



momofuku **milk bar**

**christina tosi**

foreword by david chang



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christina tosi

with courtney mcbroom

photographs by gabriele stabile

and mark ibold



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**To Peter, Hannah, Oscar,  
and Hazel for putting this book  
in motion, for baking and eating  
and BabyBjörning and  
double dutching and doggy sitting**



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real talk

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**nut brittle**

**nut crunch**

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**mother dough**

**bonus track: crack pie™**

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# foreword

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When Momofuku Noodle Bar opened in 2004, we had no intention of ever serving desserts. We thought measuring out ingredients and baking was for wusses. Sometimes for regular customers we send out Hershey's Kisses or ice cream sandwiches that I would buy at the bodega across the street. We fooled around with an ill-advised and short-lived cupcake program for a second. Hiring a pastry chef was the furthest thing from my mind back in the day. I'd rather have hired an extra sous chef than spend money on someone who spins sugar and bakes cookies. That's what I thought.

Then I met Christina Tosi.

The Department of Health had showed up at the restaurant and dumped bleach all over hundreds of dollars of pork belly we had stored in vacuum-sealed bags. The DOH required anyone cooking with a vacuum sealing system to have a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan, a crazy complex record-keeping system more common at food factories than ramen bars. Wylie Dufresne felt my pain and sent over Christina from wd~50, where she'd just implemented such a plan for him. She quickly and single-handedly saved us from DOH hell.

She was running these kinds of plans for several top New York City restaurants at the time, which would have been a full-time job in itself for most people. But I realized Tosi was not like most people and that we had a lot in common; she burns the candle at both ends and takes a flamethrower to the middle.

So I hired Tosi to help us organize our "office"—a desk in a hallway. Instead, she started organizing the company.

At the same time, she was working as a cashier at Ssäm Bar during the burrito phase, training for marathons at night, and somehow finding time to bake at home. Every day she came in to work she brought in something homemade—and amazing. Nothing tasted like it was made in a tiny Brooklyn apartment kitchen with no special ingredients and very little time. I practically lived on that stuff while we were trying to help Ssäm Bar transition from a failing Mexican-Korean burrito joint into something that would be around for more than a year.

Her cookies and pies, like many things that made their way onto the menus—the bo ssäms, the fried chicken dinner—started out just for the staff. I would constantly say she should sell them; I was a broken record. I don't know what or when or how, but I must've worn her out. It seems like one day Tosi was writing up an HACCP plan and then she was making me promise never to buy dessert again for the restaurants. She had finally taken my hints about tackling a more culinary role at Momofuku. Even though it was five years ago, it seems like five minutes ago.

She knew how things worked by then and wasn't disappointed to bake in the basement ... from the sugar, flour, and butter we already had on hand ... after doing her "etc." job by day and running around the city doing HACCP plans for other restaurants ...

Tosi has many talents: she is a dog whisperer; she can consume more sugar than seemingly humanly possible ~~without keeling over~~; she is the most stubborn person I know. But it's her insane work ethic and brilliant mind that make her so special in my book.

I've always found that when you get talented people, you coach them up to a certain point and then let them loose. Tosi reset the bar in terms of that theory. Milk Bar wouldn't be—let alone be what it is—without her. This is the story of how it came to be and where it is now as she guides it into unknown territories.

One final word of advice before you dive in: Don't let her nice demeanor and southern charm fool you; underneath she is a ruthless killer ... just like her recipes in this book, where deceptively simple flavors and ingredients combine in ways that make grown men whimper. Resistance to her sugar manifesto is futile.

**David Char**



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**introductions** are awkward, especially in kitchens. Everyone's sizing each other up and no one wants to take the time to learn your name until you've been to the battle of dinner service enough nights in a row to show that you aren't going anywhere. The best way to get through it is to just throw your hand out there and share.

My name is Christina Tosi. I am twenty-nine. We opened Momofuku Milk Bar six days after my twenty-seventh birthday. I never thought I'd be where I am today.

I was born in Ohio and raised in Virginia. Both of my grandmothers are avid bakers, nurturing souls, and ferocious card sharks. The matriarchs of my family bake for every occasion, large or small—birthday, bake sale, and, more often than not, just because.



We are a kinship of sweet teeth on both sides of the family, some more refined and some more restrained than others. My mother cannot give up ice cream for the life of her, because she just can't bear the thought of having to go to bed on an "empty" stomach. My father was known to substitute a chocolate ice cream cone for any meal of the day.

