

# CROQUEMBOUCHE

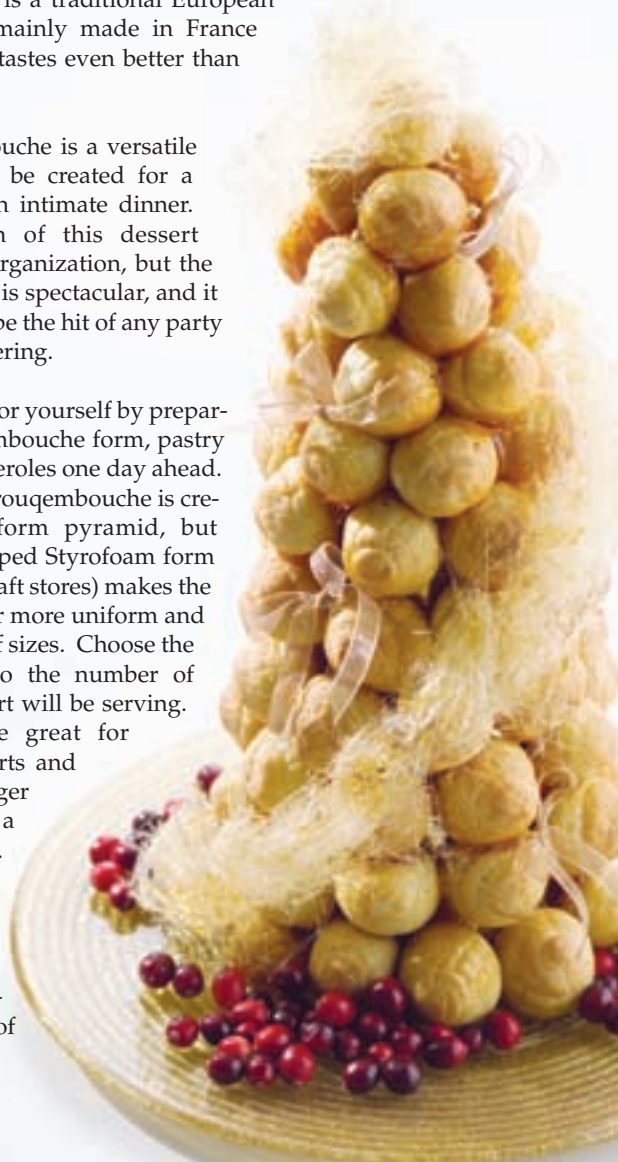
By Katie Beck | FOR ANY OCCASION

Photography by Marty Snortum Studio

The translation from French is “crisp in the mouth,” and that description only does this dessert half the justice. The croquembouche (kroh-kuhm-boosh) is a tower of profiteroles, which are small cream puffs filled with pastry cream that are then stacked on top of each other. They are stuck together with caramelized sugar and eventually form a visually stunning and palate-pleasing pyramid of dessert. Croquembouche is a traditional European wedding cake, mainly made in France and Italy, and it tastes even better than it looks.

The croquembouche is a versatile dessert that can be created for a large party or an intimate dinner. The preparation of this dessert takes time and organization, but the finished product is spectacular, and it will doubtlessly be the hit of any party or gourmet gathering.

Make life easier for yourself by preparing the croquembouche form, pastry cream and profiteroles one day ahead. The traditional croquembouche is created in a free-form pyramid, but using a cone-shaped Styrofoam form (found at local craft stores) makes the formation appear more uniform and offers a variety of sizes. Choose the size according to the number of people the dessert will be serving. Small cones are great for individual desserts and a variety of larger sizes can serve a bigger party. Wrap the cones in foil; a golden color foil is preferable because it is similar to the color of the profiteroles.



## The Profiteroles

2 cups water  
16 tablespoons unsalted butter (2 sticks)  
1 teaspoon salt  
3 ½ teaspoons granulated sugar  
2 cups flour  
8-10 eggs

\*this yields 20 profiteroles and can be multiplied according to the size or number of the dessert.

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. In a large saucepan, bring the butter, water, salt and sugar to a rolling boil. Take the pan off the heat, add all of the flour at once, and stir vigorously with a wooden spoon until the flour is incorporated, about 45 seconds. Return pan to the heat and cook while stirring until the dough begins to come together and separate from the sides of the pan (this step cooks out excess moisture and a raw flour taste). Scrape the dough into a mixer fitted with a paddle attachment and run the mixer on low for one minute.

With the mixer on a low speed, begin adding the eggs one at a time, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl after each addition. Mix until the eggs are fully incorporated and the dough falls smoothly off the beater. If the dough is still sticking to the beaters, add one or two more eggs.

Place the dough in a pastry bag fitted with a large plain tip and begin piping large kiss shapes onto a parchment-lined baking sheet. Whisk an egg with a tablespoon of water to create an egg wash. Dip a pastry brush in the egg wash and gently knock down the points to create a rounded profiterole. Bake at 425 degrees for 15 minutes and then reduce heat to 375 degrees. Bake until golden brown, about 20 more minutes. Let the profiteroles cool completely. Once cooled, take a small star pastry tip and puncture holes in the base of each profiterole. Store in plastic bags.

## The Filling (Pastry cream)

4 cups whole milk  
1 vanilla bean, split  
12 egg yolks  
1 ½ cups granulated sugar  
½ cup cornstarch  
¼ teaspoon salt

In a medium saucepan, heat milk and vanilla bean to a boil over medium heat. Remove from heat, extract vanilla bean and scrape seeds, then replace the seeds in the warm milk. In a separate bowl, sift the cornstarch, sugar and salt into the egg yolks and whisk until well combined. Whisk in a bit of the warm milk to warm up the egg yolks, then mix the egg yolk mixture into the milk and place back on medium heat. Stir constantly until the mixture thickens and resembles loose pudding. Pour the pastry cream into a container and place a piece of plastic wrap directly on the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Let cool at room temperature and then refrigerate overnight.

### Filling the Profiteroles

Put the pastry cream in a pastry bag fitted with a small star tip (the same one used to puncture the small cream puffs), fill each profiterole and place on a pan. Clear off some counter space and create an assembly area where you can accommodate a hot pad for the sugar saucepan, the pan of filled profiteroles, and finally the foil forms on a separate pan.

## Caramelized Sugar

3 cups sugar  
½ cup water  
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Place the sugar in a saucepan and slowly add water (ensuring that all sugar has absorbed water and no sugar has splashed up onto the sides of the saucepan), and then squeeze a little lemon juice into the pot (the acid of the lemon prevents crystallization). Place the saucepan on a high heat and wait for a golden color to spread through the sugar. Take the saucepan off the heat and dip the base in a water bath to stop the cooking.

### Assembling the Croquembouche

Taking one profiterole at a time, lightly dip the sides in the caramelized sugar and begin sticking them together in a circular pattern around the foil form. Continue sticking the profiteroles together with the sugar until the form is completely covered. Garnish with cranberries, strawberries, spun sugar (often too much of a mess) or any other edible decoration.

The caramelized sugar will crunch at first bite and then the sweet pastry cream will complete the dessert experience with another texture. It will look too pretty to eat, but don't hold back - it tastes divine!

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