

This Book belongs to

.....

**Melissa
Forti's
Christmas
Baking
Book**

Photographs by
Danny Bernardini



*To Miss P.
The purest love I have ever known.
I will never forget you.
And to my beloved Rudy,
who is my guardian and furry child.
No love was greater than the one we three shared.*



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♡

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My first meeting with Melissa was unforgettable. For the German TV series *Kitchen Impossible*, my friend, Tim Mälzer, sent me to Melissa's Tea Room in Sarzana. My task was to recreate Melissa's tiramisu cake, but as many people know, baking and cooking are not the same thing. I failed dramatically at the task.

Failure, however, is one of life's greatest challenges, but for me it does not mean a tragic end. Instead, it signals the end of a learning process, albeit a tough one. By failing, you learn that something does NOT work. What results is the discovery of a new approach—a new way of tackling things—which brings us to Melissa's work.

When you get to know Melissa personally, you immediately sense her perceptiveness and keen style. The fire in her eyes and the intensity of her words enrich everything that she bakes. The cakes and gateaux themselves are reminiscent of their creator's graceful silhouette. They are brimming with authenticity and good taste. Every ingredient

makes its presence felt and expertly interacts with the others. It is as if every cake is infused with a kind of excitement.

Melissa's book is an invitation to try your hand at her creations. And that, as I know from experience, is impossible to do without the recipes. For this reason, I am delighted that we now have the opportunity to immerse ourselves in Melissa's world with detailed instructions to guide us. My advice to the reader is to keep strictly to the recipes; if you do, the results of your baking will be superb. For my part, I succeeded with my second tiramisu cake because I followed Melissa's step-by-step directions.

The cordiality and vivacity that sparkle in every Italian sentence that Melissa speaks can be tasted in each of her recipes. However, her Christmas creations are exceptional, providing an extra helping of warmth and comfort, ensuring that this season of togetherness is a sensual feast for the heart.

Tim Raue



Pretty Christmas to you

I am sitting at my desk, in front of my computer, on a stormy Italian winter morning.

Today, my two cats are enjoying sitting by my side; it's cold and rainy outside, and they love to snuggle in search of a warm spot.

I am enjoying a slice of cake and a hot cup of coffee, of course.

My breakfast is usually sweet. And sweet is also this time of the year... Christmas is coming!

When I was offered the chance to write a book about Christmas baking, I was overwhelmed with excitement! There isn't a better time of the year to turn on the oven and to bake like there is no tomorrow! And so, I quickly started dusting off my personal baking notebook, where I write all my recipes for the festive season, and I was ready to ramble on happily about ingredients like: citrus zests, winter berries, cinnamon sticks, liquors etc. I stopped for a moment and realized that I didn't want to simply write a book about Christmas recipes. For that, we have the Internet, and I am sure you all have your fair share of amazing recipes, too. As I go through life, I find myself in search of deeper meanings. This is why, before sharing my recipes with you, I wish to stop for a moment to think about what Christmas means to me and perhaps to some of you, too.

In Italian, the holiday is called "Natale," which means "birth." Whether or not you look at Christmas from a religious point of view, Christmas is also a time for gatherings to celebrate life, family, friends, the past,

the present, and the future. In a sense, we are all united, with the same purpose: to share time together and to reset whatever we feel needs resetting. It's like time stands still for a moment; we pause, we gather together, we share, and we hope for new beginnings. From north to south, from east to west, we cook and we bake following old traditions and creating new ones.

As you probably know by now, I am on a quest to tackle the world's great pastry heritage, as well as reinventing recipes while exploring new territories.

