

# The Flying Baker



Shaheen doing what she loves

Well-known food blogger and baker Shaheen Peerbhai aka *Purple Foodie* gets busy and whips up a delightful tray for you to dish out at home

Text: Lyle Michael

On a baking trail, the petite chef, author and teacher has taken her classes to Bangalore and Delhi after more than five years of sharing her secrets with Bombay, Bombay, home till 2011 when she shifted to Paris to fulfill her childhood goal of studying at a prestigious culinary school and onward to London a year later, to set up house with her husband, her blog and her baking. It's a busy life for Shaheen Peerbhai who is currently pursuing a diploma in Superior Culinary Arts from the *Centre de Formation d'Alain Ducasse* in France and readying to launch her illustrated cookbook later this year.

First, the festive fervour in *Purple Foodie's* tray of delights, then more about the young lady behind them. Raspberry *clafoutis*, a flavour of *clafoutis* which is a baked custard typically dotted with glistening red fruits. Come summer months, and the pastry windows are filled with berry and cherry *clafoutis* in Paris, we learn. Next up, the



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A BAKER'S TRAY | **UPPERCRUST FOOD**



The decadent canelé

vanilla cream *éclair*s that are topped with chocolate *ganache* to weaken the steepest resolve and cute little sugar doughnuts which can be eaten plain or filled with cream as you so desire. Wrap up the sweet treats with the chocolate chip pecan cookies where the nutty sweetness of pecans takes these humble cookies to another level. Close to perfecting the decadent *canelés*, Shaheen has left her favourite dessert out of this repertoire for now.

"It's forever a learning process," smiles Shaheen whose other passions include gardening and watercolour painting. As a

rule, she takes up various courses to keep it fresh and exciting. Said courses include block printing, filmmaking, calligraphy, fermentation, leatherwork and risograph printing "I keep trying out different activities to decipher what I can take up and gain inspiration from."

The dream as a child was always to be a pastry chef and the *Le Cordon Bleu*, Paris graduate has gone beyond, with her classes growing

organically, last year recording close to 1100 students taught. From a professional in the IT sector to a rising star in the kitchen, Shaheen has come a long way, barely imagining the potential impact her pastime blog-writing would have on her life. With a few meritorious and hard-to-come-by scholarships under her hat, she strove and subsequently earned experience at top restaurants such as *Ches Michel* in Paris and Michelin-starred *Lyle's* in London. Recalls Shaheen, "I treasure my experience at these wondrous establishments where we worked with the freshest produce and I learned to shuck 30 kgs of scallops, make the best *Moules en Papillote* and the most buttery *Kouign Amann*, a French cake. And it all goes back to when followers of *Purple Foodie* requested me to teach them to bake."

Today as Shaheen continues to teach and evolve in her field, inspired by chefs and masters like Pierre Hermé, Christophe Michalak and Cedric Grolet, she could only but wonder at the distance she has come and smile, whip in hand and toque in place; yes, fingers on the keys as well, for *Purple Foodie* is where it all began – the blog remains very much still the author's sanctum sanctorum and your go-to for all the lowdown on home-baking.



## Raspberry Clafoutis



**Ingredients**  
150 ml milk  
50 ml cream  
3 eggs

60 g sugar  
1 vanilla bean  
5 g salt  
100 g flour  
5 g baking powder  
40 g melted butter  
300 g raspberries  
icing sugar

### Method

Pre-heat oven to 175° C.  
In a bowl whisk together the milk, cream, sugar, eggs and the seeds from the vanilla.  
In another bowl, whisk together

the flour, salt and baking powder. To this, add the liquid mixture gradually as you continue to whisk gently so that there are no lumps. Finally, whisk in the melted butter. Butter an 8" baking dish and pour in half the batter. Bake in the oven until the batter is just set. Scatter the raspberries and pour the remaining batter over it. Continue to bake for 30-35 minutes; the top should be golden brown and puffed up and a knife inserted should come out clean. Sprinkle with icing sugar and serve.

## Sugar Doughnuts

### Ingredients

250 g flour  
30 g castor sugar, more for coating  
5 g salt  
6 g instant yeast  
2 eggs  
1 lemon, zested  
80 ml milk  
65 g butter, softened  
sunflower oil, for deep-frying

### Method

Put all of the ingredients except the salt, butter and oil in a bowl. Mix all the ingredients together until fully hydrated. Let it rest for 15 minutes. Then add the salt and beat until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl.

Add the softened butter into the dough while it's still mixing, a little at a time until it's fully incorporated.



