

# Move over macarons, flashy eclairs take centre stage



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Published on: February 26, 2017 | Last Updated: February 26, 2017 6:03 AM PST



Eclairs from the pastry class at Vancouver Pastry School, from left, chocolate, with curry crumble; lemon kalamansi, with ginger custard with honey meringues; red eclair shell with pistachio cream and fresh berries; and coffee and caramel. *MARCO ROPKE / PNG*

Even in the pastry world trends come and go.  
Macarons had more than their fair share of the

spotlight, and who remembers cupcakes? Now it's éclair's time. The once humble pastry has now become haute éclair.

The éclair is the most popular patisserie treat in France because it's comforting, easy to eat, and able to be made at home, albeit with varying degrees of success.

We are not talking about the soggy amorphous kind with stodgy filling and chocolate icing, either. Some people think those Long Johns doughnuts are eclairs, or that recipes calling for instant vanilla pudding and Cool Whip custard and Twinkies are somehow related (heaven forbid). They are not.

L'Éclair de Génie — a Parisian pastry shop that only sells eclairs — opens its 25th store on Robson St. in Vancouver in April, so it's a safe bet to say that eclairs are more than a flaky fad; they are having a renaissance.



An Eclair de GÃ©nie store in Paris. PNG

## A flashy history



The éclair originated in France in the early 1800s, first made by Marie-Antoine Carême, a pastry chef for French royalty. Eclair is the French word for lightning, and the pastry could have been so named because it glistens when coated with confectioner's glaze, or because chefs joked it is "in a flash". The Chambers English Dictionary defines it as "a cake, long in shape but short in duration."

In 2017, some very creative pastry chefs have given the éclair a modern makeover. They're sporting bright colours, from gold leaf to raspberry red, with glistening tops and light fillings with innovative flavours like passion fruit and mango, lemon cream, or salted caramel with mascarpone. They're flashy.

While many pastry chefs in Vancouver make eclairs, only a few have pushed the envelope.

"A few years ago we did a black sesame éclair, but people weren't familiar with eclairs let alone this," says Jackie Kai Ellis, who owns Vancouver's [Beaucoup Bakery and Cafe \(http://www.beaucoupbakery.com/\)](http://www.beaucoupbakery.com/). She says it was the wrong timing for Vancouver then, but times have changed.

"The pastry and food community are always supportive of each other and when someone does well, the rest of us do well," says Kai Ellis. "Thomas Hass inspired me to open my own bakery. If he didn't do all the hard work first, there wouldn't be so many French pastry shops in the city."

She welcomes the opening of L'Éclair de Genie. "The more the merrier, because there are so many foodies in this town."

Kai Ellis also credits Instagram with speeding and spreading trends. "Food pics on Instagram are a constant inspiration for foodies and chefs alike. Before that we relied on cookbooks and blogs."

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Oomph and dazzle

Adam Chandler, pastry chef and owner of Beta5 Chocolates (<http://beta5.myshopify.com/>) in Vancouver, features eclairs periodically and has elevated them to an art form. Last Christmas he infused pastry cream with Douglas fir tips paired with dark chocolate and came up with the “Canadian éclair”.

In 2007, Chandler took an intensive choux pastry course in Paris taught by Christophe Adam, who went on to open the first L'Éclair de Genie store in 2012.

“He taught a modern approach to presentation, and pushed the éclair as trendy,” says Chandler.

“We have 257 kinds of eclairs, and I still have fun playing with new flavours, textures and colours,” says Adam. “The éclair must have oomph, with a dazzling, modern look.”

Adam has stores in Japan, Hong Kong, and Moscow, and the one in Vancouver will be the first L'Éclair de Genie in North America.

“We will start with 10 kinds of eclairs and introduce two new ones each month, like every other store. And we serve coffee,” says Adam.

## Eclair 101

Eclairs must be fresh when assembled. The shell, made from choux paste, is easy to make and freezes well. The inside is typically filled with vanilla custard and the top is brushed with chocolate glaze, but the possibilities are endless. By following a few rules, you'll be a genius.

“I got the idea to teach eclairs from visiting L'Éclair de Génie in Paris. Christophe gets the credit for modernizing the éclair,” says Marco Ropke, chef and owner of Pastry Training Centre of Vancouver (<http://vancouverpastryschool.com/>).

“I want to teach technique that isn't intimidating, so students can make a good éclair at home. You can come up with your own funky colours and flavour combinations but first learn how to make choux paste and the correct way to pipe the filling, and of course (make) the custard — life is about eating custard.”

