Dining

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Dining

Dining Dining **Cupcakes and Clambakes**

By Susie Iventosch



Chow Bella booth at the Farmers' Market. Customers Tom Leserman and Jenny Leserman. Behind the table; (left to right) Jenny Smit, Lindsay Simpson, Elaine Smit and Katy Simpson Photo Andy Scheck

Elaine started Chow Bella

"It all started when three of

several years ago to share her love

my good friends and I were in-

volved with the Buena Vista Aux-

iliary, a charity organization in

Walnut Creek," Elaine noted.

"Since we all had a passion for

cooking gourmet food we thought

that we could donate to our annual

fundraiser, 'A Toast to Tutoring' a

preparation and delivery of several

gourmet meals throughout the year

to the highest bidder. The donation

was a hit and they kept it up for a

few years. This group of young

moms also enjoyed cooking to-

gether to prepare meals to freeze

for eating on one of those days,

when life is simply too rushed to

fix a nice meal! (If I could have

about a dozen of those lemony

cupcakes in the freezer at all times,

my appetite would be perfectly

taking in cooking classes all

around the Bay Area, from An-

dronico's and Home Chef in Wal-

They also made a habit of

content on those harried days!)

The four friends donated the

wine tasting silent auction."

of cooking with others.

f you haven't met up with the Chow Bella girls and their cupcake booth at the Moraga Farmers' Market you don't know what you're missing. Actually, I don't even know what I'm missing because I haven't tried their most famous cupcake yet ... the Mocha Cupcake. Perfected by Chow Bella partner Katy Simpson over many hours in the kitchen, the Chow Bella foursome prefers to keep that one a closely held secret for the time being. But, I have tried their divine Vanilla Bean Lemon Curd

Cupcake. Chow Bella founder Elaine Smit offered to part with this recipe and my friends and I are very glad she did. This little cupcake is light and airy with just the right amount of tart curd filling in the middle and buttercream frosting on top. The recipe calls for Meyer lemons, which are plentiful in many home gardens in the Lamorinda area, and if you don't have a tree of your own, a neighbor probably does. If not, try it with regular lemons from the grocery store. I did and the cupcakes were still wonderful.

nut Creek to the Culinary Academy in San Francisco. One day, Colleen and Elaine took a daylong cooking class from Thomas Keller of the French Laundry in Yountville in the Napa Valley.

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"At the end of the cooking day, the entire class was invited to the French Laundry for dinner, wine and music," Elaine fondly remembers.

Elaine feels fortunate to have many friends and family who support and encourage her efforts. Due to the success of Chow Bella, she called upon her most trusted foodie friends to join her in the business.

"They keep me going," she says. "I couldn't do it without the involvement of Katy, Colleen and Rebecca. They play important roles from the baking to teaching the kids' classes and making every dish look beautiful."

Katy (Cupcake) Simpson is the heart and soul behind the beautiful dessert creations, while Colleen Wheaton has the creative eye for plate presentation and food design. Trained at the San Francisco Culinary Academy and also possessing a degree in fashion design, Colleen has a real knack for food styling. Rebecca Sullivan, who also trained at the San Francisco Culinary Academy, studied culinary arts and is a natural at teaching. She heads up the Chow Bella Kids Cooking Program.

Chow Bella has a host of great party ideas and a scrumptious selection of catering menus, but this week we're featuring the Vanilla Bean Lemon Curd cupcakes as a tiny glimpse into the bakery portion of the business. Since Chow Bella has been asked by clients to create traditional east coast clambakes for summertime parties, we'll feature their recipe for clambakes using three different cooking methods in the next issue of Lamorinda Weekly.

Chow Bella, Back to the Kitchen Cooking Parties, Kids Summer Cooking Camp, Cooking classes, Catering, Personal Chef Services Baked Goods at the Farmers' Market in Moraga-featuring Mocha, lemon curd, coconut, salted caramel, strawberry, s'mores (graham cracker crust) cupcakes Phone: (925) 878-9932

Web: www.chowbella.net

Email: elaine@chowbella.net

Vanilla Bean Lemon Curd Cupcakes **Lemon Curd**

(Makes enough for 2 dozen cupcakes)

- 1 cup sugar
- Zest of 3 lemons
- 3 large eggs 4 large egg yolks
- 1 cup Meyer lemon juice
- 5 ounces unsalted butter, chilled and cut into small pieces

Prepare and ice-water bath. Set a medium bowl in ice-water bath and set aside. Place sugar and lemon zest in a mortal and grind with a pestle to combine and release the oils. Transfer sugar mixture to a medium heatproof bowl along with eggs and egg yolks; whisk to combine. Place over a saucepan of

simmering water and whisk until sugar has dissolved. Add lemon juice and continue whisking until mixture is thick and reaches 160 degrees on an instant-read thermometer, scraping

down sides of bowl as necessary. Add butter and

whisk until well combined. Strain lemon mixture through a fine mesh sieve set over prepared bowl. Cover lemon curd with plastic wrap, pressing plastic wrap directly onto surface. Transfer to refrigerator until completely chilled.

