

Finom Szelet or Gerbeaud Szelet with Buttercream

My husband's grandmother was apparently a phenom in the kitchen especially with the pastries. But, as you can imagine, what's left of her legacy is a few scant recipes in Hungarian and incredible memories. My brother-in-law, Robbie, and my husband told of a wondrous dessert called Finom Szelet but there does not seem to be a legitimate recipe for a Hungarian dessert by that name which simply translates into "Delicious Slice."

Stephen's input on Finom Szelet: Its like Linzer cookies with a tan cream ...Its like Gerbeaud Szelet but with a cream no jam and no walnuts

Robbie's input: Its not sponge cake ...the cream is not like the pastry cream in an éclair

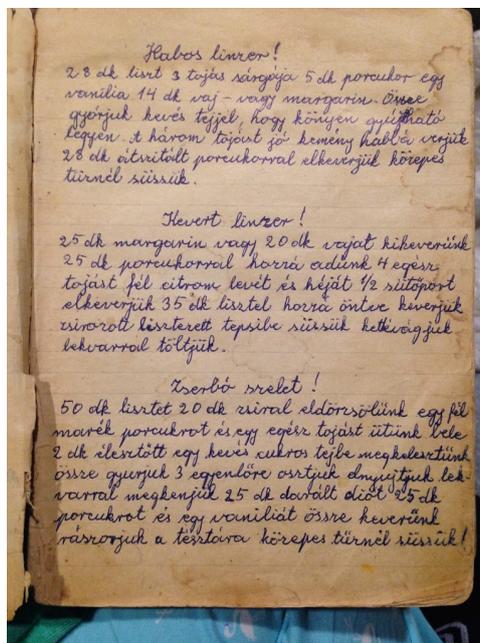
This sounds like the perfect mystery for me, the tireless baking sleuth. Never having made Gerbeaud or even tried it I set about piecing the recipes together from various Hungarian cookbooks and online recipes. All are written with very little detail. Gerbeaud szelet is 3-4 layers of short crust pastry with layers of apricot or raspberry jam and ground walnuts in between. Its topped with chocolate glaze or a ganache. At least, thats my understanding. Stephen and Robbie didn't like the walnut and lekvar (jam) combo so Mama filled it with the mysterious "cream" instead.

I had to assume it was some sort of buttercream since Robbie and Stephen were sure it was not pastry cream and definitely not whipped cream. Although, if you ask me I would have used whipped cream for two young boys who would probably engulf it like amoebae anyway.

But I digress...I went flipping through the Hungarian cookbook I have trying to guess which "cream" it might be and got

slightly alarmed when I found that the buttercream recipes called for egg whites which were whipped and then only slightly heated with boiled then cooled milk. Very cavalier. Anyway, I found a basic one that sounded Italian Meringue Buttercream -ish only with powdered sugar and made sure to add the boiling milk to the meringue.

On to the Gerbeaud szelet "cookie layers." This was confusing as I found recipes for both yeast-leavened dough and dough just leavened with baking soda. Although, the recipe from their grandmother includes "elesto" which my handy translator app told me was yeast.



Grandma's recipe for Gerbeaud or Zserbo Szelet shared with me by cousin Niki Kovacs Earnest

But since I couldn't decipher the rest of the recipe I adapted the one for Gerbeaud Szelet from [Helen's Hungarian Heritage Recipes by Clara Margaret Czegeny](#):

Pastry:

5 cups flour

1 cup brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

pinch salt

4 egg yolks

1 cup sour cream

2 cups unsalted butter, cubed and chilled

Mix the dry ingredients together in a large food processor. Pulse in the butter cubes until the pieces are the size of peas (think pie crust). Whisk together the egg yolks and sour cream and pulse into your flour mixture until it comes together. Dump out of the food processor and gather together into 3 equal balls. Wrap each in saran wrap and flatten into disks. Chill for one hour.

Preheat oven to 350F. Have ready 3 rimmed cookie sheets that are 10"x15". Roll out one dough disk at a time on a lightly floured surface to the approximate dimensions of your cookie sheet. Lay in the cookie sheet and bake for 12-15 minutes or just when it begins to be lightly golden around the edges. Cool in pan for a few minutes. Lay a piece of parchment on a cooling rack. Flip the baked dough out on the parchment paper and cool completely. Repeat for the remaining pieces of dough.

