

BADGE OF *honour*

Vanilla and rum are the magic ingredients for the *canelé*, a beloved French pastry and a speciality in the city of Bordeaux, writes **Paola Westbeek**





Above: Canelés are synonymous with Bordeaux

Left: Canelés are caramelised on the outside and moist inside

The *canelé* is one of the most beloved French pastries. Caramelised on the outside

and moist on the inside (or ‘*moelleux*’, as the French would say), this *petit gâteau* has a perfect contrast of textures that makes it totally irresistible.

Biting into a really good *canelé*, infused with the warm flavours of dark rum and vanilla, is a gourmet experience not easily forgotten. But not all *canelés* are created equal, and some can be downright disappointing. For the best *canelés*, you’ll want to plan a trip to Bordeaux (their hometown) or try making them yourself.

Mysterious origins

The history of these elegant French cakes remains a mystery, but one of the most popular theories is that they were invented in the 18th century at the Couvent des Annonciades in Sainte-Eulalie, a municipality of Bordeaux. The nuns at the convent made bar-shaped, fried cakes called ‘*canelats*

or ‘*canelets*’ with leftover egg yolks given to them by local winemakers (the whites were used for clarifying the wine, the ‘*collage*’). For extra flavour, they also added rum and vanilla, which arrived at the port from the French colonies.

The cakes were sold or donated to the poor. Some sources trace this story to the first half of the 16th century when the convent was established by Jacqueline Andron de Lansac, wife of Jacques de Pons, Baron de Mirambeau. However, when excavations were carried out at the convent grounds in 1991, no traces of the recipe were found. What we do know is that in the 17th century, a pastry called ‘*canaulés*’ or ‘*canaulets*’ was being made by a guild of bakers in Bordeaux called ‘*canauliers*’. To make things even more confusing, a similar bread-like pastry, called ‘*canoles*’, was also popular in Limoges during the same century.

Apparently, the cakes disappeared without a trace

after the French Revolution, only to be revived and revamped somewhere in the 1930s. When the characteristic fluted mould was first used is anyone’s guess. The first written mention of *canelés* can be found in the book *La Maison au Bord de la Rivière*, by Jeanne Alleman in 1937.

Authentic canelés de Bordeaux

In 1985, *canelés* were protected as a speciality of Bordeaux by a brotherhood of 88 *pâtissiers*, the Confrérie du Canelé de Bordeaux. Since then, the name of the authentic pastry has been spelled with a single ‘n’. Variations made with the addition of other ingredients or flavours are spelled with a double ‘n’. One summer in Arcachon, for example, I had a dessert of ‘*cannelés*’ filled with cream and drizzled with chocolate sauce. The name of this, on the menu, read ‘*cannelés façon profiteroles*’.

Today, the *canelé* is Bordeaux’s culinary emblem. Though you can find them all

over France these days, no visit to the city would be complete without a stop at one of the many special bakeries where you can savour them with a drink or buy a box to take home. One of the most prestigious and elegant is Baillardran, which first opened in 1988. Their outlets are decked out in bright red and scattered all over the city. You'll even find three locations at the airport, in case you simply can't wait.

Another excellent bakery with addresses throughout the city is La Toque Cuivrée. They are just as delightful but significantly more affordable: a box of eight *canelés* costs €4.50, while at Baillardran, a box of six will set you back €16. Both bakeries offer the *canelés* in three sizes: the large weighs 60 grams; the medium (also called the 'Lunch') weighs 30 grams at La Toque Cuivrée and 35 grams at Baillardran; and the smallest, which is perfect with coffee, weighs 17 grams.

If you happen to spot *canelés* at a supermarket, don't be tempted to buy them. Chances

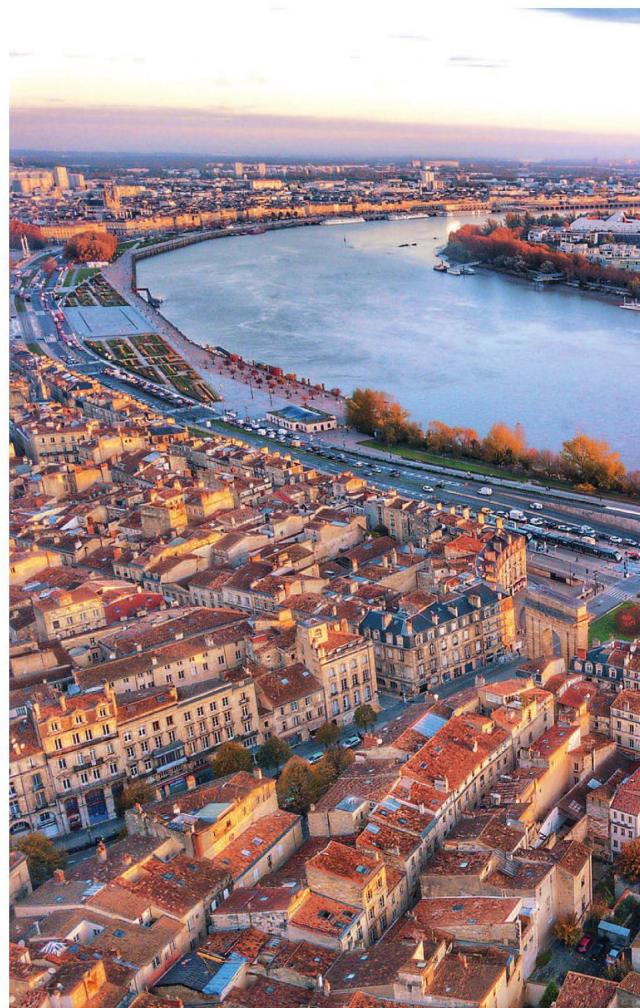
are they were industrially made, and because they aren't fresh, they'll be quite disappointing.

