

2019 ICA CATIE AWARDS SUBMISSION

Best Food Trend



Savory Parmesan Macaron
filled with Lemon Thyme Gelato and Candied Sage Leaf

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Synopsis

When our client asked us to think outside the box and come up with something surprising and new as a passed hors d'oeuvre, we knew this was the perfect opportunity to debut our re-invention of the iconic French macaron. We were so sad that French macarons had become so common place they had become un-cool to serve. However we just didn't want to let go of the delicious little bite that it was.

We re-tooled it a bit.

Without losing it's classic shape, we transformed it into a chilled savory macaron to be served during cocktail hour.



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Concept and objectives

When French macarons became so popular several years ago, we perfected our recipe. We made them in-house, in flavors and colors to suit any event. Now-a-days these delicious bites are all too expected on a dessert display.

Our goals when creating this hors d'oeuvre were simple:

- To give the French macaron new life as a savory hors d'oeuvre.
- Blur the traditional lines of sweet and savory, encouraging diners to explore new culinary horizons.
- Explore new service options for our signature house-made gelato.
- Give new life to a dish whose original trendiness had diminished.
- and of course, to make something DELICIOUS!

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Originality

Our favorite hors d'oeuvres are the ones that guests buzz about to each other. "Did you try the savory gelato and macaron? You have to try one!"

When guests first see this, they're unsure what they're looking at. They've seen macarons before. But with Parmesan? With sage? Although it may seem counter intuitive, this is the space we love to be in. Conformity is for comfort food. Curiosity, on the other hand, is a requisite to really enjoy trending and innovative food. After hearing a description, they're still not sure. But they're certainly more intrigued. Thyme gelato? Garlic gelato? Really? When they're asking these questions, we've got them right where we want them.

Key to this presentation is juxtaposing the familiar with the unusual. Diners need to feel simultaneously confident and adventurous. They need to be willing enough to explore, but also skeptical enough to slow down and pay close attention. The epiphany that comes when they taste, understand, and appreciate something new is what makes food at it's most enjoyable.

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Originality

Our savory French macaron can still be created in any color and flavor. None of that versatility is lost in a savory version. The changes we made to the original sweet version are in the filling, and shell. For the filling we use a house-made gelato, flavored to suit the menu theme and event colors. For this event we made a lemon thyme flavored gelato. We sprinkled the shell with browned butter Parmesan cheese before baking, and then top it with a small candied sage leaf. The result is a chilled, salty and slightly sweet hors d'oeuvre that looks exactly like a French Macaron, but isn't! A delightful way to get guests in the mood for the creative culinary experience ahead.

At this dinner event for 60 guests, we tray passed our chilled savory macarons. This allowed our servers to alert guests as to why we seemed to be passing a dessert item during the cocktail hour. Servers could also monitor the temperature of the macaron insuring that they were passed in a timely manner at the peak of flavor.

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Production

All the individual components of this item are prepared in advance. At the actual event all we need to do is final assembly. This is mostly a simple matter of sandwiching the gelato between the cookies and adding the sage leaf. Keeping things simple and smooth at the final stages helps to successfully deliver this hors d'oeuvre whose service window is fairly small.

We explored various methods and techniques for final execution of the gelato. From scooping and re-freezing in advance at the commissary, to scooping from the gelato pans on site, and others. In the end, we had the most reliable and recreatable success by slicing off the gelato like a loaf of bread. Then using a small ring cutter to cut a thin flat piece of gelato to sit on the macarons. Quick, easy, avoids melting, doesn't need to be flattened which would risk crushing the macaron cookie.

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Challenges

The biggest challenge we faced with this is the same we face anytime we serve gelato. Real gelato (not ice cream masquerading as gelato) should be a low to zero overrun product and should have low fat ratios. Since there's no air whipped in, and since there's not much butter fat, real gelato freezes very solid and can only be scooped and eaten at a narrow range of temperatures. There's a sweet spot to the tempering that takes some finesse to target. Too late or too cold and the gelato is impossibly hard. Too early and too warm, and the gelato is too soft and messy.

