

# In the kitchen



This month **Paola Westbeek** enjoys her favourite wintertime indulgence – warmed Mont d’Or cheese from the Jura mountains

**T**hough it was late spring, my thoughts wandered to powdery slopes, wood smoke and the raw beauty of winter as I stared into the distance at the towering spruce trees that surround Le Crêt l’Agneau, a cosy bed and breakfast nestled in La Longeville in Haut-Doubs.

It was my first visit to the Jura mountains and owner Lili had graciously prepared a fondue feast with local cheeses, including one of my favourites – Mont d’Or.

Also known as *Vacherin du Haut-Doubs*, Mont d’Or is one of the most popular cheeses of this tranquil and relatively undiscovered corner of France, situated just a stone’s throw from the Swiss border. Named after the Massif du Mont d’Or, where it is produced with raw milk from Montbéliarde and Simmental cows collected daily by approximately 500 dairy farmers, the cheese was granted AOC certification in 1981.

Mont d’Or’s origins, however, probably date back to the 13th century and in the 18th century, the unctuous cheese regularly appeared at Louis XV’s lavish banquets. Today, 11 *fruitières* (cheese cooperatives) produce roughly 5,000 tonnes of



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Mont d’Or annually between 15 August and 15 March, which can only be sold between 10 September and 10 May. In a nutshell, the production process starts daily at 4am when rennet is added to the vats of fresh milk. Once curds form, they are pressed into cylindrical moulds of three different sizes. After unmoulding, each soft wheel of cheese is held together by a spruce band and placed in a characteristic spruce box before maturing in cool cellars for a minimum of 21 days.

Each cheese, including its box, weighs between 480 grams and 3.2 kilos. Mont d’Or’s runny consistency means that it can be spooned cold straight out of the box and according to the experts, this is actually the best way to appreciate its buttery sweetness and slightly resinous aromas. It wasn’t until the 1990s that the cheese was baked and served hot and molten, a dangerously addictive preparation called *boîte chaude* and the one I prefer most.

Simply scoop out a little cheese from the centre, fill with white wine (preferably the regional, sherry-like *vin jaune*), season with a few turns of the pepper mill and bake at 220°C for approximately 25 minutes until bubbling and golden.

On cold, snowy evenings, this is one of the most exquisite winter indulgences, especially when enjoyed in front of a crackling fire.

## RECIPE

### Chocolate croissants

Makes 16

#### INGREDIENTS

- 2 sticks (9oz/250g) butter, preferably 84% butterfat, diced
- Scant 2/3 cup (2.5oz/70g) unsweetened cocoa powder, divided
- 2 cups (9oz/250g) all-purpose flour
- 2 cups (9oz/250g) pastry flour
- 2½ tsp (12g) salt
- 1/3 cup (2.5oz/70g) sugar
- 1/2 cup (2oz/60g) powdered milk
- 0.5oz (15g) fresh baker’s yeast
- 2 tbsp (30ml) whole milk
- 1 cup plus 3 tbsp (280ml) water

#### EGG WASH

- 3½ tbsp (2oz/50g) lightly beaten egg (about one egg)
- 3 tbsp (2oz/50g) egg yolk (about 2½ yolks)
- 3½ tbsp (50ml) whole milk

#### METHOD

1. At least one hour before making the croissant dough (or ideally a day ahead), incorporate a heaped 1/4 cup (1oz/30g) of the cocoa powder into the butter.
2. Blend with a bowl scraper and then with your hands until thoroughly combined. Cover in plastic wrap and refrigerate until well chilled, preferably overnight.
3. Combine the flours, place them on a work surface and make a well in the centre. Put the salt, sugar, powdered milk and remaining cocoa powder in the well. Make another small well in the flour ‘wall’ and crumble the fresh yeast into it. Carefully pour the whole milk and a little of the water over the yeast, and pour the rest over the ingredients in the main well.
4. Gently mix the ingredients together in the centre of the well with your fingers.
5. Using a bowl scraper, draw the flour into the centre of the well, combining it with the other ingredients.
6. Knead the dough with your hands until smooth. Shape into a ball, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 20 minutes.
7. With a rolling pin, soften the cocoa powder-butter mixture and shape into a square. The butter should still be cold, but needs to be as malleable as the dough you have just made.



8. Roll the dough so it is twice as long as the square of butter. Place the butter on the dough and wrap the dough around it to enclose it completely.

9. Dust the work surface very lightly with flour and roll the dough into a rectangle measuring 10x24 inches (25x60cm).

10. Fold the dough in three, making what is known as a single turn. Rotate the folded dough 90 degrees to the right.

11. Roll out the dough again.

12. Fold the dough in four to make a double turn: fold the shorter ends toward the centre, one-third of the way down from the top and two-thirds up from the bottom, then fold in

half. The dough now has 2½ folds. Cover in plastic wrap and chill for 30 minutes.

13. Roll the dough into a rectangle measuring 9½ x 20 inches (50x24cm), 4mm thick. With the tip of a large knife, mark one long side of the dough at 3 inch (8cm) intervals and then do the same on the opposite side, staggering the marks by 1¼ inch (4cm). Cut the dough into triangles following the marks. Gently stretch each triangle with your hands, then roll the triangles up from the base to the tip to form the croissants.

14. Whisk the egg wash ingredients together and brush over the tops of the croissants.

Place a bowl of boiling water in a cool oven (75°F/25°C/gas on lowest setting), put the croissants on a non-stick baking sheet above and let them rise for three hours. Remove and preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C/Gas mark 4).

15. Brush the croissants again with the egg wash and bake for 18–20 minutes.

### Serve with...

Traditionally, the cheese should be drizzled over boiled potatoes and Jura’s excellent charcuterie such as smoked *saucisse de Morteau* and *jambon du Haut-Doubs*. You can also add crusty bread for dipping and a green salad or crisp cornichons for a refreshing contrast.



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Next month’s recipe:  
Onion and fig tartines