



ALSO BY DOMINIQUE ANSEL

Dominique Ansel: The Secret Recipes



EVERYONE CAN BAKE

SIMPLE RECIPES TO MASTER AND MIX

DOMINIQUE ANSEL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVAN SUNG



SIMON & SCHUSTER

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI



Simon & Schuster
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

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First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition April 2020

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Interior design by Suet Yee Chong

Manufactured in China

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN 978-1-5011-9471-9

ISBN 978-1-5011-9472-6 (ebook)

To A, because no one does it alone

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The Building Blocks of Baking

When I was growing up, I loved to play with building blocks. With the blocks scattered across the floor of my parents' living room, I saw endless possibilities: each cube could become something new and different when joined with another.

I never got tired of playing that game. These days, in the kitchen, I still play the role of builder and architect. A chef, unlike a home cook, doesn't follow a recipe for a cake, with a prescribed base, filling, and finishing. We share basic recipes for *components*, and build those into cookies, cakes, tarts, and other showstoppers.

These components are the building blocks of baking. And with them, there are endless dessert possibilities.

This is the way I want to teach you how to bake.

The book is split into three sections:

- > **BASES:** cakes, tarts, cookies, brownies, and more
- > **FILLINGS:** mousses, jams, curds, pastry creams, and more
- > **FINISHINGS:** meringues, chocolate glazes, and more

Each recipe starts off with a reliable go-to—this is your baseline. Perfect these first, then explore their variations. A vanilla cake with a bit of clove, ginger, and cinnamon turns into a wonderful gingerbread for the holidays. A pastry cream can be mixed with fruit or chocolate or even hazelnut paste.

Select from each of the three sections to create your showstopper. Choose a base, a filling, and a finishing, then combine them. And don't worry—I'll show you how to do that in the Techniques section where you assemble everything together. Perhaps you're in the mood for a decadent cake with a brownie base, a rich mascarpone mousse filling, and a caramel glaze. Or maybe a light lemon tart with a vanilla meringue.

Many of these components can be enjoyed on their own, and I'll show you how to do that, too. A ganache can be chilled and rolled into chocolate truffles. A pastry cream can become a makeshift flan. A tart shell can be broken and sandwiched together with jam to make a cookie.

You'll learn to bake, but more important, to create. The possibilities really are endless.



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

WHAT TOOLS SHOULD YOU BUY?

There's a precision to baking that's always appealed to me. I love that there were exact metrics and temperatures; nothing is left up to chance. But it's that precision that is perhaps the biggest hurdle for a lot of home cooks to overcome. Investing in the right tools is a big help here. In baking, "a pinch of this" and a "dash of that" could throw off the entire recipe. (Have you ever mistakenly measured a tablespoon of baking powder instead of a teaspoon? I'm sure it was a disaster you won't forget.) Each ingredient is precisely measured on a scale. And there's the right set of equipment for each task.

Here are the tools I recommend for cooking your way through this book, from the Bare Necessities that you need for making a simple cookie or brownie to the Standard Additions for making cakes and tarts to the Upgrades I recommend for making even more advanced recipes.

BARE NECESSITIES

Bowls (various sizes)	Parchment paper	Whisk
Cutting board	Rolling pin	Wire rack
Digital scale	Saucepans (various sizes)	
Knives (small paring knife, large chef's knife, and large serrated knife)	Sheet pan	
	Spatula (heatproof)	

STANDARD ADDITIONS

Bowl scraper	Hand mixer	Fine-mesh sieve
Cake pan and cake ring (8-inch or 20 cm round)	Offset spatulas (large and small)	Silicone baking mat
Loaf pan (8½ x 4½ inch or 21 x 11 cm)	Piping bags	Tart ring (8-inch or 20 cm)

UPGRADES

Digital thermometer	Rotating cake stand	Stand mixer
Pastry brush	Silicone cake molds	

TIMING

Baking isn't instantaneous in the same way that cooking can be. You can fry up an egg or boil some pasta in minutes, but baking is a slower game. That's why it's often done as a hobby or group event—it requires you to spend time on it. While the steps themselves do not always take a while, they sometimes demand a practice of patience. You wait for the dough to chill before rolling it out. You wait for the cake to bake. You wait for the jam to cool or the mousse to thaw. Here are some quick guidelines for how much time you should set aside, depending on what you're baking.