Perfect results

Making authentic *canelés* – with eggs, flour, butter, full-fat milk, sugar, dark rum, a fleshy vanilla pod and a pinch of salt – will require some effort. Unfortunately, you can't whip up a batch in a flash as you would muffins or cookies. They demand patience, attention and quality ingredients. Without proper instructions and adequate moulds, disasters are bound to happen.

When making the batter (similar to that of crêpes), don't whisk it vigorously as this will add air to the mixture and make the *canelés* rise. Chilling the batter is also crucial. My advice is to refrigerate it for 48 hours. Not only will this ensure that the flour is fully hydrated and that the *canelés* hold their shape as they bake, but the flavour of rum and vanilla will also be more pronounced.

The beauty of a proper *canelé*



Above: Visit Bordeaux to try an authentic *canelé*

Left: The contrast of textures is a treat for the tastebuds

is its contrast of textures: that crisp, burnished crust and a soft, custardy centre. This can't be achieved with anything but copper moulds, which are quite expensive. Copper will distribute heat better, guaranteeing even cooking and that ultimate 'crunch', so don't be fooled by the ease and affordability of silicone moulds.

Greasing the moulds well and baking the *canelés* at the right temperature is also key. Many recipes call for beeswax, but I prefer butter as it doesn't affect the taste and is more readily available. *Canelés* should first be baked at a high temperature for 20 minutes in order to achieve that characteristic deep bronze – not black – crust.



Keep in mind that the *canelés* must be unmoulded immediately after baking. They will come out soft and then harden as they cool.

Don't let the above stop you from giving these scrumptious treats a go. With these tips and a set of copper moulds, you'll be turning out batch after batch of beautiful *canelés* worthy of any fancy French bakery. They're wonderful for breakfast, with coffee and for dessert with a glass of sweet white wine such as a Sauternes or Monbazillac. *Canelés* are best eaten within a few hours after baking as time affects their texture, but once you taste them, I doubt they'll be around for long! 💕



MAKE YOUR OWN CANELÉS

Makes 12*

INGREDIENTS:

- 500ml full-fat milk
- 40g butter (plus extra, for brushing the moulds)
- Vanilla pod, split lengthwise and seeds scraped out
- 2 eggs
- 2 egg yolks
- 100g all-purpose flour
- 200g granulated sugar
- Fat pinch of fleur de sel
- 65ml dark rum

METHOD:

1 Simmer the milk, butter, vanilla pod and seeds for three minutes. Leave to cool briefly.

2 In a small bowl, gently stir the eggs and the yolks with a fork. Don't whisk (you don't want air in the mixture).

3 In a larger bowl, mix the flour, sugar and salt. Add the eggs and the milk mixture to the flour, stir gently, breaking up the biggest lumps with the back of a spoon.

4 Stir in the rum and gently continue to break up the tiny lumps. At this point, your batter shouldn't be smooth.

5 Strain the batter into a clean bowl, cover and refrigerate for 48 hours.

6 When ready to bake, preheat the oven to 225°C, brush the inside of the moulds with melted butter and place them on a baking sheet covered with aluminium foil.

7 Remove the batter from the fridge, give it a gentle whisk and pour it into the moulds, almost to the top.

8 Bake the *canelés* at this high temperature for 20 minutes.

9 Reduce the heat to 190°C and bake for an additional 55 minutes. Check halfway through the cooking time. If the tops are too dark (dark brown is great, black is not), cover with foil.

10 Once done, immediately unmould, place them on a rack and leave to cool briefly before eating.

* The moulds are 4½cm tall and hold about 70ml. You can buy *canelé* moulds in the UK at Sous Chef (tel: (UK) 0800 270 7591; souschef.co.uk).