Of course, practice and attention to detail are most crucial to this tempering process. However, other logistical efforts can be very helpful too. This is wonderful as a passed hors d'oeuvre. When we're sending trays from kitchen in small batches at our preferred pace, we can more easily ensure they're perfect. When this item is one of multiple hors d'oeuvres selections, it gives us some leeway to roll with the punches the gelato throws.

Frankly, this would not be a great option for a convention of 5000 guests all needing to enter, eat, and leave within 90 minutes. But for a summer soirée of 150 with a leisurely cocktail hour, they are perfect!

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Recipe: Savory Parmesan Macaron Shell

Ingredients

makes 25 sandwiched 1-inch macarons

1 ¼ packed C (165 g) Almond flour
 pinch of Sea salt
 ¾ packed C (165 grams) Confectioners' sugar
 ½ C (115 grams) Aged egg whites, divide into 2 equal parts
 ⅓ C (38 grams) Water
 ⅝ C (125 grams) Granulated sugar
 2 Tbsp (10 grams) Powdered egg white
 4 drops (gel) or 6 drops (liquid) Food coloring

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 325° F. Pulse almond flour, salt and confectioners' sugar in the bowl of a food processor 4 times for 4 seconds each time. Sift with powdered egg white. Stir in ¼ cup (57 grams) of aged egg whites to form a paste.
2. Put the remaining ¼ cup (58 grams) egg whites in mixer with whisk. Whisk the egg whites on medium speed until soft peaks form. Heat the granulated sugar and water in a small saucepan over medium-high heat and cook until the sugar reaches beginning or soft ball stage (234° F) (test by removing a drop on a heat-proof spatula). Pour the syrup down the side of the mixer bowl at medium speed. Continue whisking until the meringue forms soft-medium peaks, about 4 minutes.
3. Fold the meringue into the dry ingredient paste in thirds, to gradually lighten it and make a smooth batter (and add food coloring, if using it, when the dry ingredients appear to be just incorporated). It is important to fold the different components just enough, but not too much or the macarons will crack. To make sure that you have reached the right point, once the ingredients appear combined, lift some of the mixture about 1 inch above the bowl with the spatula. If it retains a three-dimensional shape, fold it again. When folded just enough, the mixture should fall right back into the bowl, with no stiffness, in a continuous drip.
4. Using the piping guide, pipe the macarons 1½ inches apart on a silicon baking sheet lined sheet pan. Slam the baking sheet down to remove excess air (slam up to 6 times, from 6" above the table). Let dry at room temperature ½ hour until a skin/crust forms. Bake on 1 sheet pan for 13 minutes, until the macarons just come off the baking sheet when you lift them (the centers will have risen, and will not have any dark indentations). If the macarons darken too quickly, put a wooden spoon in the door of the oven to prop it slightly open. Cool completely before removing and filling.
5. Bake at 250° F in a convection oven about 10 minutes. Brush lightly with browned butter; top with shaved or grated Parmesan, turn off the convection, increase to 325°, and bake another 4-5 minutes.

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Recipe: Lemon Thyme Gelato Filling

Ingredients

4 gallons 10% custard base*

4 gallons of frozen yogurt **

add 1 quart of lemon juice that has been reduced on the stove by half of the original amount

2 cups lemoncello (To infuse the thyme, we simply soak a thyme filled cheese-cloth sachet in the limoncello for a couple days before preparing the gelato. Think of it like a cold brewed tea.)

Combine ingredients and process in a gelato machine.

*Custard Base

36 cups whole milk

2 tsp salt

10 2/3 cups sugar

96 egg yolks

10 2/3 cups heavy cream

**Frozen Yogurt

16 quarts whole-milk plain yogurt

8 cups heavy cream

12 cups sugar

1 cup corn syrup

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