Set aside an hour or so for any batter-based recipe that doesn't require additional components for assembly, such as:

- > Cookies
- > Brownies
- > Loaf cakes

Set aside a morning or an afternoon for any recipe that has multiple components and requires assembly, like:

- > Tarts
- > Standard cakes

Plan on waiting overnight before you can enjoy any recipe that requires freezing or extended baking times, such as:

- > Mousse cake
- > Pavlova

If you're like me, you like to plan ahead. Here are some guidelines for what you can and cannot do beforehand.

CAN DO BEFORE

- > Tart and cookie doughs can be prepared and refrigerated for 1 to 2 days before baking.
- > Pastry creams, curds, jams, and ganaches can be prepared and refrigerated for up to 3 days, then used to fill a cake or tart the day of.
- > Glazes can be prepared and refrigerated for up to 7 days, then reheated the day of.

CANNOT DO BEFORE

- > Batters must be baked immediately, as not to deflate or separate.
- > Anything whipped must be whipped and used within a few minutes, or it will lose volume.

Once you've planned your time and set yourself up for success with the right tools—it's time for the fun to begin.

Turn the page for some ideas to get started.



BASES





MY GO-TO VANILLA SABLÉ TART SHELL

A proper tart shell should be golden brown, uniformly thin, crispy, and have smooth, clean edges. When you bite into it, it should melt in your mouth as you chew. I'm practical when it comes to tart shells. To me, a tart shell must serve a purpose: it should carry as much fresh fruit as possible. During the summer in France, this means a punnet of ripe woodland strawberries—they taste so sweet, they could be candy—arranged on top of a layer of whipped vanilla ganache. I add as many as I can, so there's not a sliver of ganache visible. A little strawberry jam piped on top deepens the tart's flavor.

MAKES: One 8-inch (20 cm) tart shell

TIME: 1 hour (including time to blind bake)

INGREDIENTS

185 grams	1½ cups	all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
85 grams	⅔ cup	confectioners' sugar
50 grams	5¼ tablespoons	cornstarch
1 gram	¼ teaspoon	Kosher salt
3 grams	½	Tahitian vanilla bean, split lengthwise, seeds scraped
130 grams	10 tablespoons (1¼ sticks)	unsalted butter, cut into cubes, at room temperature
50 grams	1 large	egg

EQUIPMENT

8-inch (20 cm) tart ring or pan

1. Make the dough: Combine the flour, confectioners' sugar, cornstarch, salt, and vanilla seeds in a large bowl. Add the butter and mix with your hands until the butter is broken down into pieces the size of peas and the ingredients are well combined. (Alternatively, use a stand mixer or hand mixer to combine the ingredients.) Add the egg and mix with a spatula until the dough is smooth and the egg is fully incorporated. Don't overmix.

2. Chill the dough: Turn the dough out onto a large piece of plastic wrap and gently shape it into a ball. Wrap the dough in the plastic wrap and flatten it into a disc. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to overnight, until cold but still pliable. It should

have the texture of clay.* (At this point, the dough can be refrigerated or frozen for later use—see Storage.)

** Flattening the dough into a disc will help it chill faster. You'll want to make sure the dough is cold before rolling it out. Working with dough that's too warm will cause the tart shell to shrink as it bakes.*

3. Preheat the oven: Place a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C).

4. Roll out the dough: Flour your work surface and rolling pin. Unwrap the dough and place it on your work surface. Roll it out into a rectangle about ⅛ inch (3 mm) thick.* Make sure to work quickly so the dough doesn't get too warm.

** If you find that your dough is sticking to the rolling pin or work surface, add some more flour. Then roll it out between two sheets of parchment paper. Parchment paper also makes it easier to lift the rolled-out dough onto the sheet pan later on.*

5. Shape the dough: Using an 8-inch (20 cm) tart ring or pan as a guide, cut the dough into a round that's 1 inch (2.5 cm) wider than the ring (this ensures the dough will come up the sides of the tart ring).*

** Don't throw out your dough scraps! Sprinkle them with cinnamon sugar (I make mine with 3 grams [1 teaspoon] of cinnamon to 100 grams [½ cup] of granulated sugar) and bake them, then enjoy them as buttery sugar cookies or crumbled over your morning yogurt.*

6. Now the fun part: you're going to **"fonçage"** the tart dough (page 282), or form it into a tart shape. (Don't worry, it's not as intimidating as it sounds!) Butter the tart ring or pan. If you're using a tart ring, line a sheet pan with parchment paper, then set the tart ring in the center (no need to do this if you're using a tart pan with a bottom). Place the round of dough on top of the tart ring or pan and push down gently with your fingers, pressing the dough along the inside of the ring or pan and into the inside edge. Don't press too hard, and try to keep the dough an even thickness so that it bakes evenly. Use a paring knife to trim any dough hanging over the sides of the ring or pan.*

** If your dough is starting to feel warm, return it to the refrigerator for 15 minutes before baking. Remember, warm or overworked dough will shrink as it bakes. If the dough is cool to the touch, you can bake it right away.*

7. Blind bake the tart shell*: Line the tart shell with a round of parchment or a large coffee filter; the surface of the dough should be completely covered.* Fill the tart shell with uncooked rice or dried beans to keep the dough in place. Bake on the center rack until the tart shell is light golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes.

