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New Cookbook

HOLIDAYS IN FRANCE

# bake

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# CHINON

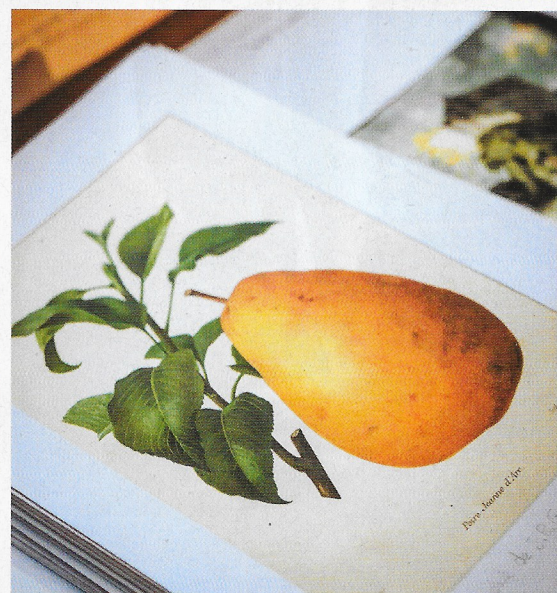
## Charm



BY JAMIE SCHLER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOANN PAI

STEP INSIDE JAMIE SCHLER'S  
HÔTEL DIDEROT HOME FOR  
A GLIMPSE OF THE HOLIDAYS  
IN THE LOIRE VALLEY





**L**in the Loire Valley's small town of Chinon, France, located on the Vienne river, cookbook author and food writer Jamie Schler owns and runs the cozy and charming Hôtel Diderot with her husband, Jean-Pierre. When the couple purchased the hotel, which dates back to the 1400s, part of their contract stipulated that Jamie had to spend two weeks learning the jam-making process she was inheriting from the previous owner. It's tradition that hotel guests are treated to breakfast each morning in front of the hotel's roaring fireplace, where baskets of breads are served with fresh chèvre and homemade jams. Currently, more than 50 varieties of jam are made from local fruit throughout the year. When Jamie's not spending time with guests or making jams, she's baking in her home kitchen, located inside an apartment in the hotel. During the holidays, you'll find her preparing classic French holiday recipes, including stollen, a decadent chocolate-chestnut fondant cake, and cookies.



**GO THERE**

To book a stay at  
Hôtel Diderot, visit  
[hoteldiderot.com](http://hoteldiderot.com).



## CHOCOLATE CHESTNUT FONDANT

Makes 1 (8-inch) cake

*To the French, a fondant is an ethereal cake-like confection, dense and thick, made with little or no flour, meltingly smooth on the tongue, its immediate burst of richness fading away and leaving a delicate essence, a flavor that lingers. This fondant au chocolat et marrons, chocolate and chestnut fondant, is less cake than truffle, so dense yet surprisingly delicate, and makes for one spectacular holiday treat. The addition of a tablespoon of rum or Grand Marnier would be truly festive. For an especially elegant dessert, serve with crème anglaise, an unsweetened or very lightly sweetened whipped cream, or a berry coulis or sauce.*

- 7 ounces (200 grams) 70% cacao dark chocolate, roughly chopped
- 11 tablespoons (160 grams) unsalted butter
- 3 large eggs (150 grams), room temperature
- 1 (17.6-ounce) can (500 grams) crème de marrons or chestnut cream (see Notes)
- 1 gently rounded tablespoon (11 grams) flour (see Notes)

Garnish: confectioners' sugar

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Butter an 8-inch round cake pan or baking dish. Line bottom of pan with parchment paper.
2. In a medium microwave-safe bowl, place chocolate and butter. Heat on high in 30-second intervals, stirring between each, until melted and smooth (about 1½ minutes total). Let cool completely.
3. In a large bowl, whisk eggs until blended. Whisk in crème de marrons. Gradually whisk in chocolate mixture, being careful not to splatter. Whisk in flour. Pour batter into prepared pan.
4. Bake until puffed, center is set and cracking a bit, and surface is matte (almost like brownies), 30 to 35 minutes. Let cool completely before serving. Garnish with confectioners' sugar, if desired.

**Notes:** Chestnut cream, also known as crème de marrons, is a sweetened chestnut spread. We used Clement Faugier Crème de Marrons de l'Ardèche, available at amazon.com.

