

THE VIOLET FEMME



Jamie calls her his favourite cake maker, and her shop, Violet, is an East London landmark. Claire Ptak shares some of the recipes that have made her baking's best

Recipes & styling **Claire Ptak** Photography **Laura Edwards**



HER FRIENDS HAVE NICKNAMED HER CLAIRE CAKES, WHICH GIVES some hint of what it is that keeps Claire Ptak busy. Jamie is a huge fan of hers (they've been friends for a decade) and her American-style cupcakes have a loyal following. She is best known for the cake stall, Violet, that she has run at East London's Broadway Market since 2006, but last year she expanded her empire with a shop and cafe in a street nearby. Here, an open-plan kitchen offers customers the added treat of being able to watch Claire at work while gorging on the fruits of her labour.

Claire recently branched out into whoopie pies (a cross between a biscuit and a cake that sandwiches a sweet, creamy filling) and fell so in love that she wrote a book about them. "I am infatuated with moist, creamy whoopie pies," Claire says. "We've been making them at the shop for a year now and are so happy to see them catching on. It was so much fun writing a book on them and I'm continuously inspired by my ingredients to make up new combinations of the soft sponge and gooey filling."

Growing up in Point Reyes, California, young Claire was obsessed with Alice Waters' famous restaurant, Chez Panisse, in nearby San Francisco, and happiest when experimenting in her mother's kitchen. "We were nowhere near a shop, so if I didn't have an ingredient, I had to improvise. My recipes must have been disgusting, but my mom was always telling me "These are great, honey!" At 14 Claire got a job at a bakery, working every Sunday and rising at 4am in the school holidays. In her twenties, she walked into Chez Panisse and sufficiently impressed her idol, Alice Waters, with her huckleberry pie that she was offered a job on the spot. Three years later, she moved to the UK, where she's been keeping London's cake lovers happy ever since.

So what's Claire's idea of the perfect afternoon tea? "It's got to have a selection of flavours. A little bit of chocolate, something light and citrusy, and something really sweet and extravagant, such as my coffee éclair. Wash it down with builder's tea, black coffee or a delicate herbal tea - though you can't beat champagne!"

Violet, 47 Wilton Way, London E8 3ED; 020 7275 8360, violetcakes.com. Jamie Magazine readers in the UK can buy Claire Ptak's *The Whoopie Pie Book* for the special price of £12, including p&p (RRP £15, Square Peg) - just call 01206 255 800 and quote the reference 'Jamie Magazine'. The book contains more than 60 irresistible recipes for whoopie pies, ranging from simple and sweet to frozen and chilled.



TEA-TIME
TREAT

The perfect afternoon tea requires a selection of flavours. Start with a little chocolate, add something light and citrusy, and don't forget something sweet and extravagant. To wash it down, you can't beat champagne!

EARL GREY, PRUNE & OATMEAL MUFFINS

"This is sort of like a porridge muffin. Prunes soaked in Earl Grey somehow seem to taste more like prunes than plain prunes. Porridge loves prunes, and so this muffin was born. I use spelt flour because it works well with oats. If you want to stay away from wheat and gluten entirely, use gluten-free oats and buckwheat flour instead."

Makes about 16

- 250g prunes, pitted
- 100ml freshly brewed Earl Grey tea (bag left in)
- 100g whole almonds
- 200g unsalted butter
- 75g soft light brown sugar
- 2 tbsp maple syrup
- 100g jumbo oats
- 200g fine spelt flour
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 2 eggs
- 350ml plain yoghurt
- Zest of 1 lemon or bergamot lemon

1 Preheat the oven to 180C/gas 4 and line a muffin tin with paper cases (or just grease them, if you prefer). Place the prunes in a bowl that's just large enough to hold them and pour over the tea. Cover the bowl with a plate or lid and leave to steep. This can be done the night before.

2 Spread the almonds over a baking tray and toast in the oven for 5-7 minutes, or until golden in the centre when cut them open. Allow to cool.

3 Melt the butter and sugar in a small saucepan, then set aside to cool slightly. Stir in the maple syrup.

4 In a bowl, mix together the oats, spelt flour, bicarbonate of soda and ½ teaspoon of salt. Roughly chop

the toasted almonds before stirring them into the dry ingredients.