** Since many tarts are filled with creams or mousses (which aren't baked), you'll have to bake the tart shell in advance of filling it. This is called blind baking. If you're planning to fill your tart shell with Almond Frangipane (page 123), however, DO NOT blind bake the*

tart shell first. The almond frangipane contains raw eggs, so it needs to be baked, too. Pipe the almond frangipane into an unbaked tart shell first and then bake.

** Here's an easy trick to cut a perfect circle: Fold a square of parchment paper in half, then in half again. Fold it in half diagonally to form a triangle, then fold the triangle in half once more. Flip your pan upside down and place the folded paper triangle with the narrow tip at the center of the pan. Using scissors, cut the base of the triangle (the side opposite the tip) into a curve, following the curve of the pan. Unfold the paper: it should now be a circle slightly larger than the tart ring or pan.*

8. Unmold the tart shell: Cool for 2 to 3 minutes, then unmold the tart shell while still warm (it's easier to remove from the pan when it's warm). If you're using a tart pan with a removable bottom, set the pan on an upside-down pint container or a small bowl and push down gently on the sides of the pan to unmold the tart shell. If you're using a tart ring, lift the ring up and off the tart shell. Let cool completely before filling.* Wait until just before serving to add the filling so the shell stays nice and crispy.

** Before you start assembling a cream-filled tart, always make sure the tart shell is fully cooled. If the shell is too hot, the pastry cream will melt and soak into the crust, giving you a soggy-bottomed tart.*

STORAGE

The tart shell is best enjoyed the day it's baked, but can be stored in an airtight container in a cool, dry place for up to 2 days before filling and serving.

The unbaked tart dough can be wrapped tightly in plastic wrap and stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days or in the freezer for 2 to 3 weeks. Thaw the frozen dough in the refrigerator for a few hours before using.

PAIR IT WITH

- > **RECOMMENDED FILLINGS:** pastry cream, lemon curd, jam, compote, ganache, whipped ganache
 - > **RECOMMENDED FINISHINGS:** meringue, fresh fruit, Chantilly cream, streusel
-

TWO IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

- > Lemon Curd (page 134) with Italian Meringue (page 258)
- > Vanilla Whipped Ganache (page 187) with fresh strawberries (page 248)

SHOWSTOPPERS

STRAWBERRY HONEY CRÈME FRAÎCHE TART: Vanilla Sablé Tart Shell (page 4) filled with Strawberry Jam (page 159), Pastry Cream (page 121), and Crème Fraîche Whipped Ganache (page 178) and finished with fresh strawberries, honeycomb, and Nappage Glaze (page 223)

MIXED FRUIT TART: Vanilla Sablé Tart Shell (page 4) filled with Pastry Cream (page 121) and finished with assorted fresh fruits (page 248)

FLAN (page 10): Vanilla Sablé Tart Shell (page 4) filled with Pastry Cream (page 121)

LINZER COOKIES (page 8): Vanilla Sablé Tart Shell (page 4) filled with Raspberry Jam (page 159) and finished with confectioners' sugar

LINZER COOKIES

Roll the dough slightly thicker than a tart shell, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm) thick. Use your favorite cookie cutter to cut shapes from the dough. With a smaller cookie cutter, cut a smaller shape from the center of half the cookies. Arrange all the cookies on a parchment paper-lined sheet pan and bake in a preheated 350°F (175°C) oven for 10 minutes. Let cool completely in the pan. Turn the cookies without the center hole bottom-side up and dollop a teaspoon of your favorite jam (the classic choice is Raspberry Jam, page 159) onto each. Dust the cookies with the center hole with confectioners' sugar and place on top of the jam. Push down slightly to make a sandwich. Once assembled, the cookies can be stored in an airtight container in a cool, dry place for up to 2 days.