Chandler is also a graduate of Ropke's pastry classes.

“Marco was inspirational and a great teacher,” says Chandler. “He made striped eclairs by piping alternating colours of fondant icing using metal bars to keep a straight edge. It was wondrous.”

At one of Ropke’s recent classes students made four kinds of eclairs, including a classic chocolate with curry crumble, and bright red shells with pistachio cream topped with fresh berries.

Students also learned a few tips and tricks: a French star nozzle is best for piping choux paste; make three tiny holes in the bottom shell to best fill with custard; and stick a little paste on four corners of your parchment sheet so it doesn’t move. And, if you’re a perfectionist, put trays of lava rocks or metal chains in the oven until they are hot and throw on ice cubes, and then put the piped eclairs in the oven while it’s steaming.

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### Recipes

Beta5’s choux paste

1 cup (250 mL) water

2 tbsp (30 mL) skim milk powder

½ cup (125 mL) unsalted butter

½ tsp (2.5 mL) salt

1 tbsp (15 mL) sugar

½ cup (125 mL) all-purpose flour

½ cup (125 mL) bread flour

4 large eggs

In a large saucepan combine water, skim milk powder, butter, sugar and salt. Bring to a boil. In a bowl, sift flours together. Remove from heat and stir in sifted flours with a wooden spoon. Return to medium heat and cook dough,

stirring continuously for 2-3 minutes or until a golden crust forms at the bottom of the pan.

Transfer dough to a stand mixer to cool. Using a paddle attachment at low speed, add eggs one at a time, ensuring each egg is fully incorporated before adding another. Mix on medium speed for 2 minutes. Pipe into 4 inch (10 cm) x 1 inch (2.5 cm) strips on a parchment-lined sheet pan and reserve.

Cut Craquelin Crust (see recipe below) into 4 inch (10 cm) x 1 inch (2.5 cm) strips and place over piped choux pastry.

Preheat oven to 450 F (230 C)

Place trays of prepared choux with crust in oven and reduce heat to 400 F (200 C). Bake for 15 minutes then reduce temperature to 325 F (160 C). Do not open the oven. Bake for 30-40 minutes, checking to see that eclairs are fully baked and crisp (when picking them up they should be very light with a well-developed crust). If they feel soft after 40 minutes, leave them in the oven to completely dry (taking them out too early will result in collapse).

Once fully baked, transfer to a cooling rack, then fill when completely cooled. Shells can be frozen. When ready to use defrost and re-crisp in a 350 F (175 C) oven.

*Makes 20 4 inch (10cm) eclairs*

Beta5's Craquelin Crust

This adds "oomph" to an eclair

*4 tbsp plus 1 tsp (65 mL) unsalted butter, room temperature*

*½ cup (125 mL) sugar*

*½ cup (125 mL) bread flour*

*¼ tsp (1 mL) salt*

In a bowl combine butter and sugar and mix just until combined. Add flour and salt. Wrap with plastic wrap and chill for 2 hours. Roll to 1/8th inch (3 mm thickness) between sheets of parchment paper and freeze.

*Yields 40 pieces*

Custard for eclairs

From Vancouver Pastry School's Marco Ropke.

*3 cups (750 mL) whole milk*

*2/3 cup (160 mL) sugar*

*8 egg yolks*

*¼ cup (60 mL) cornstarch*

*3 tbsp (45 mL) unsalted butter, room temperature*

In a medium bowl, combine one-third of the milk with sugar, cornstarch and egg yolks. In a saucepan, heat the remaining milk until simmering and add to the bowl of milk mixture, whisking constantly. Transfer the mixture to the saucepan. Cook the custard over medium-low heat until bubbly and thick, until the cornstarch is cooked out, for about 8-10 minutes. Do not boil. Whisk in the butter.

At this point you can add flavourings, such as passion fruit purée. Here are two classics.

Vanilla Custard Cream: add 1 tsp (5 mL) vanilla

Chocolate Custard Cream: Break 3.5 oz (100 g) Valrhona dark chocolate into small pieces and stir into warm custard. Don't cook the chocolate

*Makes about 4 cups (1 L)*

Chocolate Glaze (Chocolate Fondant)

*10 oz (284 g) sugar fondant*

*3 oz (86 g) Valrhona dark chocolate 70 per cent*

*1 tbsp (15 mL) water*

In a bowl, place the fondant over a saucepan of simmering water (water bath) and melt gently. Add water and then chocolate and stir until combined and melted. Dip eclairs into the fondant glaze.

*Makes enough for 20 eclairs*

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