

Piece of Cake

AT BAKED IN NEW YORK CITY, THE CAKES
LOOK MODERN AND PRETTY. HERE'S HOW THEY DO IT.

PRODUCED BY JOANNE SMART



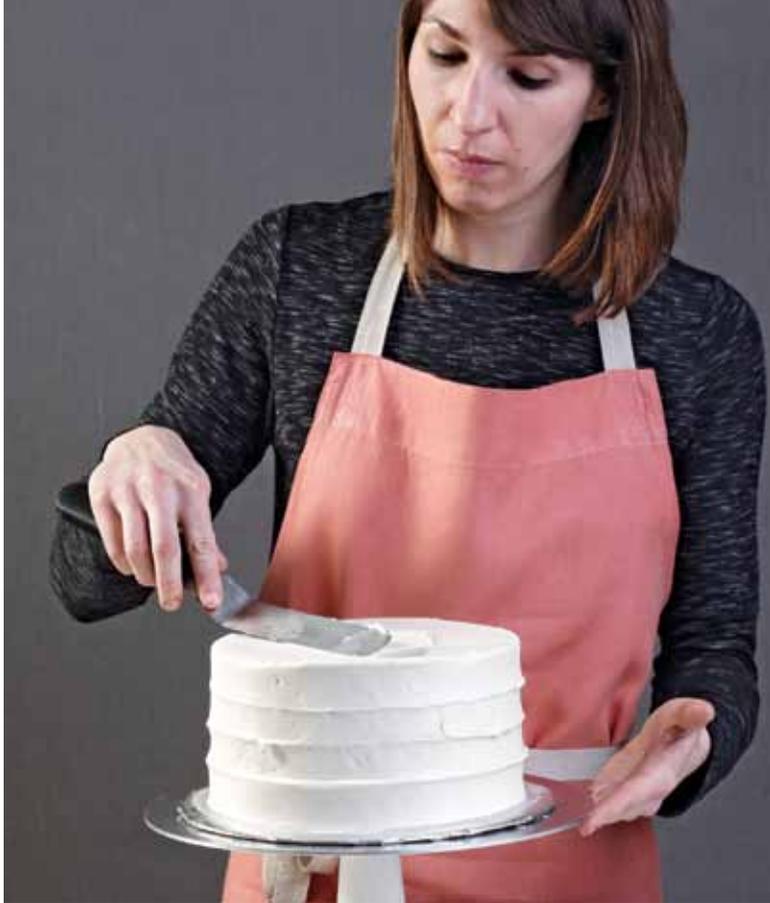
Among the many assorted goodies for sale at Baked bakery in New York City's Tribeca neighborhood, cakes—especially layer cakes—stand tall. At last count, 26 different flavors of cake were on the menu, including chocolate and vanilla, of course, but also carrot, caramel apple, coconut cream, green tea, lemon drop, malted milk ball, and strawberry supreme. Despite how unlike they may taste, all share a similar look: modern and unfussy, yet beautiful in a quiet way. “Clean and minimal was conscious,” says Matt Lewis, who along with Renato Poliafito opened the first of two Baked outposts in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Red Hook back in 2005. “So many cakes out there have so much going on. We wanted something that was a little less abundant in aesthetic.”

The bakery's signature look is the swirl. A customer once remarked to Lewis that the way the cakes are frosted is reminiscent of Manhattan's Guggenheim Museum. “If there was any connection to Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpiece, it was deeply subconscious,” quips Lewis. “But the description makes total sense.”

The simplicity of the design is good news for baking enthusiasts. With the right tools—a cake turntable and an offset spatula are nonnegotiable—a little practice, and some know-how, mere mortals can frost similarly gorgeous cakes in their own homes.

Recently, Baked's head decorator, Annemarie Bouman (right), and events manager, Jordan Slocum, came to the *Fine Cooking* test kitchen to demonstrate how it's done. Turn the page, follow the step-by-step photos, and then go find a reason to celebrate.





A master lesson
**ON HOW TO
 FROST a CAKE**

WITH CAKE DECORATOR
 ANNEMARIE BOUMAN

Gather your tools (see below) and follow the photos to frost a cake like a pro. Use Baked's vanilla cake and frosting recipes on p. 91 or your own favorite cake and frosting. For best results, you'll need three 8- or 9-inch layers and about 8 cups of creamy, spreadable frosting.



MUST-HAVE TOOLS make all the difference



CAKE TURNTABLE
 Basically an elevated lazy Susan, this is a must for making pretty swirls. Spend a little extra on a heavy-duty one.



