

## Lemon cake from Presidio Social Club

Michael Bauer

Sunday, March 4, 2012

This year when I'm asked what I'd like for my birthday cake, I'll request the lemon cake from the Presidio Social Club. It's a cake for all seasons and all reasons.

I'm a fool for lemon, and this cake offers an intensity you don't find in other versions. It's so good I'd go there just for this dessert, which was placed on the menu by then-consulting pastry chef Phil Ogiela shortly after the restaurant opened.

The cake has a lot of layers - figuratively and literally. The tender crumb is moist with lemon simple syrup, and a whipped mascarpone and lemon curd separates the four layers, all covered with a meringue. It's as beautiful as it is delicious.

Opened in 2006, this American-inspired restaurant is housed in a 1903 Army barracks. You can still see the bones of its former life, but it has been modernized into a space that has broad appeal both because of the interior and the approachable menu.

It's open continuously for lunch, dinner and brunch on weekends, and it takes on a whole different atmosphere at night. During the early evening hours you have families and seniors, and a younger, often singles crowd begins to filter in later.

The all-American dishes appeal to them all - whether it's the roasted half chicken (\$19), the flat iron steak with mashed potatoes and onion rings (\$25) or, my favorite, the grilled calves' liver (\$17) with onions, bacon and mashed potatoes. Yet it's the lemon meringue cake (\$8) that puts Presidio Social Club on the map for me.

*563 Rugey St. (near Lombard Gate in the Presidio), San Francisco; (415) 885-1888 or [presidiosocialclub.com](http://presidiosocialclub.com). Lunch and dinner daily. Full bar. Reservations and credit cards accepted.*

### The secrets

**Four layers:** Halving the two cakes to make four thin layers allows the lemon curd and mascarpone flavors to be evenly distributed.

**Lemon simple syrup:** Brushed on the cake, this adds a tangy-sweet essence and makes for a moist crumb.

**Mascarpone cheese:** Whipped and used between layers, this adds a rich, complex counterpoint to the cake.

**Lemon curd:** Also in between layers, this reinforces the citrus flavor.

### **Presidio social club's lemon meringue cake**

**Serves 10**

The syrup, mascarpone and cakes can be made a day ahead, but the overall cake is best served the day it is assembled. The recipe calls for a kitchen blowtorch to brown the meringue at the end; if you don't have one, or are unsure about using one, omit this step.

- Lemon simple syrup
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup water
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon zest
- Whipped mascarpone
- 1/4 cup mascarpone, softened at room temperature
- 1/4 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- Cake
- -- Unsalted butter, softened
- 6 ounces cake flour (about 1 1/2 sifted cups) + more to dust the pans
- 6 large eggs, separated
- 1 cup+ 3 1/2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/2 cup water
- 6 tablespoons canola oil
- Meringue
- 1/4 cup water
- 7 tablespoons sugar
- 1/4 cup egg whites (from about 2 large eggs)
- -- Pinch cream of tartar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch
- To assemble
- 1 cup lemon curd, your favorite recipe or purchased

**For the syrup:** Bring the sugar and water to a boil to dissolve the sugar. Cool, then stir in the lemon juice and zest. Set aside until ready to assemble cake.

**For the mascarpone:** When ready to assemble the cake, whip the mascarpone in a stand mixer fitted

with the whisk attachment; beat in the vanilla and sugar, then slowly pour in the cream. Whip at high speed until light and airy (about 3-4 minutes); do not overwhip. Refrigerate until ready to use.

**For the cake:** Adjust the rack to middle of the oven; preheat to 300° for conventional, or 275° for convection. Butter and flour two 8-inch round cake pans.

Sift the cake flour again; set aside.

Separate the eggs, placing the yolks into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment.

Heat 1 cup and 2 tablespoons sugar and the 1/2 cup water until the sugar dissolves; remove from heat.

Whisk the yolks at medium speed until slightly thick and lemon-colored. Slowly pour in the syrup; increase speed to high and whip until cool.

Pour a little of the yolk mixture in a bowl; drizzle in the canola oil and whisk until mixed. Add this back into the rest of the yolk mixture. Fold in the flour, 1/3 at a time; set aside.

Place egg whites in a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, and whip until foamy; add the remaining 1 1/2 tablespoons sugar and whip until soft peaks form. Fold into the batter.

Divide the batter equally between the cake pans. Bake until golden brown, about 35-40 minutes. Let cool in the pans on a wire rack for 5-10 minutes, then turn out to cool completely. If made a day ahead, cover tightly with plastic wrap.

**For the meringue:** Combine the water and sugar in a small pot fitted with a thermometer; heat slowly. Meanwhile, combine the egg whites and cream of tartar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. When the sugar mixture reaches 240°, whisk the cornstarch into the egg whites. With mixer at medium-low speed, slowly drizzle in the hot sugar mixture; increase speed to high and whip until the mixture is cool to the touch.

**To assemble:** Have the simple syrup ready. Remove the mascarpone from the refrigerator and let come to room temperature. With the cakes right side up, carefully slice each in half horizontally to make a total of four layers.

Place one cake layer on a cake plate or stand. Brush with some simple syrup. Spoon 1/2 cup of the lemon curd into the center; spread with an offset spatula to make a 1/4-inch layer, leaving a 1/2-inch border around the edge. Place a second cake layer on top, and brush with simple syrup. Spread all of the whipped mascarpone onto the cake, leaving a 1/2-inch border around the edge.

Place the third cake layer on top, and brush with simple syrup. Spread the remaining lemon curd on top, leaving a 1/2-inch border around the edge.

Top with the fourth cake layer, and lightly press to settle the layers. Brush the top and all the sides of the cake with simple syrup. Spread the meringue on the top and sides to cover the cake entirely. Use a

spatula to create attractive swirls. If desired, use a kitchen blowtorch to lightly brown the meringue. Cut into slices to serve. Refrigerate leftovers.

**Per serving:** 542 calories, 6 g protein, 89 g carbohydrate, 18 g fat (5 g saturated), 167 mg cholesterol, 78 mg sodium, 0 g fiber.

Michael Bauer is The San Francisco Chronicle's restaurant critic. [mbauer@sfgate.com](mailto:mbauer@sfgate.com)

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2012/03/04/FD3S1N9AH2.DTL>

This article appeared on page **G - 5** of the San Francisco Chronicle

© 2012 Hearst Communications Inc. | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Contact](#)