5 In a separate bowl, whisk together the eggs, yoghurt and lemon zest, then stir in the soaked prunes. Stir in the melted butter mixture, then pour it all over the dry ingredients and mix until just combined.

6 Pour into the muffin tins and bake for 30-40 minutes, or until a skewer inserted comes out clean.

Per muffin 285 cal, 16.1g fat (7.7g saturated), 5.9g protein, 27.7g carbs, 14.8g sugars

CHOCOLATE BUNS

"These little buns are really easy to make and so special. I like them on a Saturday, with coffee and the papers. They are best served warm from the oven, but can be briefly reheated so the chocolate is melty inside. The dough can be made in an electric mixer all at once and left to rise, before being shaped and filled with chocolate and left to rise again. The entire process takes a few hours, but there's ample time between each step so you can do other things. Steps 1-3 can be done in advance. Just place the buns in the fridge for up to 12 hours before baking. It is lovely to prepare them the night before and leave to chill overnight then wake up and bake them fresh for breakfast."

Makes 8-10

- 2 tbsp whole milk
- 20g fresh yeast
- 40g unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 250g strong bread flour
- 125g dark (70% cocoa) chocolate, broken into pieces
- Egg wash



CHOCOLATE BUNS

1 Combine all ingredients, except the chocolate and egg wash, with 80ml warm water and 1 teaspoon of salt. Mix using a wooden spoon or electric mixer with a dough hook until a dough forms.

2 Turn the dough onto a work surface to knead (or use the mixer's dough hook). There is no need to sprinkle the surface with flour. Let the dough rest for 15 minutes, so it's less sticky, then stretch and slap it until it becomes silky. Cover with a tea towel and leave to rise for about 30 minutes.

3 Separate the dough into 8-10 balls. Push a piece of chocolate into the centre of each roll. Pinch the dough together around the chocolate to seal. Form into balls again by pulling the dough towards you with your cupped hand while applying a little pressure. Place on a sheet to rise for 1 hour.

4 Preheat the oven to 190C/gas 5. Brush the buns with egg wash and bake for 20 minutes, or until golden and baked through. Serve at once.

Per bun 198 cal, 8.8g fat (5.4g saturated), 5.1g protein, 24.2g carbs, 6.9g sugars



COCONUT CREAM PIE

COCONUT CREAM PIE

"This is an all-American diner classic. I would usually use butter instead of vegetable shortening in a recipe like this, but the pastry you get from shortening has an unparalleled flaky, crispy texture and is needed to stand up to the thick custard filling. It's so good. Every once in a while, go for it!"

SERVES 16

- Butter for greasing
- 100g desiccated coconut, plus 1 tbsp for topping
- 500ml milk
- 140g sugar
- 4 tbsp cornflour
- 3 eggs

Pastry

- 70g vegetable shortening
- 170g flour
- 2 tsp powdered milk

Cream topping

- 250ml double cream
- Seeds of ½ vanilla pod
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp sugar

- 1 To make the pastry, put all the ingredients and ½ teaspoon of salt in a food processor and blitz until the shortening is the size of small peas. You can also do this in a bowl with the back of a fork. Add 1 tablespoon of ice-cold water and pulse to combine. If the mixture is still very dry, add another ½ tablespoon of water.
- 2 Bring the crumbly mixture together and wrap in clingfilm. Flatten the ball to a disc and chill for at least 30 minutes. This stage can be done a day in advance and the dough kept in the fridge, or up to a month in advance and kept in the freezer.
- 3 Preheat the oven to 180C/gas 4 and grease a deep 20cm round pie tin. Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper, spread all the desiccated coconut on the tray and toast in the oven for 5-7 minutes, or until golden. Set aside.
- 4 Roll out the pastry until it's large enough to line the pie tin with a slight overhang. Fold the overhang inside the tin to strengthen the sides of the pie. Press the pastry firmly into the tin,

trim and chill for 10 minutes. Line the case with baking paper, fill with baking beans, then bake for 20 minutes, or till the pastry has set. Remove the beans and return the case to the oven to bake until golden and crisp – about another 10 more minutes. Remove from the tin and set aside.