Jamie used chestnut flour, but you could also use all-purpose flour or even cake flour if that's what you have on hand.



## ALSATIAN STOLLEN

Makes 1 loaf

*Often called Christstollen, this sweet cakelike bread studded with candied fruit, fragrant with orange and rum, and topped with a snowy layer of confectioners' sugar is a Christmas specialty of the Alsace region of France. With its German heritage, this is the quick version of yeasted stollen, with finely ground nuts replacing the traditional marzipan usually nestled in the center.*

- 4 cups (500 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1½ cups (150 grams) finely ground almonds or hazelnuts
- 4 teaspoons (20 grams) baking powder
- 1 tablespoon (9 grams) kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon (1 gram) ground cardamom
- ½ teaspoon (1 gram) ground nutmeg
- Zest of 1 large orange (about 1¼ teaspoons or 8 grams)
- ¾ cup plus 2 teaspoons (180 grams) unsalted butter, cubed
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- 2 cups (200 grams) dried cranberries or a mix of dried cranberries, currants, and raisins
- 3.5 ounces (100 grams) candied citrus peel
- 1 cup (250 grams) quark, fromage frais, or full-fat Greek yogurt
- 2 large eggs (100 grams), room temperature
- 2 tablespoons (30 grams) dark rum
- 1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract
- ¼ to ½ teaspoon (1 to 2 grams) almond extract
- 3 to 4 tablespoons (42 to 56 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- ⅓ cup (40 grams) confectioners' sugar

1. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, ground nuts, baking powder, salt, cardamom, nutmeg, and orange zest until combined. Add cubed butter, and using your fingertips, rub butter into flour mixture until there are no more lumps of butter and mixture resembles wet sand. (There should be no clumps of zest; it should be evenly distributed throughout.) Add granulated sugar, cranberries, and candied peel, and toss well until combined.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together quark, eggs, rum, and extracts until smooth. Pour over flour mixture, and using a fork or wooden spoon, fold and blend until dry ingredients are moistened and a dough forms.
3. Scrape dough out onto a lightly floured surface, and knead until dough is smooth, elastic, and no longer sticky, 10 to 15 minutes, adding extra flour as needed.
4. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
5. Shape dough into a 11-inch oval with slightly tapered ends. Make a deep, exaggerated indentation down long side of dough about one-third of the way in. (If the indentation is not deep enough, it will be lost in baking.) Place on prepared pan.
6. Bake for 45 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 325°F (170°C), and bake for 15 minutes more, loosely covering with foil to prevent excess browning, if necessary. Immediately brush entire top and sides of hot loaf with softened butter. Generously dust with confectioners' sugar.









## ZIMTSTERNE (CINNAMON STARS)

Makes about 12 cookies

Bredele are cookies baked in the Alsace region of France for the Christmas season. There are a wide variety of traditional bredele baked and served during the holidays, one of which is Zimtsterne, or cinnamon stars. Zimtsterne are cinnamon and spice cookies, dense, chewy, made of a simple meringue blended with finely ground nuts and spices and topped with a thin, crispy, snowy-white icing, an addictive and joyously gluten-free Christmas treat.

- 2 large egg whites (60 grams), room temperature
- 1 teaspoon (5 grams) fresh lemon juice (about ½ lemon)
- ¼ teaspoon plus 1 pinch salt, divided
- 1⅓ cups (200 grams) confectioners' sugar, plus more for dusting
- ½ teaspoon (2 grams) vanilla extract
- 2⅔ cups (256 grams) plus 3 tablespoons (18 grams) superfine almond flour\*
- 2 teaspoons (4 grams) ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon (2 grams) gingerbread spice (see Notes)

1. In a large bowl, beat egg whites with a mixer at low speed for 15 seconds; gradually increase mixer speed to high, beating until foamy. Add lemon juice and pinch salt, and beat until just opaque, about 1 minute. Increase mixer speed to high; gradually add confectioners' sugar, beating until combined. Beat until meringue is thick and slightly increased in volume, about 2 minutes.
2. Transfer 2 heaping tablespoons (27 grams) meringue to a small bowl; cover and refrigerate.
3. Add vanilla to remaining meringue, and beat at medium speed until combined.
4. In a medium bowl, stir together 2⅔ cups (256 grams) flour, cinnamon, gingerbread spice, and remaining ¼ teaspoon salt. With

mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to meringue, beating until combined.