CAKE BOARDS
 These inexpensive cardboard circles act as disposable cake plates. At Baked, they used gold-laminated rounds.



AN OFFSET SPATULA
 A bend where the blade meets the handle keeps your fingers out of the way when frosting. A 6-inch blade works well.



RECTANGULAR CAKE DECORATING COMB
 This thin piece of metal can smooth frosting in seconds. A bench scraper works, too.



PASTRY BAG AND TIPS
 A pastry bag comes in handy for piping a professional finish. In a pinch, you can cut off the tip of a zip-top bag.



SILICONE SPATULA
 A big one is perfect for transferring large amounts of frosting onto a cake.

See Sources, p. 100, for where to buy.

STEP 1

TRIM THE LAYERS

For a tall, elegant-looking cake, start with three 8-inch layers as shown here. If your hand isn't super steady, you can use a cake leveler (see p. 98) to remove the domed tops.



1 Remove the domed top with a serrated knife. Begin by positioning the knife just below the top edge. Plastic wrap on the turntable makes cleanup easy.



2 Gently saw through the layer to remove the top. Discard the top or save for another purpose (see p. 95). Repeat with the other two layers.

STEP 2

STACK AND FILL THE LAYERS

Be sure to put a cake board on your turntable for easy transport of the finished cake. To keep it from sliding, put a flat piece of rubber, such as from a nonskid mat, between it and the turntable.



1 Place a layer, cut side up, on a cake board on the turntable. Using a large silicone spatula, dollop about 1½ cups of frosting on top and smush it down a bit.



2 Spread the frosting to the edge. For efficient spreading, choke up on the offset spatula blade, hold it at a slight angle, and spin the turntable as you go.



3 Top with the second layer, cut side down. Press down firmly in the middle of the cake to squeeze out air bubbles.



4 Top the second layer with frosting and spread as before. For nice, thick bakery-style layers, be generous with the frosting.



5 Top with third layer, cut side down. Press on the top layer with your hand as before. Don't worry about the frosting that squeezes out.

STEP 3**THINLY COAT THE CAKE TO SEAL IN CRUMBS**

1 Using the offset spatula, smooth the frosting that squeezed out between the layers, being sure it fills the gaps between them.



2 Frost the top of the third layer with 1½ cups frosting.



3 Apply a thin layer of frosting to the side of the cake using the offset spatula. Don't worry about it looking perfect at this point.

STEP 4**SPREAD ON A THICK COAT OF FROSTING**

1 Add a final thick layer of frosting, starting with another 1½ cups on the top of the cake. A thick coat now allows for more pronounced swirls later.



2 Spread the frosting with the offset spatula, allowing the excess to go down the sides.



3 Thickly frost the sides using the offset spatula. Don't worry about the bottom of the cake; it will get its own finish later.



4 Smooth the sides as before using the cake comb while turning the table. You can leave the top edge rough at this point.



4 Position a cake comb with its smooth side against the cake, and turn the table to create smooth sides.



5 Working in sections, hold the blade at a slight angle and pull it across the surface of the cake toward the center, rounding off the top edge. Scrape excess frosting back into the bowl.



6 Clean up the frosting on the board by holding the spatula down on it and rotating the turntable. Refrigerate the cake for at least 30 minutes.

STEP 5 MAKE THE SWIRLS



1 Rest the spatula on the turntable with about an inch of the tip pressing against the cake. Keeping your elbow close to your body and the spatula still, turn the table counterclockwise (if you're a righty) while pressing the spatula against the cake to create the bottom swirl. Position the blade just above the seam of the first swirl and repeat for four swirls.



2 Round off the top edge of the cake as directed in photo 5 above, and then spread about 2 Tbs. more frosting on top of the cake. Place about an inch of the tip of the spatula on the left side of the top of the cake and begin to slowly turn the turntable counterclockwise.



3 As you turn the turntable, pull the blade left to right, stopping at the center of the cake. It may take a little practice to get an even looking swirl on top, but you can always smooth out the surface and try again.

STEP 6

ADD PRETTY FINISHES



1 Clean the board with a paper towel, if necessary. Put some frosting in a pastry bag fitted with a tip about 1/8 inch wide. With the tip at a 45-degree angle, pipe and pull to create beads along the bottom of the cake. Pipe with one hand while turning the turntable with the other.



2 Garnish the cake with a ring of sanding sugar (shown here), sprinkles, nuts, or chocolate shavings. Don't worry if some falls onto the sides.

VARIATION ON THE SWIRL SCALLOPED SWIRLS



1 Frost the cake as directed up to Step 5. Instead of holding the spatula still for swirls, drag and lift it in short bursts as you turn the table to create a scalloped, brick-like pattern.