LINZER COOKIES

BASE: Gingerbread Sablé Tart Shell (page 14)

FILLING: Raspberry Jam (page 159)

FINISHING: Confectioners' sugar

TECHNIQUE: Linzer Cookie (page 7)



FLAN

A flan is a two component dessert that doesn't need much else. Simply get a taller cake pan to line your Go-To Vanilla Sablé Tart Shell (page 4). I like a 3-inch tall (6.75 cm) and 8-inch wide (20 cm) pan. Then prepare your Go-To Pastry Cream recipe (page 121). While the pastry cream is still warm (but not piping hot), pour it into the tart shell. Bake at 350°F (175°C) until the flan is dark brown on top, 25 to 30 minutes. Let cool completely before unmolding and serving. Once baked, it can be kept refrigerated for 2 days.

FLAN

BASE: Vanilla Sablé Tart Shell (page 4)

FILLING: Pastry Cream (page 121)

TECHNIQUE: Flan (page 10)



CHOCOLATE SABLÉ TART SHELL

BASE

MY GO-TO VANILLA
SABLÉ TART SHELL

Adding cocoa powder to my vanilla sablé tart shell results in a rich chocolate shell that can turn a classic tart into something a bit more decadent. This variation works well with fruit fillings like fresh berries (page 248) or Caramelized Bananas (page 238), or with even more chocolate like a smooth chocolate ganache (page 137) or a light and airy chocolate mousse (page 204).

THE CHANGE

In step 1 of **My Go-To Vanilla Sablé Tart Shell** (page 4), add **18 grams (2½ tablespoons) unsweetened cocoa powder** to the dry ingredients before adding the butter, then proceed with the recipe as directed. The dark color of the dough makes it hard to tell when the chocolate tart shell is done baking. To avoid overbaking, check the tart a minute or so early; if there are no wet spots, it's ready.

TWO IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

- > Soft Caramel (page 208) with Caramelized Bananas (page 238)
- > Cherry Jam (page 163) with Vanilla Chantilly Cream (page 252)

SHOWSTOPPER

SALTED CARAMEL CHOCOLATE TART (page 13): Chocolate Sablé Tart Shell (above) filled with Dark Chocolate Ganache (page 137) and finished with Caramel Glaze (page 227) and a sprinkling of sea salt



SALTED CARAMEL CHOCOLATE TART

BASE: Chocolate Sablé Tart Shell (page 12)

FILLING: Dark Chocolate Ganache (page 137)

FINISHING: Caramel Glaze (page 227)

TECHNIQUE: How to Build a Tart (page 286)

GINGERBREAD SABLÉ TART SHELL

BASE

MY GO-TO VANILLA
SABLÉ TART SHELL

Brown sugar, cinnamon, and ground ginger subtly spice this variation. The tart shell has rich, caramel color and flavor, thanks to the molasses in the brown sugar and the warm spices. Pair it with apples and pears for winter holidays.

THE CHANGE

In step 1 of **My Go-To Vanilla Sablé Tart Shell** (page 4), replace the confectioners' sugar with **85 grams (½ cup) dark brown sugar**, and add **4 grams (1½ teaspoons) ground cinnamon** and **4 grams (1½ teaspoons) ground ginger*** to the dry ingredients before adding the butter. Proceed with the recipe as directed.

** I like to use ground ginger rather than fresh in this tart shell because the intensity of fresh ginger can vary, which can easily make your recipe either too spicy or too mild.*

TWO IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

- > Muscovado Sugar Whipped Ganache (page 186) with Streusel Crumble (page 268)
- > Mascarpone Whipped Ganache (page 178) with Apple Compote (page 150)

HAZELNUT SABLÉ TART SHELL

BASE

MY GO-TO VANILLA SABLÉ TART SHELL

I've always loved hazelnuts. I think it's because I used to eat Nutella straight out of the jar when I was a kid, and that memory has stayed with me all these years. Here I've substituted some of the all-purpose flour in my vanilla tart shell with hazelnut flour, which gives the tart shell a nutty flavor and crumblier texture. It works well with a rich chocolate ganache filling or a tart, creamy orange curd.

THE CHANGE

In step 1 of **My Go-To Vanilla Sablé Tart Shell** (page 4), reduce the all-purpose flour to 125 grams (1 cup) and add **60 grams (½ cup) hazelnut flour**. Since hazelnut flour contains no gluten, the dough for this tart shell will be crumblier, so handle it delicately. Proceed with the recipe as directed.

TWO IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

- > Orange Curd (page 136) with Toasted Hazelnut Meringue (page 265)
- > Raspberry Chocolate Ganache (page 143)

SHOWSTOPPER

LEMON EARL GREY TART: Hazelnut Sablé Tart Shell (above) filled with Lemon Curd (page 134) and finished with Earl Grey Italian Meringue (page 261)