



SLICE OF HEAVEN

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Body

SWEET OR SAVOURY, TARTS ARE BOTH BEAUTIFUL AND SATISFYING I lost my job as head pastry chef at Dinner by Heston Blumenthal Melbourne when the restaurant closed in early 2020, and promptly slid into an early midlife crisis. After years of long nights and antisocial work rosters, it was the perfect time to throw in the towel with hospitality. I applied for account manager positions in the food sector, recruitment jobs, and I even entertained the idea of going to university. Then in March 2020, when the pandemic set in, I was still unemployed. Eventually, I found myself applying for anything that was going, which turned out to be a job at a supermarket. There's nothing like being well outside of your comfort zone to make you realise how good you had it. Over the months that I restocked and organised confectionery and cat soup (literally soup for cats) on supermarket shelves, I found myself realising the kitchen was where I belonged. Meanwhile, my partner Catherine suggested we do some baking as a fun lockdown activity. I started playing around with different techniques and recipes, but tarts became the go-to.

This is an edited extract from Tarts Anon by Gareth Whitton with Catherine Way (Hardie Grant, \$50). Photography by Armelle Habib.

VANILLA CUSTARD TART This has to be the most classic of the classics. There's something so satisfying about a vanilla custard that cannot be surpassed. The two things you need to nail for the perfect vanilla custard tart are the texture of the custard and showcasing the taste of the vanilla.

475g pure cream 55g double cream 40g cream cheese 6g vanilla paste, or 1 vanilla bean 140g soft brown sugar 195g egg yolk (10-11 egg yolks) 1 x baked shortcrust pastry shell, see below Nutmeg, for grating Preheat the oven to 125C. Add the creams, cream cheese, vanilla and brown sugar to a saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a simmer, then immediately remove from the heat. To temper the egg yolks, add them to a mixing bowl and whisk in a small amount of the hot cream mixture until well incorporated. Then add the remaining cream mixture and whisk again until combined. Using a handheld blender, blend until the mixture is shiny and smooth, keeping the head of the blender submerged so that no air gets into the mix. Strain the mixture through a sieve into a jug to use straight away - you want to keep it as warm as possible to ensure that the mixture cooks evenly in the oven. Place the prepared shell in the oven. Pour the custard into the shell until it is full to the brim. Bake for 30 minutes, or until slightly wobbly in the centre, then remove from the oven and allow to cool in the shell. Once the custard has

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completely cooled, remove the tart from the tin and portion into slices with a hot, sharp knife. To serve, grate a fine layer of nutmeg on top.

Shortcrust pastry 200g plain flour 100g cold unsalted butter, cut into cubes 3g salt 50g water Place the butter, flour and salt into a bowl (this process can also be done in a kitchen stand mixer or food processor). Using your fingers, work the ingredients together until they resemble fine bread crumbs and no lumps of butter are present. Add the water a little at a time (or in a steady stream if using a kitchen stand mixer), until it forms a firm but malleable mixture. If you used a food processor earlier, it'd be best to finish this one off by hand. Move the dough to your benchtop and work into a puck-sized shape. Wrap with plastic wrap and allow to rest in the fridge for at least 30 minutes. Preheat your oven to 180C. Place the pastry on a piece of baking paper and cover with a second piece of baking paper. Using a rolling pin, roll out the pastry into a circle roughly 35cm wide and 3mm thick. Allow the pastry to firm up again in the fridge for at least an hour before lining the tin (if lining the tin immediately, be sure to rest it for at least an hour). Remove one piece of baking paper from the pastry and drape the pastry over your tart tin. You may find this easier to do by using a rolling pin. Press the pastry into the knuckles of the tart tin using the flats of your fingers. Use a sharp knife to remove any excess from the edges of the pastry. Allow it to sit for 15 minutes or so in the freezer for one final rest. Take one large sheet of aluminium foil and gently press into the edges of the pastry shell, ensuring that the sheet is big enough to go over the edge and completely line the tart. Fill it to the brim with uncooked rice, then fold the foil gently back over the top and place into the oven. Bake for 25-30 minutes, or until the edges of the pastry are a nice medium-golden colour. Remove from the oven and sneak a look under the foil to check the doneness. Cook until the colour is consistent, then allow to cool at room temperature. Remove the foil and rice when cool enough to touch.

CHEESE & BACON TART 1 Å— baked shortcrust pastry shell Chives, finely chopped, for garnishing Leek and bacon cake batter 200g leek, sliced into 2mm rounds 200g smoked speck, cut into 1.5cm cubes 30g maple syrup 30g soft brown sugar 90g natural almond meal 35g plain flour 21/2g baking powder 5g salt 90g eggs (about 2 eggs) olive oil, for frying Gruyere custard 110g gruyere cheese 85g egg yolk (5-6 egg yolks) 250g pure cream 2g salt Preheat the oven to 165C. To make the leek and bacon cake batter, place a large pot of salted water on the stove and bring to a boil. Blanch the sliced leeks in the salted boiling water for 15 seconds. Drain and refresh in iced water, then squeeze out the water from the leeks. Add some olive oil to a frying pan and heat on high until it starts to smoke. Add the speck and cook until caramelised, then remove from the pan and discard the oil. Place the same pan over medium heat and add the maple syrup and the brown sugar. Bring this to a thick and bubbly caramel then return the drained speck pieces. Cook for one minute or until the edges of the speck start to look a little candied. Drain any excess caramel and set aside. To make the batter, weigh the dry ingredients in a bowl and stir them together. Add the eggs to the mixing bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment and mix on low speed until combined (or do so by hand). Melt the brown butter in a saucepan. You want this to be warm enough so that the liquid doesn't cool down too quickly, but cool enough so that it doesn't develop any burnt characteristics. If the butter is too hot, it can also fry the egg mixture as you add it, so a thermometer is useful (roughly 100C). Once the butter comes up to temperature, slowly pour it into the whisked eggs while mixing. Ensure the mixture is well emulsified, as this will ensure the butter doesn't bleed out later, giving the cake a greasy texture. Then add in the dry ingredients and mix until well combined. Vigorously mix the leek and speck into the cake batter by hand so that the mixture is evenly distributed.

To bake Pour the batter into the pastry shell. Bake the tart for about 18 minutes, or until the crust is an even golden brown and the centre of the tart is firm. Remove from the oven and allow to cool inside the tin. Using the back of a spoon, press down firmly on any areas where the cake has risen unevenly, so the surface is flat.

Gruyere custard Grate the cheese and mix with the egg yolks in a measuring jug, then set aside. Bring the cream and salt to a boil in a saucepan over medium-high heat, then pour it over the egg and cheese. Using a hand-held blender, blitz the custard until it is smooth and glossy. Pour the custard on top of the cake layer, and bake in the oven for 15 minutes, or until it is set.

To finish Allow to cool at room temperature, then remove the tart from the tin. Using a hot sharp knife, portion the tart into slices. Sprinkle an even layer of the cut chives over the top of the tart.

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