5 Place the milk and sugar in a small pan and bring to just below the boil.

6 Meanwhile, whisk the cornflour, eggs and a pinch of salt. When the milk is hot, pour a small amount into the egg mixture, then pour the lot back into the saucepan and return to the heat, whisking constantly, until it's thick, about 7 minutes.

7 Strain the mixture into a bowl and stir in all but 1 tablespoon of the toasted coconut. Chill for 3 hours. The custard can also be made the day before and chilled overnight. When cool, spread it over the pastry shell.

8 For the cream topping, whip all ingredients together until thick, then spread or pipe over the custard layer. Sprinkle with the remaining toasted coconut. Chill for 2-3 hours.

Per serving 238 cal, 14.8g fat (8.8g saturated), 3.8g protein, 21.8g carbs, 11.4g sugars

STRAWBERRY JAM WHOOPIE PIES

"Strawberries aren't at their peak yet, but after the long winter, I am always so ready for them. They make great jam when they are not very sweet, so I often cook them in a small batch to be eaten within a few days. This loosely set jam is the best type to use here. If you can't get good strawbs to make icing, use all jam instead."

Makes 9 large or 24 small pies

- 250g flour
- 1½ tsp baking powder
- 200g soft light brown sugar
- 75ml canola oil
- 100g strawberries, finely chopped (or 75g strawberry jam or compote)
- 100ml buttermilk
- 1 egg
- Strawberry jam icing (see recipe below)





remove the bowl and attach it to an electric mixer fitted with a whisk attachment. Whisk until fluffy peaks form and the mixture has cooled, about 10 minutes. The meringue needs to be completely cooled before adding the butter.

3 Turn the mixer down to a low speed and gradually add the softened butter, mixing well after each addition and scraping down the bowl. The icing may appear to curdle but keep going - it will come back together again. When the butter is mixed in, switch to the paddle attachment and continue beating till there are no more air bubbles, about 2 minutes. Gradually add the jam, mashed strawberries, vanilla seeds and lemon juice till it's all incorporated and the icing is smooth.

4 Use a piping bag with a star tip to pipe great swirls of it on half of the sliced whoopie pies, or spread with a palette knife. Sandwich together and serve. The pies will keep well at room temperature for the day.

1 Preheat the oven to 180C/gas 4 and line 2 baking trays with baking paper. Sift together the flour and baking powder, then stir in ½ teaspoon of salt. Set to one side.

2 Place the sugar and oil in a large bowl and mix well with a wooden spoon. Stir in the strawberries and buttermilk until just combined, then whisk in the egg. Fold in the flour mixture in 2 parts, being careful not to over-mix. Cover the batter and chill for 30 minutes.

3 Use an ice-cream scoop with a trigger to portion out 18 large or 48 small portions of batter, about 5cm apart, on the baking trays and bake in the oven for 10-12 minutes.

4 The whoopie pies are ready when the touch of a finger leaves a slight depression in the cake. Remove the pies from the oven and leave to cool completely on a wire rack before slicing them in half and filling with the strawberry jam icing.

Per pie (with icing) 184 cals, 9.3g fat (4.1g saturated), 1.9g protein, 23g carbs, 15.1g sugars

STRAWBERRY JAM ICING

Makes enough for 9 large or 24 small whoopie pies

- 2 egg whites
- 120g sugar
- 175g unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tbsp homemade strawberry jam
- 2 strawberries (about 25g), mashed
- ½ vanilla pod, split lengthways, seeds scraped
- A squeeze of lemon

1 Combine the egg whites and sugar in a heatproof bowl (preferably one for an electric mixer). Place the bowl over a pan of simmering water, whisking constantly until the sugar is dissolved, about 8-10 minutes. To test if it's ready, rub a small piece between your fingers - it should feel smooth, with no grains. Or use a sugar thermometer: heat the whites and sugar to 75C in a bowl over simmering water, then immediately transfer to a cold bowl, so you don't scramble the whites.

2 When the sugar has dissolved and the syrup is warm to the touch,

COFFEE ECLAIRS

"Eclairs are my favourite treat in the world. My French friend Sonia introduced me to the coffee version, now I'm utterly, totally converted."