5. Generously dust work surface with confectioners' sugar. Scrape dough onto work surface. Fold and knead up to remaining 3 tablespoons (18 grams) flour into dough as needed until it is stiff enough to shape into a ball. (Dough will be sticky but not wet.) Divide dough in half (about 255 grams each). Wrap each in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 3 hours or up to overnight.

6. Preheat oven to 300°F (150°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

7. Dust work surface and rolling pin with confectioners' sugar. Working with one half of dough at a time, roll dough to ¼- to ⅜-inch thickness. Using a 3½-inch star-shaped cutter, cut dough, rerolling scraps as necessary, and gently place 1 to 1½ inches apart on prepared pan. Using an offset spatula, carefully spread 1 teaspoon (2 grams) reserved meringue into a thin layer on each cookie, smoothing well. (See Notes.)

8. Bake until set and baked on sides and icing is matte and still white, 15 to 20 minutes. (The cookies will continue to firm up once out of the oven; if left in too long, the icing will become tinged with a pale brown color and the points of the stars will harden.) Remove from pan, and let cool completely on wire racks. Store in an airtight container for up to 10 days.

*\*You can also use a mix of almond flour and finely ground hazelnut meal.*

**Notes:** Gingerbread spice is a seasonal offering. To make your own, whisk together 1 tablespoon (6 grams) ground ginger, 2 teaspoons (4 grams) ground cinnamon, 1¼ teaspoons (2.5 grams) ground nutmeg, ½ teaspoon (1 gram) ground cloves, and ½ teaspoon (1 gram) ground allspice.

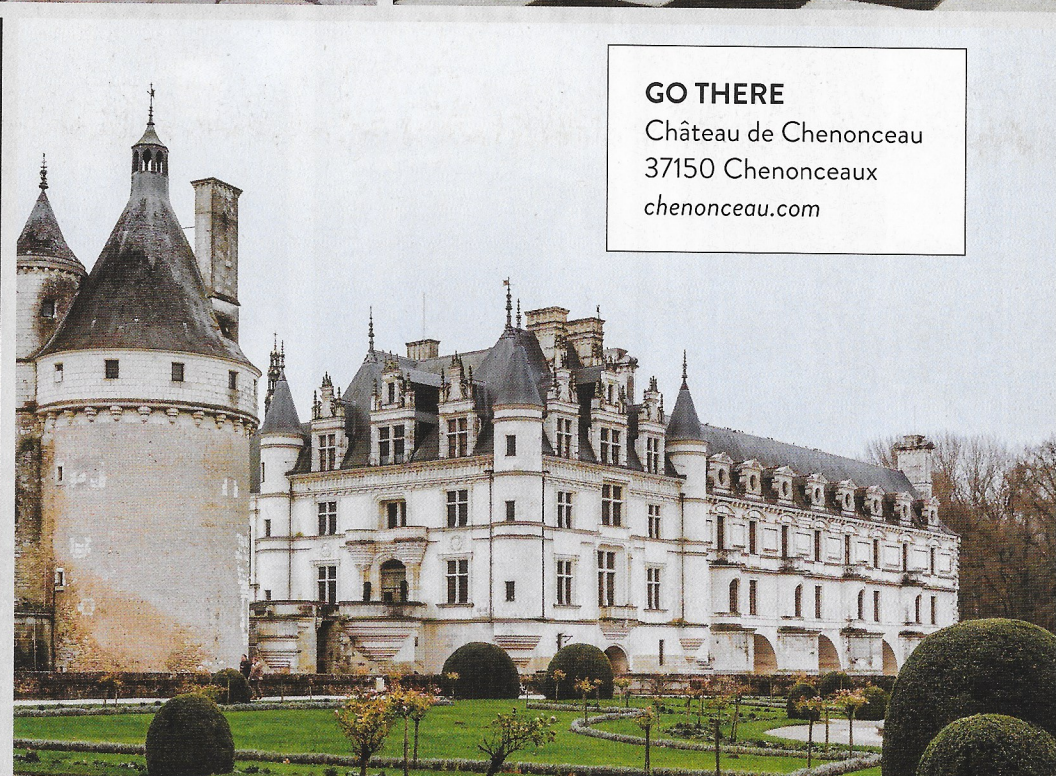
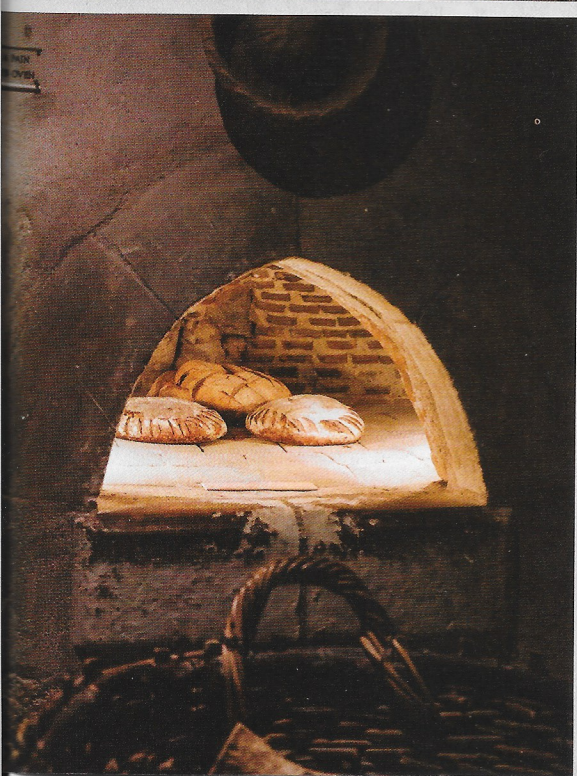
*The meringue icing will not smooth in the oven; it will come out exactly as it goes in!*

