



PASTRY **AND** CHOCOLATE

**A Conversation with Federico Fernandes,
Marisa Sun and Donald Wressell**

By Federico Fernandes, Marisa Sun and Donald Wressell

Only a short walk away from the Guittard Chocolate Studio in Culver City, stands Bianca, a family-owned restaurant and bakery that has become an L.A.-area destination for fresh bread, pastries and custom cakes. It's also home to a delicious savory menu where the classic flavors of Argentina, Italy and France come together. Recently, our Executive Pastry Chef, Donald Wressell, spent the day with Federico Fernandez and Marisa Sun. The former pastry colleagues from his days at the Four Seasons currently make magic as co-owners and pastry chefs at Bianca. They discussed the transition from pastry at the Four Seasons to running their own bakery, their culinary influences and the key to success in their new endeavor.



Donald: For as many times as I've been here, I don't think I've heard the story about the origin of Bianca. How did you make the transition into your own business?

Marissa: After many years of traveling the world with the Four Seasons, we moved with them to Los Angeles. Federico just loved L.A. In his eyes you get it all - the beach, the city, the mountains - and after a couple of years living here, he knew this was where he wanted to put down roots. It was the perfect place to open something of our own.

Federico: We always thought we wanted a small place of our own, but having something smaller means you have to do it all yourself. As we were asking others for advice on getting started, we met with Gianni and Nicola Vietina of Madeo Ristorante. They had been around for three decades and were the epitome of a successful family business - still are. Serendipitously, they were looking to expand with a fresh concept. We decided to pull together a joint concept, bringing together the classic flavors of Argentina, Italy and France. We found a place that could hold a bakery and a restaurant in the same space, where we could have a storefront, restaurant dining and capacity to support wholesale and catering, too.



Donald: You've been open for over five years now. What's been the best part? The hardest part?

Marisa: The best part is that we are a great team. Federico and Gianni and Nicola and I and also our amazing employees. We have over 60 employees and — believe it or not — some of our employees come in at 3:00 a.m. to learn and train. I was raised in the restaurant business — my parents ran a Chinese restaurant in Argentina — and I've always been drawn to the energy and commitment of people in this industry. We've also had our fair share of ups and downs. We opened right before the pandemic, which plunged us into survival mode not too long after we opened. But we're owners without investors, so we had to get resourceful and creative. This instilled in us a "must-survive" mindset early on.

Donald: Let's get specific about pastry — what do you love about pastry and why did you choose to focus on this part of the culinary world?

Marisa: First and foremost, I love to eat it! It is different from the kitchen — it's more specific, more precise and measured and consistent and methodical. Right now I'm obsessed with laminated dough — I like to rotate to different stations and follow a methodical process to bring it to life.

Federico: Execution is everything in pastry. It's delicate and you can't rush it. I love it all: wedding cakes, plated desserts, lamination chocolate, bread. The Bianca customer wants things simple but done really well, so it has been really fun transforming pastry techniques into simpler but still finely executed desserts and bakery offerings.





Donald: You know I'm going to ask: what about chocolate? How is it incorporated in your menu?

Federico: I love making a traditional American-style chocolate cake. Hydrogenated dutch-processed cocoa powder gives the cake its color and that classic Americana flavor. And for the icing I combine 100% cacao wafers and another slightly sweet chocolate to balance the sweetness of the powdered sugar. Customers just love it. We have a client who orders it at the beginning of his meal because he's afraid it'll be sold out if he waits until the end. It happened to him once, but never again! I also love using wafers as inclusions in cookies. They're higher quality because they have more cocoa butter, they create layers that look like laminated dough in a cookie and they just taste better.

Donald: Do you have any tips on working with chocolate that have helped you perfect Bianca's customer favorites?

Marisa: We're very focused on how we preserve and store chocolate and cocoa butter, since they can often take on the flavors of other things in the kitchen that are lingering nearby. Plus, we have a smaller kitchen than we used to at the Four Seasons. Now, we're more selective in what we bring in. We focus on premium ingredients that are versatile and high-quality; they must perform well and deliver on the flavor we're going for in a variety of uses.

Donald: It might be hard to pick, but do you have a favorite chocolate integration?

Definitely our alfajores. To perfect a dessert, I always do a ton of research. On my last trip to Argentina, I visited 40 different restaurants and bakeries for inspiration. On Mondays, when our bakery is closed, I explore the Los Angeles area. I'm always searching for new ingredients, flavors and approaches to simple classics that I know our customers will love.

In this case I wanted to make something innovative for the American and European palette. Our popular Alfajor Dulce de Leche represents Argentina's version of the Alfajor which is better than you can find anywhere else in the world. The key is using great 72% chocolate that has enough cocoa butter to make it fluid and thick and crisp. For the dough, I try to make sure that it delivers on the nostalgic flavor from Argentina but with better texture, flavor with great cocoa powder and more moisture with a hint of alcohol. For the Dulce de Leche, I find that it's better to source it from Argentina rather than making it from scratch.



CHOCOLATE AND DULCE DE LECHE ALFAJORES

By **Federico Fernandes** and **Marisa Sun**,
Co-Owners and Pastry Chefs, Bianca

Yield: makes 15

- 200 g granulated sugar
- 200 g butter
- 50 g honey
- 40 g malt extract
- 50 g water
- 2 whole eggs
- 20 g Guittard® Cocoa Rouge Unsweetened Cocoa Powder
- 5 g baking soda
- 400 g all-purpose flour
- 100 g cornstarch

1. Cream the sugar and butter
2. Add the honey, malt extract and water.
3. Add the eggs.
4. Slowly add the combined cocoa powder, baking soda, flour and cornstarch. Don't overmix.
5. Refrigerate the dough for 1 hour.
6. Sheet the dough to .16 inches (4 mm) and cut into 2-inch (50 mm) circles. Place the rounds onto a paper-lined sheet pan.

7. Bake at 350°F (177°C) in a convection oven for 6-8 minutes. There shouldn't be any color, and the cookies should pull away completely clean from the parchment paper.
8. Once the mixture is cool, sandwich with Dulce de Leche filling.

DULCE DE LECHE FILLING

- 500 g San Ignacio® Dulce de Leche
- 20 g Cyrano Armagnac
- Zest of 1 orange

1. Mix all ingredients and reserve.

ENROBING

- 250 g Guittard® Coucher du Soleil 72% Dark Chocolate Couverture
- 100 g cocoa butter

1. Temper the chocolate and cocoa butter.
2. Dip and decorate the assembled Alfajores