Makes 12 small éclairs

- 65ml milk
- 50g unsalted butter, softened
- ½ tsp sugar
- 75g flour
- 2 eggs, beaten, plus egg wash

Coffee custard filling

- 250ml whole milk
- 2 tbsp whole coffee beans
- 60g sugar
- ½ vanilla pod, split lengthways, seeds scraped
- 1 egg
- 2 tbsp cornflour
- 25g butter, diced into small cubes

Coffee glaze

- 100g icing sugar
- 2 tbsp espresso or strong coffee

1 Preheat the oven to 180C/gas 4 and line a baking tray with paper. Place the milk, butter, sugar, 65ml water and a



LEMON BARS

éclair. Place on a board or rack and allow to set before serving.

Per éclair 152 cals, 6.1g fat (3.8g saturated), 3.2g protein, 21g carbs, 14.6g sugars

LEMON BARS

“This is based on my mother’s recipe, but I’ve adjusted it to get the perfect balance between dense shortbread and lemony curd. You could also make the bars with Seville oranges or try a combination of bergamot lemons and regular lemons.”

Makes 12

- Butter, for greasing
- 4 eggs
- 350g sugar
- Juice of 2 large lemons (120ml) and ½ tsp zest
- 35g flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- Icing sugar, to dust

Shortbread base

- 280g flour
- 80g icing sugar
- 225g unsalted butter, softened

pinch of salt in a saucepan, and bring to the boil over a high heat. Remove from the heat, add the flour and stir with a wooden spoon until smooth. Return to a medium heat and cook for 1 minute, until the mixture comes away from the sides and a little skin forms on the bottom of the pan.

2 Remove from the heat and gradually whisk in the eggs till you have a smooth batter that just drops off the spoon. Cover with clingfilm and leave the mixture to cool.

3 Fit a large piping bag with a 1cm plain nozzle, fill with the cooled mixture and pipe 12 éclairs onto the baking tray, spaced 5cm apart. Brush with egg wash and bake for 25–30 minutes, till golden brown and puffed. Transfer to a wire rack and pierce each pastry with a skewer so the steam can escape. Leave to cool.

4 Meanwhile for the custard filling, place the milk, coffee beans, sugar, vanilla pod and seeds, and a pinch of salt in a saucepan and heat to just under the boil. Remove the milk

mixture from the heat, cover, and leave to steep for 10–15 minutes. Meanwhile, whisk together the egg and cornflour in a small bowl and set aside.

5 Strain the milk mixture through a fine sieve into a bowl. Return the mixture to the pan and heat again to just under the boil, then whisk 2 tablespoonsful into the egg mixture. Pour this back into the pan and whisk constantly over a low heat until you have a thick custard.

6 Strain the custard, then stir to release the steam. Stir in the butter cubes, one by one. Place a sheet of clingfilm on the custard’s surface so a skin doesn’t form, and leave to cool.

7 Using the tip of a 5mm nozzle, pierce the underside of the éclairs in 4 places along their length, then gently fill each éclair with coffee custard. If you don’t have a 5mm nozzle, split the éclairs and fill using a regular nozzle.

8 For the coffee glaze, sift the icing sugar into a small bowl, then gradually whisk in the espresso. When smooth and glossy, spoon the glaze over the

1 Butter a 25cm square cake tin and line with baking paper so that one long strip covers the bottom and goes up the sides of the cake tin. Preheat the oven to 180C/gas 4.

2 For the shortbread base, put all the ingredients and 1 teaspoon of salt in a food processor and blitz until the mixture just comes together in a ball. Try not to over-mix or it will be too sticky. Press the dough into the cake tin and bake until golden, about 20–25 minutes. Remove and let cool slightly. Leave the oven on.

3 Meanwhile for the topping, whisk together the eggs, sugar and lemon juice, then whisk in the flour and baking powder. If lumps form, pour through a sieve. Stir in the lemon zest.

4 Pour the topping over the base and bake until set, about 15–20 minutes.

5 When the cake has cooled completely, loosen the edges with a knife, then use the paper to remove from the tin. Cut into 12 bars and dust with icing sugar. ●

Per bar 287 cals, 9.5g fat (5.9g saturated), 3.5g protein, 46.7g carbs, 34.9g sugars