

Mother Knows Best

Being raised in a family catering business + a recipe for Baked Alaska

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My sister Robin and I have been in business with our mother for over forty years (from our toddler days)! Growing up as the kids of Marcia Selden was fantastic. Our mentor, advisor, teacher of everything, and most importantly our mother, she cared for everything we did, and only wanted to see us enjoy our childhood. As we grew up in a home where our mother worked from home, we had the luxury of learning her business of catering from our early years. With Mother's Day around the corner, it only felt natural to talk about how great it was to be raised in a family business, run by our mother that had us learning about food from our early childhood years.

Weekends were interesting. While many of my friends started their Saturdays with activities and play dates, I spent many a weekend out with my dad shopping for all of the parties that we did on the weekends. It was always fun to try and explain to the grocery clerks why I was buying 100 pounds of chicken breast, or why I needed 30 whole filet mignons. "We are a really big family" was my standard response to the awkward questions and stares. Occasionally I would say that we were having a birthday

party, and the clerks always thought it was fun to see a child shopping for such excess quantities of food. Remember, there was no Costco in the 70's.

This culinary connection had me hooked, and I always knew this would become my future. My first job was in a butcher shop learning that business. I then moved onto working at Bloomingdales and Williams Sonoma where I learned all about pots, pans, knives, tabletop and everything kitchen and food based. While considering college decisions, I wrote my college entry essay about one of my favorite desserts, Baked Alaska. In the 70's and 80's this was the dessert to have and we ate it at every occasion. My story not only talked of the fun we had with this dessert, but also the disaster we had with creating a Baked Alaska wedding cake for one of our great clients. We didn't quite realize how difficult it was to create a four foot tall wedding cake out of ice cream and meringue, and then try and deliver it in one piece. This story along with the recipe for my mother's most amazing cake became the topic for my entrance essays. I am convinced it actually got me into college. Twenty years later, I am now in business with my mother and sister. I could not think of a more perfect way to spend my days, and am honored to call my mother my boss! I wanted to share this recipe with you as it truly "takes the cake"...

Marcia's Famous Baked Alaska

This recipe has a delicious brownie like chewy chocolate cake base with layered ice creams. The ice cream flavors can be changed to suit your preference. Always use a great colored ice cream for the best visual.

6 ounces great quality bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped
6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) unsalted butter
3/4 ounce unsweetened bakers chocolate, chopped
3 cups sugar, divided
2 large eggs
1/3 cup all purpose flour
2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 quart strawberry ice cream, slightly softened
1 quart of vanilla ice cream, slightly softened
1 quart of pistachio or mint chip ice cream, slightly softened
9 large egg whites

Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter 10 inch round metal baking pan; line bottom with parchment paper.

Stir bittersweet chocolate, butter, and unsweetened chocolate in small saucepan over low heat until chocolates melt and mixture is smooth.

Cool 10 minutes. Whisk 3/4 cup sugar and eggs in large bowl until well blended. Whisk in chocolate mixture.

Sift flour, cocoa, baking powder, and salt over the chocolate mixture; stir to blend.

Transfer batter to prepared pan. Bake cake until top looks dry and toothpick inserted into center comes out with some thick sticky batter attached, about 17-20 minutes. Cool cake in pan to room temperature.

Cut around cake in pan. Place cutting board over pan and invert, tapping out cake. Peel off parchment. Line large baking sheet with parchment paper. Arrange cake on prepared pan.

Using a metal mixing bowl with a circumference no larger than 8", line the bowl with Saran Wrap, and start layering the ice cream into the bowl by flavor in any order your prefer. Cover with more Saran Wrap to ensure there is no exposed ice cream. Freeze until solid, about 3-5 hours.

Combine remaining 2 1/4 cup sugar and egg whites in large metal bowl. Set bowl over saucepan of gently simmering water and whisk until mixture is very warm, about 2 minutes. Remove bowl from over water. Using electric mixer, beat meringue at high speed until very thick and billowy, about 2 minutes. Place baking sheet with cake on work surface. Unmold the ice cream from the metal bowl and invert on top of the cake using the cake as the base of the bombe. Mound heaping dollops of meringue atop ice cream.

Spread meringue evenly over to cover the ice cream and cake base, sealing meringue to the bottom of the cake base and swirling decoratively. Freeze uncovered on baking sheet until meringue is solid, at least 2 hours and up to 2 days.

Preheat oven to broil. Transfer cake still on baking sheet from freezer directly to oven. Bake until meringue is deep brown in spots, turning pan as needed for even browning of meringue, about 3 minutes. This process can also work with a miniature kitchen torch (pictured below) which can be purchased in any high-end gourmet culinary store. Transfer to platter, slice and serve.

We love this cake served with warm chocolate sauce and am sure your mother will too. Try it out on her and she will love you even more!

Eat, Love, Party!