Italian Meringue Buttercream -ish (In the future, I would use a true vanilla IMBC but this was very good as well)

1 cup unsalted butter at room temperature

1 egg white, safer to use 30-35 g pasteurized liquid egg white for this if you have it

2 cups powdered sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste or extract

1/2 cup whole milk

Bring milk to a temperature of 140F in a small saucepan (for safety reasons this is beyond the boiling point but before the scalding point). In the meantime, beat butter, sugar, vanilla bean paste and egg white in a stand mixer almost to stiff peaks. When milk reaches temp pour into meringue slowly while continuing to beat at lowest speed. Bring to stiff peaks at a low speed— it could take several minutes before this happens and it might look curdled in the meantime (don't

worry, just keep going).

Lay first piece of pastry in the rimmed cookie sheet. Spread half of the buttercream evenly over the pastry. Add the second piece of pastry and spread the other half of the buttercream. Top with last piece of pastry and press down lightly. Make your ganache.

Ganache

12 oz semi-sweet chocolate (prob use dark chocolate next time)
3 Tbsps heavy cream
1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted

Melt chocolate in a double boiler. In the meantime, bring heavy cream to a boil. Remove chocolate from heat. Whisk in cream and butter. Cool slightly. Pour ganache over finom szelet and tap sides of pan to distribute chocolate over entire surface and even it out. Don't use a spatula or you will lose the shine of the ganache. Chill for one hour or until chocolate is set. Use a hot knife to slice the pastry into roughly 2"x4" pieces.

Well, it was delicious and according to Stephen and Robbie almost perfectly true to their memories of Finom Szelet. As I mentioned, in the future I would just a traditional vanilla IMBC rather than this one with boiling milk. Also, the pastry was pretty tricky to roll out and needed some additional flour. But, all in all, really good.

Now, today the troops rallied and a close family friend, Elizabeth Papp, relayed Mama Maria's original recipe. Interestingly, it is surprisingly close to my amateur attempt. A flour frosting is used rather than a meringue buttercream and chocolate glaze rather than ganache (although I think I will keep the ganache. The proportions of fat and flour in this recipe will make it easier to roll out and you will not need to chill the dough prior to rolling.

Finom Szelet

by Mama Maria Kovacs and relayed by Mrs.
Elizabeth Papp

Pastry (You will probably need to double this recipe for layers big enough for a 10"x15" pan):

2 2/3 cup flour (Mrs Papp specified Sapphire or Robin Hood)

1 stick unsalted butter (or you could go up to 2 sticks), cubed and chilled

2/3 cup powdered sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 egg

Enough cold milk "by feel" to get the right texture (again think of pie crust and adding enough water just to get the dough to come together or come off the sides of the bowl of the food processor)

Preheat the oven to 350F and have ready your 3 rimmed cookie sheets.

Combine the dry ingredients. Add the butter a few pieces at a time and rub together with the flour between your fingers until the butter is incorporated and the dough is in pieces the size of peas. (You could also do this in the food processor as above). Mix in egg and slowly add milk until the dough just comes together. It should not stick to your fingers. Divide into 3 portions.

Roll out each portion on a lightly floured surface into roughly the dimensions of your pan. Lay in ungreased pan and bake at 350F for 10-12 minutes.

Cool each pastry piece on a cooling rack (I found using parchment paper made it easier to transfer the pieces when cooled).

Flour Frosting (Krem):

1/2 cups flour

1 1/2 cups whole milk

1 cup unsalted butter, at room temp

2 cups powdered sugar

Optional flavorings:

1/2 cup cocoa powder

Vanilla sugar

Rum

Put flour in a saucepan over medium low heat and add a small amount of milk to make it smooth. Keep stirring with a wooden spoon and add the rest of the milk gradually. Keep cooking until it forms a thick paste. Take it off the heat and keep stirring until it is dry. Cool mixture to lukewarm.

Beat butter and powdered sugar in stand mixer until light and fluffy. Beat in flour mixture until fluffy.

Chocolate Glaze (Csokolades Maz)

3 German semi-sweet baking chocolate squares

1/4 cup unsalted butter

Melt chocolate in a double boiler and whisk in butter. Cool slightly.

Assemble pastry, filling and glaze as above.

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