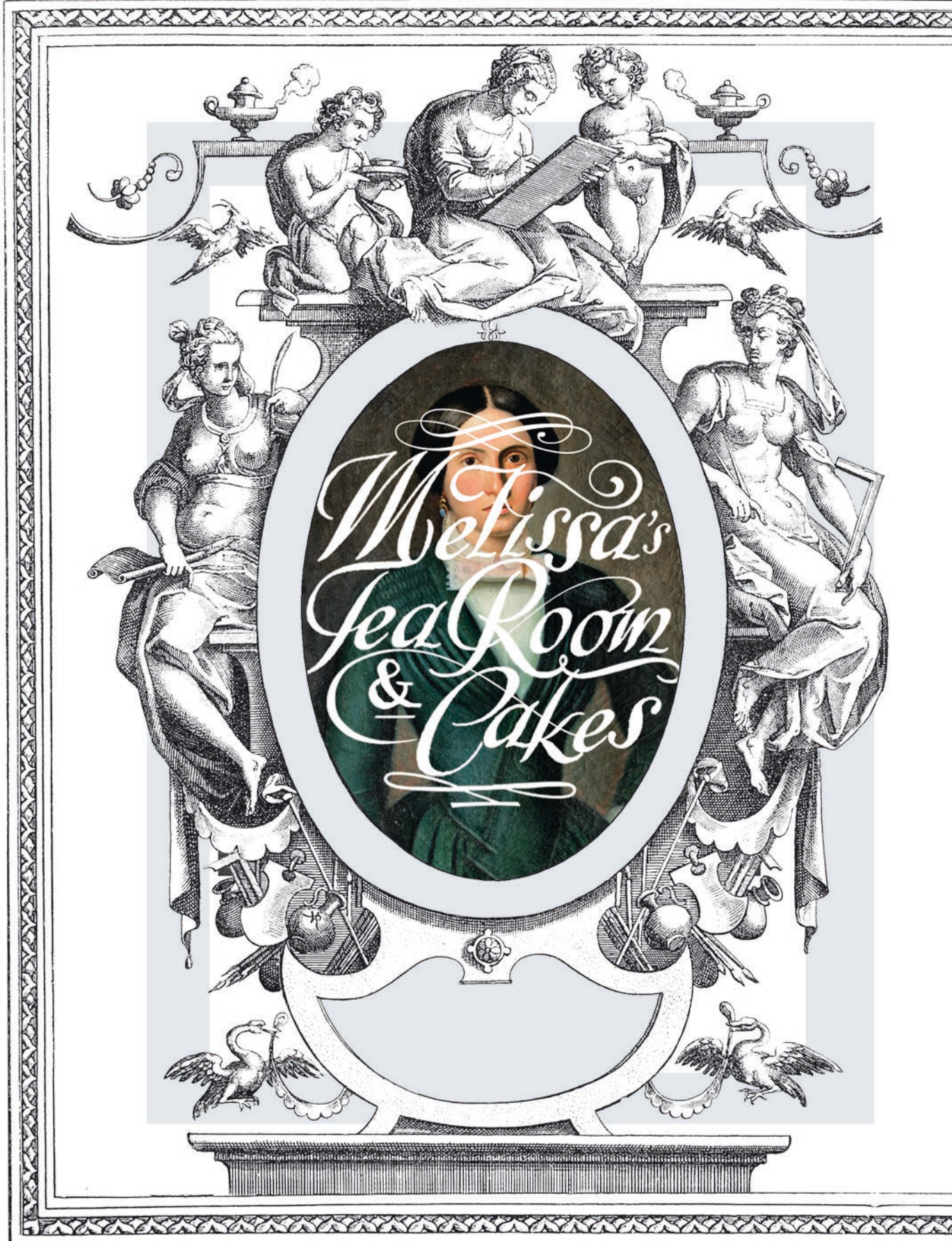
This is the fun part of my job. I present to you some of the greatest holiday recipes I have baked, created, and tasted throughout my personal life journey. From all-time favorite classics to recipes you might read for the first time.

I wish to pay my most humble and respectful honors to the vast Italian bakery tradition, as well as presenting my take on international recipes so you can bake for those you love, exploring the history and traditions of other countries and perhaps to tell stories about them. At least at Christmas, we may feel as if we were all sitting at "the same table," where there is only one thing that matters: being together.