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Vanilla Bean Cupcakes

- 2 cups cake flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 12 tablespoons unsalted butter (1 1/2 sticks), at room temperature
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise and scraped, seeds reserved (or 1 tablespoon vanilla extract)
- 2 large egg whites, at room temperature
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature
- 3/4 cup whipping cream at room temperature

Heat the oven to 350°F and arrange a rack in the middle. Line 2 (12-well) muffin pans with paper liners. Alternatively, coat the wells with butter; set aside. Combine flour, baking powder, and salt in a medium bowl and whisk to aerate and break up any lumps; set aside.

Place butter in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and beat on medium-high speed until very light in color, about 3 minutes. Add sugar and vanilla seeds (if you're using vanilla extract instead, you'll add it later), and continue beating until mixture is airy, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the paddle and the sides of the bowl, turn the mixer to medium speed, and add egg whites one at a time, beating well after each addition. Then add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition.

Add milk (and vanilla extract, if you're using it in place of seeds), and mix until combined (the mixture will look curdled, but it's not). Scrape down the sides of the bowl. Reduce speed to low, add flour mixture, and mix until just combined, about 15 seconds.

Fill the muffin wells about halfway, and bake cupcakes until golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 18 minutes. Set the pans on a wire rack and let cool for 5 minutes. Remove cupcakes from the pans and let cool completely before frosting and filling with lemon curd. Remove small piece of center of cupcake with apple corer. Fill with small amount of lemon curd (put lemon curd in plastic condiment bottle for easy filling)

Vanilla Bean Buttercream

2 cups unsalted butter, softened, cut into pieces

- 3 ½ cups powdered sugar, sifted pinch of salt
- 1 vanilla bean, scraped
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1/4 cup whole milk or whipping cream

Beat butter until creamy. Slowly add powdered sugar, until combined. Add vanilla bean seeds and vanilla. Slowly add milk or cream and beat until creamy – about 5 minutes. Frost cupcakes, dip in sanding sugar, and top with raspberry if desired.

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284-3500 Hsiangs Mandarin Cuisine, 1 Orinda Way # 1, Ori, 253-9852 Lily's House, 3555 Mt. Diablo Blvd #A, Laf, 284-7569 Mandarin Flower, 581 Moraga Rd, Mor, 376-7839 Panda Express, 3608 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, 962-0288 Szechwan Chinese Restaurant, 79 Orinda Way, Ori, 254-2020 Uncle Yu's Szechuan, 999 Oak Hill Rd, Laf, 283-1688 Yan's Restaurant, 3444 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, 284-2228 Coffee Shop Millie's Kitchen, 1018 Oak Hill Rd #A, Laf, 283-2397 Squirrel's Coffee Shop, 998 Moraga Rd, Laf, 284-7830 Village Inn Café, 204 Village Square, Ori, 254-6080 Continental Petar's Restaurant, 32 Lafayette Cir, Laf, 284-7117 Vino Restaurant, 3531 Plaza Way, Laf, 284-1330 Duck Club Restaurant, 3287 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, 283-7108 Chevalier Restaurant, 960 Moraga Road, Laf, 385-0793 **Hawaiian Grill** Lava Pit, 2 Theatre Square, St. 142, Ori, 253-1338 Indian Swad Indian Cuisine, 3602 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, 962-9575 Italian Giardino, 3406 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, 283-3869 Knoxx Restaurant, Lounge, 3576 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, 284-5225 La Finestra Ristorante, 100 Lafayette Cir, #101, Laf, 284-5282 La Piazza, 15 Moraga Way, Ori, 253-9191 Mangia Ristorante Pizzeria, 975 Moraga Rd, Laf, 284-3081 Michael's, 1375 Moraga Way, Mor, 376-4300 Mondello's, 337 Rheem Blvd, Mor, 376-2533

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Turquoise Mediterranean Grill, 70 Moraga Way, Ori, Mexican 360 Gourmet Burrito, 3655 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, El Charro Mexican Dining, 3339 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, El Jaro Mexican Cafe, 3563 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, La Cocina Mexicana, 23 Orinda Way, Ori, Mucho wraps, 1375-B Moraga Way, Mor, Baja Fresh Mexican Grill, 3596 Mt. Diable Blvd, Laf, Celia's Restaurant, 3666 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf, El Balazo, 3518D Mt. Diablo Blvd, Laf,

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