



RAISING THE BAR

Noted pastry chef François Payard provides a taste of high-speed flying's sweeter days. BY CRISTINA VELOCCI

Nothing characterized the *previous* couple of eras of big money and fast times quite like the Concorde. Traveling at Mach 2, the supersonic airliner not only shuttled its 100 passengers — a mix of celebrities, business barons, sports legends and royalty — across the pond in record time (just over three hours), it did so in style. From the moment it was wheels up, a steady stream of Kurg, salmon-wrapped caviar and mini pastries, croissants and decadent chocolate-mousse cakes flowed from the galley.

But that was a half decade ago or more, “when airlines actually made and spent money,” says third-generation French pastry chef François Payard, who created many of those desserts for British Airways and Air France’s Concorde fleet. Nowadays, you’d do far better with your own Cessna Citation X, some well-connected friends — and Payard’s recipe for ganache-caramel nougatine tartlets. “I was thinking of creating a bar when I came up with this tart,” says the Nice, France native, who got his start at the three Michelin-starred Le Bernardin, Restaurant Daniel and La

Tour d’Argent in Paris before opening the first of his eponymous bistro and patisseries in Manhattan (he’s since expanded to Brazil, Japan, Korea and Vegas). “The idea was to combine caramel and chocolate, which is a very good combination, but without the crunch it was missing something.” To get the desired chew, Payard incorporated brittle, crisp nougatine. He likens the resulting tart to a gourmet, more satisfying Mars Bar. “The tart is very small, but it’s full of flavor and very intense.

It’s bite-sized, so it’s good for the holidays when people like to eat a lot of things rather than eat a big slice of cake.”

Time and effort are saved with pre-made tart shells. For an added touch of festive extravagance, Payard suggests topping each tartlet off with an edible fleur de sel gold leaf. Just when you thought the gilded age had ended, yet another begins. ■

GANACHE-CARAMEL NOUGATINE TARTLETS

- 8 mini tartlet shells
- 1 ounce milk chocolate, melted
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cups sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon Fleur de sel, plus extra for garnish
- 1 cup heavy cream, room temperature
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature
- 5 ounces 61 percent chocolate, chopped
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus 1 tablespoon heavy cream
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature

Brush inside of tartlet shells with milk chocolate. To make filling, place sugar and fleur de sel in small saucepan over medium-high heat. Once sugar reaches a light brown, gently stir with a wooden spoon. Once sugar reaches dark-amber add cream and continue stirring until sugar returns to dark-amber color. Stir in butter and let caramel cool in covered bowl in refrigerator. Before using, reheat slightly to pour into tartlet shells, filling them two-thirds of the way. Refrigerate until caramel is set. To make the fleur de sel ganache, put the chocolate and fleur de sel in a medium bowl. Bring cream to a boil in saucepan over medium-high heat. Pour hot cream over chocolate, whisk until smooth. When mixture gets close to room temperature, whisk in butter until ganache is shiny. Let thicken for about 15 minutes. Next, pour ganache on top of set caramel to fill the tartlets. Place a pinch of fleur de sel in the center of each and let set at room temperature for about an hour.