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## Laduree in Vancouver: A taste of Paris on Robson Street (with recipe)

BY MIA STAINSBY, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 30, 2016 9:49 AM



Sales staff assemble boxes of macarons at Laduree Boutique and Tea salon 1141 Robson St, Vancouver March 24 2016.

Photograph by: Gerry Kahrmann, Vancouver Sun

One day, about eight years ago, in the fairy tale principality of Monaco, Olesya Krakhmaylyova, took a bite of something and the experience struck like a lightning bolt. It would change her life. The electric jolt was a Laduree macaron.

"It was the best thing I'd ever tasted and I'm not a dessert person," she says. "Ever since, I had been dreaming about bringing Laduree to Vancouver, a city I love. It's not just a business. It's a passion."

Last Thursday, Krakhmaylyova did exactly that, in partnership with Laduree (la-dyur-ay). She opened Laduree Boutique and Tea Salon on Vancouver's Robson Street with a storefront of celadon green, Laduree's signature hue. The chubby cherubs which graced the original bakery has survived the years. Its rich history goes back to 1862 when Louis Ernest Laduree opened a bakery on 16 rue Royale in Paris and it became an emblem of French refinement and taste. Today, Laduree is in 45 cities around the world, with multiple shops in some of them and the flagship store has moved to the swishy Avenue des Champs Elysees. Vancouver is Laduree's launch into Canada.

On opening day, 300 people lined Robson Street rivalling a new iPhone release. People had been rattling the locked doors for days and Krakhmaylyova worried the handle would break. "When? When? When?" they wanted to know. "When will it open?"

One enthusiastic couple spent the inaugural day having afternoon tea in the salon (\$40, no reservations) then racked up \$400 in the boutique. (Wealth helps but there are lots of affordable treats like the \$3 macarons and most items from the pastry and chocolate counter.)

The day before opening, Mathieu Vienne, Laduree's international chef was in the shop kitchen preparing for the opening and training the staff. He had been in Vancouver for two weeks imprinting "the Laduree way" (i.e. perfection) into the hearts and minds of the kitchen staff. The Laduree glory rests on consistency and quality control and what's done in Vancouver must be the same as what's done in Paris and Rome and Tokyo and New York and Dubai. And for that matter, Casablanca. The afternoon tea revolves around Laduree plating and service. The macarons are not perfectly identical but that's by artisanal design. But all the pastries and savories must be on point — otherwise, why bother coming across an ocean and a continent?

The macaron is the Laduree signature and it's the one fresh food item that is made in France the same way as they've always been made and distributed to various branches, most likely by air. (The company has many things that are 'secret.')

Vienne did say that Laduree macarons use an Italian meringue for most of their flavours, which I was happy to hear. It's more complex (and dangerous, considering the vast quantities of hot sugar syrup required for firming up the meringue for the thousands of macarons sold each day, globally) and I like the sturdier and shinier finish.

Laduree can take credit for creating this time-honoured cookie. The founder's grandson looked at a couple of macaron shells cleaved them together with ganache filling and voila! A star was born. Laduree macarons (\$3 each) are confidently traditional and classic. There are about 20 flavours and they don't go into silly territory; it doesn't get any wilder than blackcurrant violet or Marie Antoinette tea (made with Laduree tea). There are seasonal offerings, decided upon in France. For the Vancouver opening, said pastry chef came up with a maple syrup macaron. (Get them while they last.)

"Definitely, we keep the flavours simple and not overpowering," says Vienne. "It needs to be clean and authentic." The flavours taste like the real thing. That is, raspberry is strongly raspberry. Chocolate is well, Valrhona chocolate — the best.

In an email interview, David Holder, the chairman of Laduree and vice-chair of The Holder Group (which bought Laduree in 1993 and began a new era of expansion of stores and new products) says their macarons are "distinguished by their smooth and crackly texture as well as their unique taste. The macaron shell should be crispy and the inside (filling) should be smooth. The taste should be pronounced and we don't mix more than two or three flavours so the customers can identify the flavours."

Vienne, like Krakhmaylyova, likens Laduree to a little bit of Paris all around the world. The pastries, he says, are like a trip to childhood — traditional and beloved.

The day before opening, I had a tour of the Vancouver boutique and a sampling of their savories and sweets in the tea room and it is as he says — a hit of Paris, haute Paris with some Versailles thrown in. In fact, some of their products conjure up Marie Antoinette in her heyday. Besides macarons, chocolates, cakes and some savories, Laduree has branched into teas, jams, perfumes, candles and household items like tote bags and insulated picnic bags.

The fragrance of the candles and aromas from the tea stopped me dead in my tracks. It was like beautiful music, with an intoxicating softness. It was hard to pull away. The packaging (lots of different gorgeous boxes) are designed for hoarding because how can you throw away such loveliness. The quality from start to finish is undeniable.

In the salon, the menu features light breakfasts and lunch, and of course, anything from the pastry counter. 'You must try the French toast', I was told. That sounded like an order so I obeyed. It was like a soufflé thanks to the airy brioche bread. It's served with raspberry sauce and raspberry Chantilly or maple syrup. You must try the hot chocolate I was told. Yes sir, I said. Oh, so dangerous, I said. It's luxurious with the captivating mysteries of a complex chocolate (Valrhona, always).

Before moving on to tea, finger sandwiches, Laduree cake citron and macarons spread before me, I had to stop the madness and did an intervention with croque monsieur and Laduree ice cream. I brought up the subject of slender French women and the clever Ninja moves it must take to take on French food of the Laduree kind.