About 6-8 minutes, until the dough is shiny and stretches, passing the windowpane test.

Wrap the bowl with plastic film and let the dough rise for 2 hours at room temperature. Too warm, and the butter might separate. Knock back down and refrigerate for 4-8 hours. For regular-sized doughnuts measure the dough of 40 g each. Roll into smooth balls. Place on floured sheets with about 4-5 cm gap between them and let them prove for 2 hours,

until doubled.

Heat a large pan with enough oil for deep-frying and heat to 190° C. Fry the doughnuts a few at a time. Don't crowd them because they expand. Plus too many will drop the oil temperature drastically.

Drain the doughnuts on paper towel to soak up excess oil, then toss in the castor sugar immediately (you could also flavour the sugar with vanilla or cinnamon).

Eat plain or pipe with filling (like the pastry cream in the éclair recipe on the next pg).

**Note:** *The dough is made similar to a brioche, so it's easier to have a stand mixer to be able to incorporate the softened butter into the dough, a little at a time, to form a smooth, shiny emulsion. Also, make sure to coat the doughnuts with sugar when they are hot from the fryer for the sugar to be able to stick well.*

## Chocolate Chip Cookies with Pecans

### Ingredients

112 g butter  
110 g light brown sugar  
100 g castor sugar  
1 egg  
1/2 tsp vanilla extract  
180 g flour  
1/2 tsp baking soda  
1 tsp sea salt  
200 g dark chocolate  
100 g pecans

### Method

Pre-heat the oven to 175° C. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Place butter and beat until soft and lighter. Add both the sugars until light and continue to mix until light and fluffy. Beat in egg and vanilla. Whisk together flour, baking soda and salt. Stir into the wet mixture until just



combined. Fold in nuts and chocolate until evenly distributed, do not overmix. You can bake them immediately or chill overnight. For a cookie dough that measures about 40 g, bake for 15 minutes until evenly golden brown (the centre shouldn't look

translucent). If you like them softer in the middle, bake for 12 minutes. Transfer to a cooling rack and eat while still warm. Or let it cool completely and then store in an airtight container for a couple of days.

## Vanilla Cream Eclairs with Chocolate

### Ingredients

#### For the choux pastry

250 ml water  
10 g butter  
1/2 tsp salt  
1 tsp sugar  
150 g flour  
6 eggs (1 for egg wash)

#### For the pastry cream

500 ml milk  
1 vanilla pod  
7 egg yolks  
90 g sugar  
30 g flour  
30 g cornstarch

#### For the chocolate ganache

200 g chocolate  
200 g cream  
20 g butter

#### For the decoration

white chocolate

### Method

#### For the choux pastry

Pre-heat the oven to 190° C.

In a bowl, whisk 5 of the eggs slightly to break them up. Set aside.

In a saucepan, add the water, butter, salt and sugar and bring to a boil.

Add the flour and cook for 1-2 minutes and stir vigorously with a spatula until the dough clumps together and sticks only slightly to the bottom of the pan.

Transfer to large mixing bowl and let it cool.

Add the eggs, a little at a time and mix them into the dough with a spatula to incorporate.

Transfer to a piping bag with a No 8 plain piping tip.

Pipe on to greased baking sheet keeping a consistent size of 10-12 cm. Brush with egg wash.

Bake for 25-30 minutes.

#### For the pastry cream

Sieve the cornflour and flour



together. Set aside.

In a saucepan heat the milk and vanilla together and bring to a simmer.

In a bowl, whisk the egg yolks and sugar together until thick and pale.

Temper the egg yolks with a third of the milk and add the mixture back into the saucepan with the remaining milk to cook.

Keep whisking as it cooks into a thick pastry cream. Sieve into a bowl. Let it cool completely.

Discard the vanilla bean and whisk the cooled pastry cream to a smooth paste free from lumps that might have formed as it cooled. Transfer to a piping bag with plain tip No 6. Refrigerate until needed.

#### For the ganache

Place the chocolate cut into pieces in

a small bowl.

Heat the cream in a small saucepan. Once it comes to a boil, pour it over the chocolate.

Stir in the butter. Set aside.

#### To assemble the eclairs

Make three holes at equal intervals at the bottom of the choux pastry with a paring knife.

Pipe the pastry cream into the holes until it's filled completely. Place on a wire rack.

Next, dip the ganache over the eclairs and let it set.

**Note:** *Fill the éclairs with the cream at the last minute for the best results. This way, you can prevent the choux pastry from getting too soggy.*