Buon Natale!

With love,

Melissa



*Melissa's
Tea Room
& Cakes*



Large Cakes & Showstoppers

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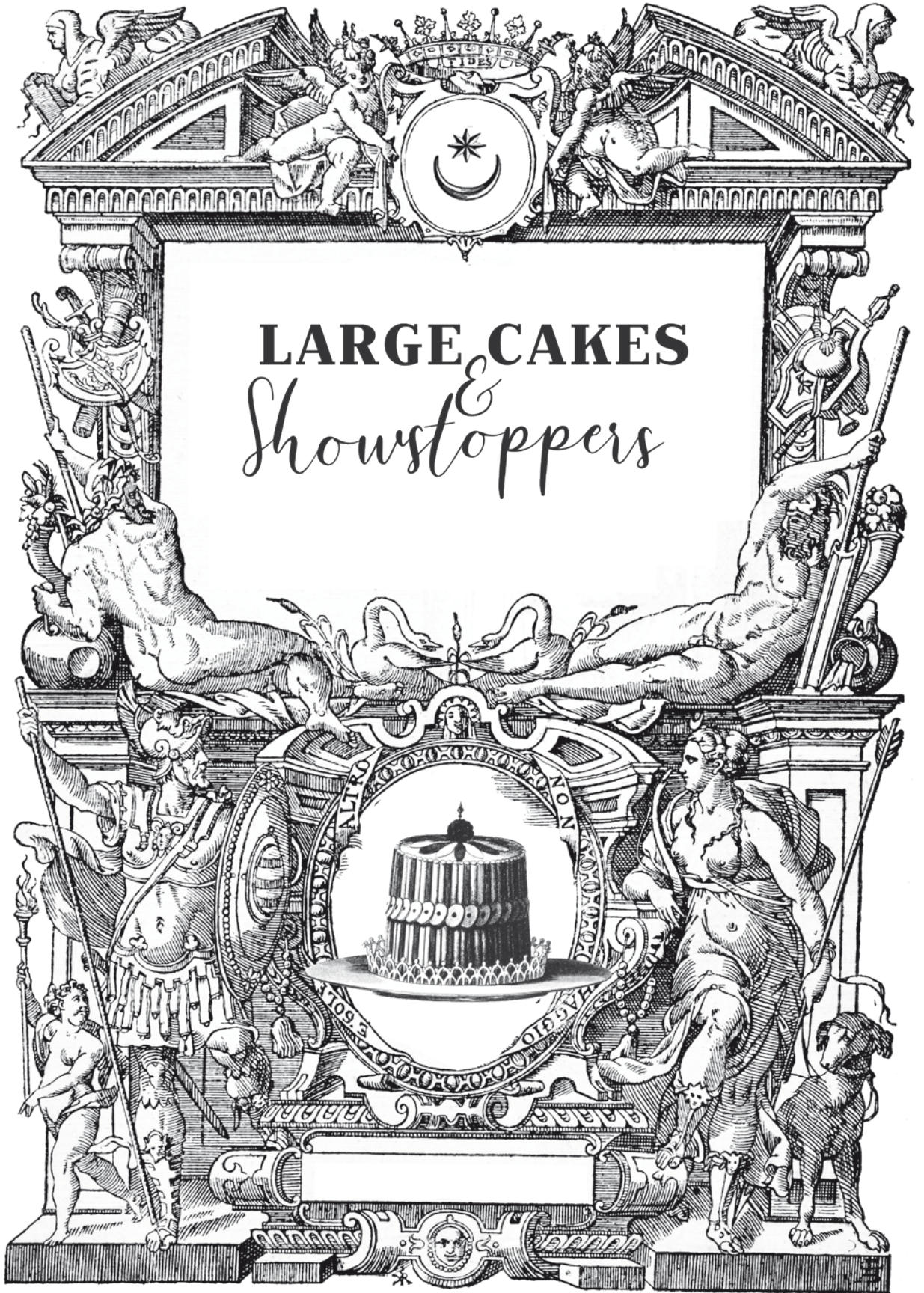
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LARGE CAKES
Showstoppers