I'm worse than either of them, to be honest. I've had a crippling cookie dough problem ever since I can remember.

My older sister and I were always allowed to help out in the kitchen. Like most kids, we would lick the beater from a batch of cookies. But for me, it was never enough. I would shape one cookie and then eat a handful of dough, or just eat the dough shamelessly until my

grandmother caught on and chided me in her strident country-Ohio accent. I was always in big trouble, because I was going to do some combination of (a) spoiling my appetite, (b) making myself sick, and/or (c) getting salmonella poisoning. (She only invoked salmonella when I had managed to eat nearly an entire batch of cookie dough, which happened more often than I think she noticed.)

The old gals cut me off, and besides, it was high time I learned how to properly fend for myself. That's when I really started baking. I followed their same baking patterns. Baking was something that could, should, and did happen every day in my kitchen, too. Nothing went to waste and every baked good had character. Leftovers got incorporated into the following day's creation and each day became a challenge to put a new spin on an old favorite.

In high school and college, I fell madly in love with math and foreign languages. Baking was a hobby, not a profession. I worked at a restaurant while attending college in Virginia, waiting tables until they let me work as a morning prep cook. I baked at my apartment in my off-hours every day, and I got my coworkers and schoolmates hopped up on my homemade desserts. I was the girl who always brought cookies or a pie or a cake. Always. Especially if it was somebody's birthday.

For two consecutive summers, a dear friend managed to convince the powers that be at a conference center on Star Island, New Hampshire, to hire me to help run their bakery. Bread and sweets for seven hundred people, three meals a day. Early mornings, late nights. I didn't talk to normal people about normal things; I baked and baked and baked, and I called my mom (and sister) every once in a while. I couldn't get enough of it.

One day on the way back from Star Island to Lacy Springs, Virginia, where I lived after college with friends who became family, I decided I'd move myself to New York City and go to cooking school. I looked on the internet and found the French Culinary Institute. Sounded good. Their rigorous pastry arts program was six months long—perfect for an antsy, overachieving student like myself.

I was going to school to study pastry in New York City, I told my family and friends as I began to plan my move north. They weren't exactly dumbfounded—everybody knew how much I liked to bake—but I had only been to the city once before, a day trip when I was a teenager. And I'd never really talked about trade school; I had a good ol' college degree. But once I get an idea in my head, I'm hard to dissuade. I'm hardheaded to a fault.

While attending classes at the FCI by day, I worked as a hostess at Aquagrill by night to pay the rent and get a feel for a city restaurant. (Actually, I answered phones at the beginning, because they thought I was a joke; then they let me hostess once they saw I wouldn't let people walk all over me; and then I graduated to whatever the lady version of maître d' is—actually wore a suit to work!) Soon after, I secured an externship that turned into a job at

Bouley, under pastry chef Alex Grunert. The pastry cook who trained me at Bouley told me it would be the hardest job I'd ever have. And it kind of was, though after every hard day, I was ready to push it even further the next.

I tried dabbling in everything with any minute of free time. The city was all mine. I interned at *Saveur* magazine, because I thought I might want to be a food writer. I styled food and catered and consulted. I worked as a food runner at *per se*. But with each side job, I missed being in the kitchen.

I found myself walking into *wd~50* one day and offering to work for free. (As long as I could make the rent with a paying gig, I would work for free anywhere in my free time.) Eventually they offered me a job.

I respected the chef, Wylie Dufresne, enormously. His approach to food was thoughtful, reasonable, logical, scientific. Every flavor pairing and composed dish had a purpose, an influence, and a level of independent thought that was revolutionary to my view of food. I grew the most as a cook while working there. Wylie, sous-chef Mikey Sheerin, and Sam Mason, the pastry chef to whom I reported, challenged me daily. Everything I cooked for family meal and everything I did to prep our pastry kitchen for service, setup, and breakdown was inspected, double-checked. If they had questions, I had to have answers, and “No, chef,” or “I don't know, chef,” were not words I ever liked to say.

I left the city after *wd~50*. I just had to get out. I had been pushing since I'd arrived four years earlier. I went back to Virginia first, spent time with the wonderful old gals in my life—Mom, Ang, my aunt Fran, my grandmas. I baked and I slept. I went to Thailand. Then I was ready to go back.

