

KURT WINNER



The decadent \$750 cupcake is diminutive in size but contains lavish ingredients.

The \$750 Decadence D'Or Cupcake

BY MICHELLE WINNER

Imagine a room full of food writers all jostling for view of a single cupcake? Here in a beautiful banquet room at the Venetian and Palazzo hotels, chef Johann Springinsfeld of France charms the foodie journalists attending the IFWTTA 2012 Conference in Las Vegas into submission but is still intent on charming the Rémy Martin Cognac to stay inside the blown-sugar fleur-de-lis that will crown the \$750 cupcake.

A homage to decadence, it is fun to turn away and escape into a dream of indulgent excess via this cupcake.

Chef Johann, born in France, at a young age fancied creating homemade cakes. He left home for a pastry apprenticeship program at 16. After 10 years of working throughout France, learning from some of the best chefs in the world, he became chef for a catering company, expanding the company of 7 to more than 30 in one year.

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In 2002, he opened his own business on the French Riviera and then moved to Las Vegas in 2006 to help a friend with a catering company. Immersing himself in the American culture and language, he took the pastry chef position with The Venetian and The Palazzo. The rest, as they say, is history.

When asked to create the Decadence D'Or cupcake by his executive chef, he says that he came up with the concept by "including the very best of everything, and making it French." Certainly Decadence D'Or is a larger-than-life gimmick, a cupcake created using audacious ingredients from around the world—but hey, this is Vegas!

A light chocolate cake with ganache filling made from estate-grown chocolate, rich AOC butter, and Tahitian vanilla bean is painstakingly topped with edible gold flakes hand-applied on the cream frosting and topped with a whimsical hand-blown sugar fleur-

de-lis filled with Louis XIII Cognac. When I asked about who buys this cupcake, I was told with a wink, "Visitors to Las Vegas looking for a once-in-a-lifetime experience." Indeed.

Here is the list of the cake's precious ingredients:
Louis XIII de Rémy Martin: This cognac is manufactured using grapes from the Grande Champagne territory of Cognac, France. Each bottle is a blend of 1,200 cognacs, ranging from 40 to 100 years old, across three generations of cellar masters, resulting from the combined labor of 10,000 people.

According to Rémy Martin's philosophy, if you start with the finest grapes from the best vineyards, sift them through the proper and best eaux-de-vie, and blend them artfully, you will get the finest cognac.

Palмира (Single-Estate Chocolate): In 2004, Valrhona wished to explore a new chocolate. Valrhona's plantation in Venezuela grows a precious cocoa that is rich, old, and rare, called Porcelana, which is a Criollo bean. Planted by Jean Francois Dargein, this is a complex, extremely rich cocoa bean varietal.

Vanilla Caviar: Vanilla is the world's most labor-intensive agricultural crop. It takes up to three years after the vines are planted before the first flowers appear.

Tahitian Gold vanilla is laboriously hand-pollinated. The fruits, which resemble big green beans, must remain on the vine for nine months to completely develop their signature aroma before they are hand-harvested before the lengthy process of curing, sweating, and drying begins. Tahitian Gold Vanilla Caviar is obtained by manually splitting the beans and carefully extracting the seeds.

Gold: Edible gold flakes are extremely delicate. Metallic gold is biologically inert and has no toxic effect on the body over time. Indeed, alchemists of the 15th century used gold medicinally, and the Europeans have a very old tradition of using edible gold on food. Italian dukes and earls used to decorate their risotto with gold leaves in the 16th century. The Japanese have been adding edible gold to foods and to sake for centuries.

So now you know what is in the \$750 cupcake and that it is available on order at Sweet Sensations at the Venetian/Palazzo (www.palazzolasvegas.com).

Here, only for The Epoch Times, Chef Springinsfeld graciously created a home version for you. Serve with a heated snifter of the finest Rémy Martin you can afford to create the same effect.

Louis XIII Cupcake

CHOCOLATE SPONGE:

- 1.8 ounces cocoa powder
- 8 ounces whole eggs

- 8 ounces oil
- 4 ounces water
- 2 teaspoons red food color

Mix together cocoa powder with eggs; gradually add in oil and water to combine. Mix in red food color. Pour into prepared forms and bake at 360 degrees for 20 minutes. Cool and store in cooler until ready for use.



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PASTRY CREAM:

- 8 ounces milk
- 4 ounces sugar
- 1.6 ounces cream powder
- 2 ounces egg yolk

Bring the milk to a simmer; then add the mixture of sugar, cream powder, and yolks. Cook for 5 minutes. Cool and store until ready to use.

CHOCOLATE GANACHE:

- 8 ounces heavy cream
- 8 ounces dark chocolate

Bring the cream to a simmer, slowly add chocolate, and stir until chocolate is melted. Cool.

Assembly:

Take cooled cupcakes out of tin. Cut hole in cup-cake top to create a small hole in the center of cake. Fill hole with ganache. Set upright on plate. Frost with pastry cream. You may shave some Valrhona chocolate curls or grate some over top of cupcake.

Recipe courtesy of chef Johann Springinsfeld.

Michelle Winner is a freelance writer, travel editor, and photographer. For more information visit: www.culinarytraveler.com.

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