

# In the kitchen



This month **Paola Westbeek** is investigating the rosy glow and sweet smell of Reims

Established in 1756, Maison Fossier is the oldest biscuit factory in France. The history of the famous *biscuits roses*, however, goes back to 1690 when frugal bakers in Reims invented an easy recipe to use up residual heat from bread ovens. The biscuits were a huge hit, even tickling the taste buds of royalty. They were served during Louis XIV's coronation in 1775, and in 1825 Charles X acknowledged their quality with a royal certificate.

The popularity of these pink biscuits continued to increase in the 1920s when people started dipping them in champagne, still a festive way to enjoy these delicate treats. After the Second World War, there were 15 pink biscuit bakers in Reims. Today, only Maison Fossier remains.

A few years ago, curiosity led me to the sweetly scented pink factory on the outskirts of the city. After meeting with *directeur général* Charles-Antoine de Fougroux, who was quite fittingly wearing a pink shirt, I headed to the factory floor to see how the biscuits are made.

First, flour, sugar, eggs, vanilla and carmine (a red pigment) are mixed into a thick, bright pink batter. The guide pointed out that the carmine was added to the recipe in order to hide the unsightly black specks from the vanilla, thus giving them their iconic colour.

The batter is then poured into rectangular moulds, sprinkled with a fine layer of icing sugar and baked twice: first at 210°C and then at 170°C. The word 'biscuit' means 'baked twice', and it's the second baking that



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gives them their irresistible melt-in-the-mouth texture.

Today, in addition to the famous *biscuits roses de Reims*, Maison Fossier makes a variety of other baked goods such as *pain d'épices*, *nonnettes*, *sablés*, *galettes*, *madeleines* and cakes. Roughly 30 million cookies are baked at Maison Fossier every day!

My visit ended at the Fossier shop where all products are sold at discounted prices. Though *biscuits roses* and other Fossier products can be found at French supermarkets and specialty shops such as La Grande Épicerie de Paris, I encourage you to visit one of the beautiful Fossier boutiques if you're in the area. There's one in the centre of Reims, but also in Cormontreuil, Épernay, Châlons-en-Champagne, Troyes and Metz.

The subtle taste and crisp texture of pink biscuits is somewhat reminiscent of ladyfingers, making them perfect for use in desserts such as charlottes, crumbles and tiramisù with raspberries and white chocolate. I even had *biscuits roses* ice-cream at a restaurant in Reims!

## serve with...

Pink champagne is the perfect choice for dipping - or follow Monsieur de Fougroux's advice and serve them with a glass of port or pineau.

