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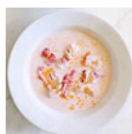
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A Tiny Trend From France Hits It Big in America

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Café Gourmand at **Sage French Café** in Ft. Lauderdale (Credit: [Scott Vandal](#))

We've all heard that French women don't get fat, but now, finally, we may be closer to understanding at least one of the reasons why. In the last few years, a deliciously sneaky dessert concept called **Café Gourmand** has crept onto the menus of France, from bistros to brasseries and neighborhood pastry shops, to gastronomic temples. And now it has landed in the U.S.

The idea is simple: Café Gourmand combines a coffee drink with three or four mini-desserts, often chosen at the chef's whim, that take the place of a single, larger, more calorific dessert. It's faster to consume than having separate dessert and coffee courses (as you traditionally would at a serious Parisian meal), and it just feels lighter.

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"When I opened my first boulangerie in 2000," baker **Eric Kayser** said, referring to **Maison Kayser**, "I didn't have seats, but it was my dream to offer coffee with cakes, so as soon as possible, we came up with the idea of doing Café Gourmand." While he wasn't the inventor of Café Gourmand—that honor apparently goes to Pizza Pino in Lyon, according to this Wall Street Journal article—Kayser was at the forefront of the trend as it took off throughout France, and when he opened a branch in New York last year, he brought it over. At Maison Kayser in New York, the pretty plateau always includes a mini-millefeuille and a miniature tart along with, perhaps, a parfait-like verrine or his signature financier.

Soon afterward, Café Gourmand spread to other restaurants and other locales. **Daniel Boulud** (with whom I am—full disclosure—writing a cookbook) has just introduced his own versions: a fluffy brioche donut, a vanilla shortbread, and a scoop of ice cream at **DB Bistro** in midtown Manhattan; and a mini flourless chocolate cake or orange cream tartelette with ice cream and shortbread at **DBGB** on the Bowery. Both cost \$9.50.

"I love it when diners get their coffee and they let the chef decide which desserts they'll taste," he said. "It's a delicate and efficient way to end a meal."

Next month, **Toni Marie Cox**, pastry chef and co-owner of **Toni Patisserie and Café** in Chicago, is launching a creative "espresso gourmand" that comes with a macaron of the diner's choice, a pistachio financier, and a chocolate chip raspberry meringue topped with fresh raspberries for \$8.95. And at **Café Rabelais and Brasserie Max & Julie** in Houston, owners **Chris and Laurence Paul** serve a generous Café Gourmand that includes a mini crûme brûlée, a ladyfinger, fruit coulis, and a profiterole for \$11.50.

"This really works best if you are too full to order a real dessert," said Chris Paul, "but you still crave the taste of a few goodies."

Having one dessert split into "a few goodies" certainly feels less decadent—"It's much lighter than a real dessert," mused Catherine Berezovski, a patron at Maison Kayser in New York—but according to Kayser pastry chef **Nicolas Chevreux**, the whole shebang still amounts to about 450 calories, approximately the same amount as in a regular-size chocolate mi-cuit.

("Oh no!" said Berezovski when informed of the calorie count. "Don't tell me that!")

But then there's the difference between how Café Gourmand is consumed in Paris versus in America.

"In France, food-lovers order Café Gourmand just for themselves," said **Laurent Tasic**, chef-owner of **Sage French Café** in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, who's been offering a \$10 Café Gourmand for the last year. (One recent week, it included a mini crûme brûlée, a mini chocolate mousse, a sorbet of the day and a chocolate truffle or mini cake.) "But in the U.S., people order it to share."

And so, perhaps, we eager-to-share American diners have discovered an improvement on the French formula: all the sophistication of Paris at a fraction of the calories—and without spending a single euro. —*Sylvie Bigar*

Millefeuille

By **Nicolas Chevreux**, Executive Pastry Chef at **Maison Kayser**, NYC



Puff Pastry

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 3/4 cups unsalted butter

PREPARATION

Combine the flour, salt and 1/3 cup of the butter in a large bowl. Work with hands until mixture resembles coarse meal.

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In a pan, heat remaining milk and vanilla scraping until it comes to a boil. Slowly pour 1/4 of the hot milk into the yolk mixture and combine.

Immediately pour yolk mixture into hot milk in the pan. Whisk over medium heat until mixture comes to a boil.

Remove from heat immediately. Cover with plastic wrap to prevent skin from forming. Cool completely. After that, the pastry cream is ready for to use.

Assembly

Evenly divide cooled pastry cream onto two strips of puff pastry. Spread evenly. Lay one strip, covered with cream on top of first, lining up evenly. Top with final strip of puff pastry. Dust with icing sugar. Chill for 1 hour before serving.

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