

# The further adventures of

## CAKE BOY

Homemaker regular **Eric Lanlard** helps us to achieve the perfect roastie...

Winter is simply a marvellous, mad and magical season. There's something about the big chunky knits and warm nuzzle of your favourite scarf that is familiar, comforting and in an odd way nostalgic. Sudden memories of previous Christmases come flooding back and we set out to reconnect with old friends. This year I'll be spending Christmas in America. I've spent the last few in Australia, so I'll be the eager beaver singing Christmas carols, soaking up the atmosphere rather manically. A lot of us get stressed on Christmas day, but the build-up throughout December is so special! It's also a time for delicious, mouth-watering flavours; apples, pears and cranberries are a few of my favourite ingredients. What better decoration for your home, than the smells of winter spices and freshly baked treats?

### TOP OF THE POTS

Now, if you're the one cooking on Christmas then firstly, well done for taking it on. Guests can be blissfully unaware of your hard efforts but I wouldn't worry about ambushing a few away from festive games and occupying them with some simple prep. Roast potatoes are one of the most highly anticipated aspect of Yuletide lunch; sub-par spuds will only disappoint but get a crispy edge and fluffy inners and you've got the Holy Grail of taters! First, blanch them and cook in hot water so they're fluffy. Dry them well and cover in a lot of goose fat, sea salt and rosemary. Once cooked, they'll make for the best roasties ever! Another favourite is to flatly boil and steam French beans and broccoli florets, deep frying them at the last minute with chestnuts and roasted hazelnuts. It's a great combo that has a crunchy spin to liven up the greens, with a hint of sweetness.

### MERRY AND BRIGHT

It's easy to get carried away leading up to Christmas day, but I prefer to make a few special touches rather than go OTT. If you have younger ones, it's a good idea to prepare something fun for them to do. I like to bake plain cupcakes and have some icing ready. It's a nice alternative to watching cartoons and they'll feel involved with the planning and like a baker in the making too. Christmas foods can be so rich that you don't need a big platter of different cheeses; choose one and give it a twist! Buy a small brie, slice in half horizontally and fill with a good layer of mascarpone cheese. It just fuses the two together! If you wrap it together in clingfilm and foil, and put it back in the fridge for another few days then it will start to mature. For that finishing touch, make your own oat biscuits. They are very simple to make and keep well too. Once you make your own you'll never buy them again, as they're so delicious. At The Cake and Bake Show recently, I was amazed by the massive turnout and it struck me how popular baking has become. I guess it shows, there's nothing quite like the homemade.



### CHOCOLATE AND CHESTNUT YULE LOG

**2** In a separate bowl, beat the egg yolks with the remaining sugar until the mixture is fluffy and white. Stir in the melted butter. Sift the flour with the baking powder into the egg yolk mixture, then fold all the ingredients together. Mix in a little whipped egg white, then fold in the remainder.

**3** Spread the mixture onto the silicone on the baking sheet with a palette knife. Bake in the preheated oven for 10 minutes, keeping an eye on it as it cooks fast. When out of the oven, cover the sponge with a damp tea-towel to stop it drying out and leave to cool completely.

**4** Make the chestnut cream in a large bowl, using an electric hand whisk, beat the cream to soft peaks, then fold in the crème de marrons.

**5** To construct the cake, soak the sponge with the dark rum using a pastry brush. Spread the chestnut cream onto the sponge with a palette knife and gently roll the filled sponge up using the silicone mat. Place on a serving plate with the join facing down and cut the ends at an angle. Save an end to use as a 'branch' when glazing.

**6** To make the chocolate glaze, melt the chocolate in a bain-marie, then stir in the butter and sugar. Leave to cool. Using a palette knife, cover the whole log with the glaze. Cover the saved end with glaze and stick on top to mimic a branch. Using a fork, decorate all over for a wood effect. Place chocolate shavings, fans and marron glacés on top, and dust with icing sugar.

3 egg whites  
130g caster sugar  
4 egg yolks  
50g unsalted butter, melted  
100g plain flour  
2tsp baking powder  
50ml dark rum  
100ml double cream  
400g crème de marrons (sweet chestnut puree or spread)  
150g dark chocolate, broken  
50g unsalted butter  
2 tbsp icing sugar  
Chocolate shavings  
A few marrons glacés, halved  
Icing sugar for dusting

**7** Preheat the oven to 220C/gas mark 7. Cover a baking sheet with silicone paper or a silicone rubber mat. To start the sponge, beat the egg whites until stiff with an electric hand whisk, then gradually add 50g of the sugar.



Eric's latest title *Chocolat* (£18.99, Mitchell Beazley) is a must for any chocaholic, with a selection of mouth-watering recipes. His recent book *Tart it Up!* (£18.99, Mitchell Beazley) is ideal for lovers of pastry in sweet and savoury dishes.