# Château of Chenonceau

A Loire Valley must-visit during the holidays

In a region studded with enchanting châteaux, the Château of Chenonceau is exceptional and located about an hour's drive from Chinon. This exquisite example of Renaissance architecture, elegantly perched above the water and surrounded by gardens, was owned, lived in, transformed, furnished, and decorated by a series of women, including Diane de Poitiers and Catherine de' Medici, endowing the château with the name *le château des dames*—"the ladies' château." No matter how often I visit, the magnificent galleries, richly furnished rooms embellished by magnificent floral arrangements, lovely chapel, and, of course, my favorite spot, the kitchens, never cease to take my breath away. During the winter holiday season, Chenonceau is always dressed in its most festive Christmas finery, an event I never miss, year after year.





**GO THERE**  
Château de Chenonceau  
37150 Chenonceaux  
[chenonceau.com](http://chenonceau.com)



## Jamie's Chinon

Don't miss these favorite boutiques and bakeries in Chinon

**Boutique Confluences** (3 rue Jean Jacques Rousseau) is my favorite shop to buy a gift for a friend, family member, and, yes, myself. You'll find gorgeous tableware and the coolest kitchen utensils, stunning linens and cushions, jewelry and handbags, lamps, and home decorations. Owners Corinne and Yves Rasquain have exquisite taste, selecting only the most beautiful artisan objects. The difficulty is walking out of this lovely shop with only one thing.

Pierre Colin opened his pastry and chocolate shop **Majuscule à Pâtisserie** (10 rue Jean Jacques Rousseau) in 2019 at the age of 22, and locals cannot get enough of his pastries—as beautiful to look at as they are fabulous to eat. My favorites are his lemon-lime tarts, his chocolate St. Honoré, and classic Paris-Brest. His melt-in-the-mouth chocolates are out of this world, and in the summer, he offers intensely flavored sorbets. Across the street is his atelier with large glass windows that allow you to watch him at work.





Bakeries are everywhere in Chinon, as they are in France, but I'm a fanatic about the incredible artisan and traditional breads at **Fournil du Château** (16 rue Jean Jacques Rousseau). Laurent Cherbonnier oversees the ovens, and his wife, Sylvie, is behind the glass cases filled with enticing treats, both savory and sweet. Don't miss this master baker's *fouace rabelais*, a dark bread enriched with spices, saffron, and walnuts that's been a local specialty since medieval times.

The stunning 15th-century building and the strains of Edith Piaf on an old gramophone set the ambience for the inviting **Librairie Ancienne Lacoste** (45 rue Voltaire) where Jacques Lacoste sells rare, antique, and modern books as well as old engravings. I head straight to the collection of old cookbooks. ▢

