

**Il Falconiere Tortino Soffice di Cioccolato e
Pere con Salsa di Vaniglia**
Il Falconiere Steamed Chocolate Cake with Vanilla Sauce

When we cook with friends at Silvia Baracchi's school, Cooking Under the Tuscan Sun, we often whip up this very simple dessert. I never thought of chocolate as seasonal, but in Tuscany, it's considered more appropriate for fall and winter. Seldom do you find it on a summer menu, perhaps because we have a plethora of plums, melons, and white peaches for hot weather *dolce*.

With this, Silvia suggests a full-bodied sweet red wine with enough alcohol to "clean your mouth." Her choices are a passito from Pantelleria or an aged Recioto. I'm partial to the passito from Arnaldo Capraia.

Serves 10

8 ounces (1 stick) butter, plus more for the ramekins
3/4 cup flour, plus more for the ramekins
1 cup fine sugar
4 eggs
3 tablespoons rum (or Tia Maria)
2 tablespoons strong coffee
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 cup ground cacao (high-quality cocoa)
4 pears, peeled and diced (optional)
Vanilla Sauce (recipe follows)
Chocolate bar or chocolate-covered coffee beans

Preheat the oven to 250 degrees F. Butter and flour 10 ramekins and set aside.

Beat butter and sugar to a soft cream. Add eggs, beating them in one at a time. Add rum and coffee. Sift flour, baking powder, and cacao into a bowl, then incorporate this into the butter mixture. Gently fold in the pears, if using. Pour into the prepared ramekins, filling halfway. Bake in a bain-marie by placing ramekins in a baking dish and filling it halfway with boiling water. Bake for 10 minutes, then increase temperature to 350 degrees F and continue baking until set, about 15 minutes.

Unmold onto individual plates or simply serve in the ramekins. Spoon vanilla sauce over the cakes, and garnish with curls of chocolate (use a vegetable peeler) or chocolate-covered coffee beans.

Vanilla Sauce

1 quart heavy cream
1/2 vanilla pod
8 egg yolks

4 tablespoons fine sugar

Heat the cream and vanilla pod to boiling, then quickly reduce heat. In a separate bowl, thoroughly beat together the yolks and sugar. Using a wooden spoon, stir the eggs into the cream and continue cooking on low, stirring constantly, for 5 minutes, until mixture slightly thickens and coats the spoon.

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