Krakhmaylyova and Vienne have opinions at the ready. "If you use good quality for the butter and cream, you are not going to get fat," says Vienne. "When it is not good quality, your body wants more fat and more sugar."

"He's exactly right," says Krakhmaylyova. "When you have quality, you don't need a lot of it. I spent a month in Paris and I'm very health conscious but I was eating bread and butter and cheese and Laduree restaurant food and not worrying about calories. I felt better and healthier because it's real food. I feel that Laduree food is full of flavour and when there is good flavour, it's satisfying."

She eats one to three macarons a day and orange blossom is her favourite flavour. The macarons, I'll add, are very good. If you live in Kamloops or Cranbrooke and would like a hit of Laduree, we've provided a recipe for Cake au Citron.

The Vancouver salon will be expanding its savoury menu especially after they secure the liquor licence, Krakhmaylyova says. There'll be champagne and cocktails and more savoury dishes.

When asked to define the brand, Holder said it represents "the refinement, the elegance and know-how, an *art de vivre a la Francaise*" which is chairman-speak but in this case, it's right on. Laduree is exquisitely French.

Krakhmaylyova, who is otherwise a chartered accountant and a UBC grad, was radiant with excitement on that opening day eve. "It's how you feel when your dream has come true. You can't believe it," she said.

## RECIPE: Laduree Cake au Citron (Lemon Cake)

This is no ordinary lemon loaf. The recipe, from Laduree calls for lemon in various forms, some yeast in place of the usual baking powder and just for that Parisian 'je ne sais quoi,' a little bit of rum. If you can't find lemon jelly in a store you can substitute another light-coloured jelly, like apricot, although you'll miss out on the that extra hit of lemon. The recipe is from Laduree Sucre.

— Mia Stainsby

Poached lemon slices:

3 lemons

1 cup (250 mL) water

1/2 cup + 2 tbsp (125 mL + 30 mL) granulated sugar

Lemon cake batter:

5 tbsp + 1 tbsp (75 mL + 15 mL) butter

1 2/3 cups + 1 tbsp (410 mL + 15 mL) all-purpose flour

1 tsp (5 mL) active dry yeast

1 lemon

1 1/4 cups (310 mL) granulated sugar

3 eggs

1/2 cup minus 1 tbsp (110 mL) cream

1 pinch fleur de sel or other coarse sea salt

1 2/3 tbsp (25 mL) rum

Lemon syrup:

1/2 cup (125 mL) water

1/2 cup + 2 tbsp (granulated sugar)

1/4 cup (60 mL) lemon juice

Lemon glaze:

2 oz (57 g) lemon jelly

1 tbsp (15 mL) water

One day ahead, cut lemons into thin 1/10 inch (2 mm) slices. Bring the water and sugar to a simmer and carefully add the lemon slices. Poach over very low heat for 20 minutes without allowing the liquid to boil. Allow to cool. Transfer slices and liquid to a bowl or container and refrigerate for a minimum of 12 hours.

Set aside 6 attractive poached lemon slices to decorate the cake. Gently drain the remaining slices. Gather up to 1/2 cup (125 mL) of the remaining slices and cut each slice in half.

Butter the pan loaf with the 1 tbsp (15 mL) of butter and line with a long rectangle of parchment paper to make the unmoulding easier. Refrigerate for 10 minutes to allow the butter to harden. Remove from refrigerator and dust the interior with flour. Turn upside down and lightly tap out any excess flour.

Place the 5 tbsp (75 mL) of butter in a small saucepan and warm over low heat. As soon as it melts, remove from heat.

Sift the flour and yeast into a small bowl. Using a grater, remove the zest from the lemon. Toss the zest with the sugar in a large bowl. Add the eggs one at a time, while whisking together. Continue to whisk and add the cream, salt and rum. Using a wooden or rubber spatula, fold in the flour and yeast mixture, halved lemon slices and melted butter (lukewarm).

Preheat the oven to 410 F. Fill the loaf pan with the batter to 3/4 inch (2 cm) below the rim. Place in oven and bake for 10 minutes. Remove from the oven, and using a knife, make a slit lengthwise in the crust that has formed on top of the cake. Immediately return cake to the oven and lower the temperature to 350 F. Bake for 45 minutes. Check to see if the cake is done by inserting the tip of a knife into the centre. When the cake is ready, the knife should come out clean, dry and free of crumbs.

#### Lemon Syrup:

While the cake is baking, prepare the syrup. Bring the water, sugar and lemon juice to a boil. Remove from heat.

Place a cooling rack on a rimmed baking sheet. When the cake is done, remove from the mould and place on the rack. Bring the syrup to a simmer. Using a ladle, pour syrup over cake and allow to soak. Gather syrup from baking sheet and pour over cake. Repeat twice. Allow to cool. Decorate the cake with poached lemon slices.

#### Lemon Glaze:

In a saucepan, stir together the lemon jelly and water. Lightly heat without bringing to a boil until the mixture is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon. Coat cake with glaze.

Makes 1 loaf.



Laduree cake au citron.

Photograph by: Handout, Vancouver Sun



Patrons line up on the opening day at Laduree Boutique and Tea salon in Vancouver.

Photograph by: Gerry Kahmann, Vancouver Sun



Trio of macarons from Laduree.

Photograph by: Handout, Vancouver Sun

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