2 Continue up the sides of the cake, staggering the strokes, then smooth the top and edge as directed on p. 89 in photo 5.



3 Starting on the outside edge, "draw" petals using the same short strokes, dragging the blade toward the center.



4 Continue around the top of the cake until you reach the center.



5 Finish the bottom with the same beading shown at top left in Step 6.



6 Garnish as directed at bottom left in Step 6. Shown here: Callebaut chocolate pearls.



For a chocolate layer cake recipe, go to FineCooking.com/extras.



very vanilla cake

Simple, understated, and elegant, this deeply vanilla cake is moist, yet light and airy, thanks to the addition of beaten egg whites. Pair it with the frosting that follows or use your own favorite. Makes three 8- or 9-inch round layers; serves 12 to 16

- 4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened; more for the pans**
- 10 oz. (2½ cups) cake flour; more for the pans**
- 3¾ oz. (¾ cup) unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 1 Tbs. baking powder**
- 1 tsp. baking soda**
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt**
- 1 cup ice-cold water**
- ½ cup whole milk**
- ½ cup well-shaken buttermilk**
- ½ cup vegetable shortening**
- 1¾ cups granulated sugar**
- 2 Tbs. pure vanilla extract**
- 1 large egg**
- 3 large egg whites, at room temperature**
- ¼ tsp. cream of tartar**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Butter three 8- or 9-inch round cake pans, line the bottoms with parchment paper, and butter the parchment. Dust with flour and knock out the excess flour.

Sift the flours, baking powder, baking soda, and salt into a medium bowl. Set aside.

In a small bowl, whisk together the water, milk, and buttermilk.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter and shortening on medium speed until creamy, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the sugar and vanilla, and beat on medium speed until fluffy, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the bowl, add the egg, and beat until just combined.

On low speed, add the flour mixture in three additions, alternating with the water mixture in two additions, beginning and ending with the flour. Increase the speed to medium for a few seconds to incorporate. Scrape down the bowl, then mix on low speed for a few more seconds.

In a medium bowl with a hand mixer, beat the egg whites and cream of tartar on medium speed until soft peaks form; do not overbeat. With a silicone spatula, gently fold the egg whites into the batter.

Divide the batter among the prepared pans, and smooth with a small offset spatula. Bake, rotating the pans halfway through the baking time, until a toothpick inserted in the center of each cake comes out clean, 35 to 45 minutes. Transfer the cakes to a wire rack and let cool for 20 minutes. Invert the cakes onto the rack, remove from the pans, and let cool completely. Remove the parchment. (The cake layers may be wrapped tightly and frozen for up to 1 month. Let thaw for a couple of hours before frosting; a partially frozen cake is easier to frost because the crumbs don't come off as easily.)

Frost with Very Vanilla Frosting (recipe right) or with another favorite frosting.

very vanilla frosting

Billowy and not too sweet, this may become your new favorite frosting. For more on the slightly unusual method for making it, see p. 96. Makes 8 cups; enough to thickly frost one 8- or 9-inch, triple-layer cake

- 3 cups granulated sugar**
- 3 oz. (¾ cup) unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 3 cups whole milk**
- ¾ cup heavy cream**
- 1½ Tbs. vanilla paste or pure vanilla extract**
- 24 oz. (3 cups) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces**

In a small bowl, whisk the sugar and flour, breaking up any lumps of flour.

In a 4-quart heavy-duty saucepan, bring the milk and cream to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce to medium low and whisk in the flour and sugar a little at a time until incorporated. Increase the heat to medium high, bring the mixture to a boil, and cook, whisking frequently, until thickened to a pudding-like consistency, 10 to 11 minutes.

Strain through a medium-mesh sieve into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Beat on high speed until cool, 7 to 8 minutes. Reduce to low and add the vanilla.

Add the butter a few pieces at a time, increasing the speed to medium after most of the butter is added. Stop the mixer after all of the butter is incorporated; the frosting will look chunky. Let it sit at room temperature for at least 2 hours and up to overnight.

With the whisk attachment, whip the frosting on medium-high speed to emulsify and incorporate air; this will take up to 20 minutes. The frosting should become more pale and voluminous. If too soft, place the bowl in the refrigerator to chill slightly, then beat again. If too firm, set the bowl over a pot of simmering water and beat until spreadable. If at any point during frosting it looks broken, simply rewhip it. You can't overbeat it.

Use on the Very Vanilla Cake at left or on your favorite 8- or 9-inch triple-layer cake.