the mold and place on a serving plate.

If you wish, you can shave off curls of chocolate using a vegetable peeler to decorate the top of the charlotte.



This is one of the many recipes attributed to Antonin Carême in the 19th century. The story goes that the pastry chef of kings came up with the clever idea for the recipe when he saw Talleyrand dipping a sponge finger in a glass of Madeira to reduce the effect of the alcohol, a common practice at that time. He devised a recipe for a cookie (biscuit) that would not disintegrate when it was soaked. The name *boudoir* is believed to refer to the "boudoir diplomacy" the statesman conducted. The anecdote has survived, but the recipe may have been created much earlier by the pastry chef of Amédée VI of Savoy.

Boudoir biscuits

Preparation time: 25 minutes • Cooking time: 6 to 8 minutes

INGREDIENTS
TO MAKE ABOUT 20 BISCUITS

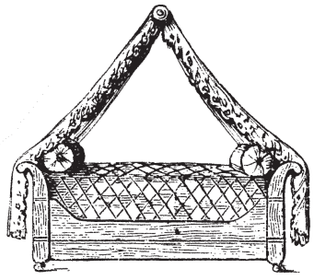
3½oz (100g) egg whites
½ cup (3½oz/100g) superfine (caster) sugar, plus extra for dusting
2½oz (75g) egg yolks
5½ tbsp (1¾oz/45g) all-purpose (plain) flour
½ cup less 1 tsp (1¾oz/45g) cornstarch (cornflour)

Preheat the oven to 425°F (210°C/Gas mark 7).

Whisk the egg whites in a bowl until they are standing in firm peaks. Whisk in the sugar in four or five batches (as for making meringue).

Using a spatula, mix some of the whisked egg whites with the egg yolks, making sure the two are evenly combined. Add the rest of the egg whites and fold in gently. Sift in the flour and cornstarch and fold in as well. Spoon the mixture into a piping bag fitted with a ½-inch (12-mm) plain tip. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and pipe lines of the batter, 4 to 5 inches (10 to 12cm) long, spaced well apart. Sprinkle over a thin layer of superfine sugar twice and place immediately in the oven.

Bake for 6 to 8 minutes.



TIP:
YOU CAN REPLACE ⅔OZ (20G) SUGAR WITH ⅔OZ (20G) RUNNY HONEY (SUCH AS ACACIA HONEY) FOR A LONGER STORAGE TIME.

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