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Food & Recipes

Dolce Italia: Divine Italian desserts from Francine Segan **April 27, 2010**

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One of the most anticipated parts of a good Italian meal is a divine after-dinner dessert that satisfies the sweet tooth while also offering a memorable cultural experience. With the growing array of authentic Italian ingredients available in the US, you can order first-rate Italian desserts off the menu or make your favorite Italian confections at home.



Francine Segan, acclaimed food historian and James Beard nominated cookbook author who was recently appointed the US spokesperson for the Italian Confectioners Association, shares three delicious Italian dessert recipes that will transport you to Italia with every savored bite.

Dolce Italia

Though a trip to Italy is the best way to sink your teeth into a truly authentic Italian dessert, you can take advantage of gourmet import markets and the tasty array of global gourmet websites to get your Italian sweet tooth fix. The most recent website DolceItalia.com, launched in March 2010, is the first official Italian website in the US devoted to Italian sweets and dessert wines.

“The Italian Confectioners Association is pleased to announce the launch of DolceItalia.com,” says Mario Piccialuti, Associazione Industrie Dolciarie Italiane (AIDI) Director. AIDI is a 100+ member organization, founded 1967, consisting of cake, cookie, chocolate, gelato and candy makers. “For the first time Italy has an online presence representing our country’s most innovative producers and authentic products never before tasted in the United States. We look forward to sharing with American consumers and even the most sophisticated gourmets the many ways in which they can experience the real taste of Italy in their own homes.”

A collaboration of the Italian Confectioners Association, Buonitalia Spa and Italian Ministry of Agriculture, DolceItalia.com offers more than just a cyberstore front. This dedicated site features an interactive regional map of Italian sweets indigenous to each area and a rich recipe library that includes chocolate and fruit desserts, custards, cookies and cakes, holiday favorites, pastries and liqueurs.

“Over the centuries, every region every city, even the smallest villages have added to Italy’s confectionary palate with their own recipes derived from popular baking traditions,” says US spokesperson for the Italian Confectioners Association Francine Segan. “Whether it is yummy chocolate or enticing Panettone, all are characterized by the use of natural, genuine and healthy ingredients. It is my hope to share DolceItalia.com as a resource to help teach American consumers about the wonderful assortment of delectable delights available in the states, so that everyone can live la dolce vita!”

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Segan's role with Dolcitalia.com is to not only educate Americans about the wide range of Italian sweets and baking traditions, but to also offer guidance on how to avoid the many imitation Italian products on the market that do not adhere to Italy's strict quality standards.

Here are three of Segan's favorite recipes featuring authentic Italian ingredients that are available at Dolcitalia.com. Stay tuned for more: In the fall of 2011, the award-winning cookbook author will be publishing her fifth cookbook, fittingly a divine collection of Italian sweets.

Lovely Italian desserts

Recipes from www.dolcitalia.com

Chocolate Tiramisu

Serves 4

Savoardi may be the basic ingredient for many mouthwatering Italian sweets, but tiramisu tops the list of most renowned Italian desserts. The original tiramisu recipe calls for just a dusting of cocoa powder but this modern Italian update from Vicenzi features a wonderfully rich and creamy center of Italian dark chocolate.



Ingredients:

8 Vicenzi Savoardi
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons coffee liqueur such as Caffuccino
4 ounces Italian dark chocolate, such as Perugina, Vanini or Venchi, divided
1/2 cup heavy cream
5 large egg yolks
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
3 ounces mascarpone cheese

Directions:

1. Cut the savoardi in half, place them in a bowl, and pour 1/2 cup of the liqueur over them. Allow them to soak up the liqueur, then line 4 glasses with the savoardi.
2. Melt 3-1/2 ounces of the chocolate in the cream in a glass bowl either over a double boiler or in the microwave. Allow to cool to room temperature and then divide the chocolate sauce between the 4 glasses.
3. Finely grate or chop the remaining chocolate as garnish and set aside. Meanwhile, bring a pot of water to a boil over medium heat.
4. Combine the yolks and sugar in a metal or glass heat-resistant bowl and whisk until creamy. Set the bowl over the simmering water, without letting the bottom touch the water, and continue whisking until the mixture thickens.
5. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons of liqueur. Continue whisking the custard until it has tripled in volume and is thick enough to coat a spoon, about 10 minutes.
6. Remove from the heat and cool the custard. Once the custard is cool, fold in the mascarpone and divide the mixture between the 4 cups. Sprinkle with the reserved chocolate and serve.

Bittersweet Chocolate Panini

Serves 4

Panettone, glorious brioche-like cake imported from Italy, is superlatively moist and delicious. Perfect for slicing and eating as is, this confection is even better when transformed into this simple-to-make dessert sandwich recipe, courtesy of Bauli. This recipe can easily be doubled if you are feeding a crowd.

Ingredients:

2 whole slices of Bauli Panettone, cut 1/2-inch thick crosswise horizontally
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
4 tablespoons dark Italian chocolate, such as Perugina, Venchi or Vanini, coarsely chopped
6 tablespoons mascarpone cheese
Confectioners' sugar
1/2 pint of fresh raspberries

Directions:

1. Cut each Bauli Panettone slice in half and then in half again creating quarter slices. You will need 2 quarters to make one panini. Butter one side of each quarter slice with 1 teaspoon of the butter and place 4 slices buttered side down on a work surface.
2. Top each of the 4 slices with 1 tablespoon of the chopped chocolate to within 1/4-inch of the edges of the pandoro. Place 1-1/2 tablespoons of the mascarpone in the center and top each with a second quarter slice of pandoro, buttered side up, to create a triangular sandwich.
3. Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. When hot, add the panini without crowding the skillet and cook for 1 minute, pressing lightly with a large spatula until golden brown. Carefully turn the panini over and cook for about 1 minute longer or until golden brown and chocolate has just melted.
4. Transfer the panini to individual serving plates, dust with confectioner's sugar and serve at once, accompanied by fresh raspberries and a good cup of espresso or cappuccino.

Italian Candy Meringues

Makes about 60 meringues

These pretty pastel colored meringues are delicious all year round! Recipe courtesy of Pastiglie Leone.

Ingredients:

4 large egg whites
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup superfine granulated sugar
1 box, 1 ounce, Pastiglie Leone candies, your favorite flavor

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 175 degrees F. and line 3 baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Beat the egg whites with the salt in a standing electric mixer at high speed until stiff peaks form. Gradually add the sugar, still beating at high speed, until glossy peaks form.
3. Spoon the meringue into a zip-lock or pastry bag and pipe 1-inch meringues onto the baking sheets. Top each meringue with a few candies.
4. Bake until firm, but still white, about 2 hours. Allow to cool completely on the sheets on a rack before removing them. Store for up to a month.