Galette des Rois



Ingredients

About 6 servings

For the pastry cream

- 3 large egg yolks
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup plus 1 tablespoon (110g) sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (30g) organic cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon (15ml) freshly-squeezed organic lemon juice
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups (350ml) whole milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste or pure vanilla extract

For the frangipane cream

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (115g) or 1 stick unsalted butter
- $\frac{3}{8}$ cup plus 1 tablespoon (75g) sugar
- 2 medium organic eggs, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste or pure vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon orange blossom water
- Freshly-grated zest of 1 organic lemon
- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon (100g) almond flour
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon (20g) all-purpose flour

For the egg wash

- 2 organic eggs
- 1 medium egg yolk
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon (20ml) whole milk
- Pinch of salt

For the cake

- 2 rectangular sheets frozen puff pastry, cold

For the sugar syrup

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (150g) sugar

Prepared in France to celebrate the Epiphany, Galette des Rois is one of those pretty creations that magically bring people together. Traditionally, in poor families, la fève—a broad bean—was hidden in the filling, while the wealthy used a little king figurine. And whoever found the prize was declared “king of the day.” Customs like these make Christmas a truly wonderful time of the year!

Note: The holidays are a very busy time of year, so I advise you to use frozen puff pastry for this recipe, providing it is of the best quality. Galette des Rois is already a little time consuming and you deserve to enjoy this wonderful preparation with your family and friends, I would rather you have fun decorating it instead of going crazy making puff pastry. Of course, if you wish to make it from scratch, please feel free to do so.

Method

Make the pastry cream in a medium-sized bowl by combining the egg yolks, sugar, cornstarch, and lemon juice. Then whisk until pale.

In a medium-sized saucepan, bring the milk to a gentle boil. Pour a small amount into the egg yolk mixture and stir quickly to temper the eggs. Pour the tempered egg mixture into the saucepan, place over low heat and cook, stirring until thick. Add the vanilla. Strain through a sieve into a large-sized bowl, then cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until ready to use.

Make the frangipane cream in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Beat together the butter and sugar on low until just combined. Add the eggs, vanilla, orange blossom water, and lemon zest and beat until just combined. Add the almond flour and all-purpose flour and beat until creamy. Gradually fold in the pastry cream—the mixture should be creamy but a little stiff, so you may not need to add all of the pastry cream. Any leftover pastry cream can be refrigerated for a couple of days or served with fresh fruit. Refrigerate the frangipane for about 1 hour or until set. Transfer to a piping bag fitted with a medium round tip and refrigerate until ready to use.

→





Make the egg wash in a small bowl by whisking together the egg, egg yolk, milk, and salt. Strain into a small bowl.

To make the cake, keep your hands and the puff pastry cold. Fill a bowl with ice water and set it near your work area in case you need to chill your hands.

Place 1 sheet of puff pastry on a piece of parchment paper set on a work surface. Arrange an 8-inch (20-cm) ring or round cake pan on the parchment paper and use a sharp knife to cut around it and cut out the first round of puff pastry. Refrigerate and repeat with the other sheet of

puff pastry and an 8 ½-inch (22-cm) ring or second round cake pan. Brush the egg wash around the edges of both puff pastry rounds, making sure not to drip it over the sides onto the parchment paper, or the Galette des Rois will not rise.

Pipe the frangipane cream on the first puff pastry round, starting from the center. Create three circles slightly overlapping each other, working your way towards the sides, leaving a margin of about 0.05 inches (1.5 cm) all the way around. At this point, the fève can be hidden. Remove