One day, Wylie's good friend David Chang, chef/owner of Momofuku, called about some issues he was having with the New York City Department of Health. One of the skills I'd acquired on the side was how to write a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan—a food-service safety plan that typically fills up a two-inch-thick binder—so that Wylie could cook *sous vide* without the city breathing down his neck.

I was just putzing around at that point, toying with the idea that writing HACCP plans would be the next phase of my “career.” I knew I wanted to be in charge of my own kitchen, but I didn't think anyone would really hire me to be the head gal. I'm not really sure I believed I had enough vision/creativity/experience to be in charge of a pastry department, either. I was still a little too young and impressionable—and euphoric.

Dave quickly made an offer for me to be the “etc.” of the small but growing team at Momofuku. I love me a good challenge, getting in on the ground floor and growing alongside everything and everyone else, moving and shaking, fighting an uphill battle—I love to organize, develop, figure it all out as a part of a team of believers. Momofuku Noodle Bar

was a success at that point; Ssäm Bar was a burrito bar, not the restaurant it is today.

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There was never a mention of kitchen work. It was more office stuff, or tit shit, as Dave and I called it. (I even worked the cash register!) Looking back, I think he secretly had a plan all along—he just knew I needed some time to grow into it.

I went to work, gave it my all, and came home to my oven and jars of sugar. I baked every night, and the next day I brought baked goods to the “office”—a glorified closet where Dave and I and two other people worked full time.

Dave would shovel the sweets into his mouth and joke about how I should start making desserts for the restaurants. We would laugh at how it would even happen. Who would plate desserts if we made them? And, more important, with a restaurant menu that was such a crazy hodgepodge of culinary approaches, what would we even serve? The idea of dessert seemed so far-fetched.

One day I brought in a toasted-miso crack pie, and Dave started in again. He started laughing and told me to go make a dessert for service that night. I laughed too, said, “OK,” and went back to whatever office work I was doing. But then Dave looked at me and said, “Seriously, go make a dessert for service tonight.”

I looked at him, slowly realizing he wasn’t joking, and started hedging, “Well ... But ... I don’t even know what I’d make....”

He stared back, now stern and slightly cold. “Make this, or make those cookies. I don’t care what the fuck you make. Just make something. And make sure it’s fucking delicious.”

I gave a quick head nod and let myself out of the office. I had no idea what I was going to do but knew what I needed to do. And that’s how our strawberry shortcake—simple, fast, and seasonal, the best thing I could come up with on short notice—was born. I think people who ate at Ssäm that night, people who were used to there being nothing for dessert but frozen mochi right out of the box, were excited that there was a new option. We sold some shortcakes. So the next day I made them again.

That’s how it started. There were a lot of horrible mistakes that never made it to the menu. Some days I made five things that sucked. Then one day something would taste really good. And climbing up the hill became less painful than the downward spiral of failure.

I knew I wanted to draw on my influences, from both professional kitchens and home cooking adventures, and find a balance between the two. Mostly it was a challenge. To figure out what my voice was—how, stylistically, my food would translate. Luckily enough, Momofuku was the perfect home for desserts with no name, slightly confusing to some, but

always thoughtful and delicious.

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As a small restaurant group, with tight spaces and limited resources, we quickly learned that boundaries and limitations breed creativity. This always rang true for me, the one-person pastry department with no real prep table to call home.



There was no ice cream machine and no service freezer, just the walk-in freezer downstairs, a healthy jog from the upstairs service kitchen. There was no real heat source for baking anything to order—à la minute—or warming things for service. I prepped Ssäm Bar's desserts and the garde-manger cook (the person doing oysters and appetizers) would plate and serve them. Garde-manger had eight to ten other menu items coming off their station on a given night; dessert was *not* a priority. I had to come up with recipes that were bulletproof. And the desserts had to appear thoughtfully composed, even without any of the elements that you typically get with dessert served at a fancy Manhattan restaurant.

So I came up with ways to make desserts seem larger than the sum of their parts: shortcakes and pies somehow became elevated into something more. Everyone in the kitchen would get their spoons in something before it made it onto the menu. And I would make sure that the recipe was just right before we served it. Once Ssäm had two steady desserts, I moved on to Noodle Bar.

Noodle Bar had already grown up and moved up the block from its original tiny space—which would later become Ko—into a spacious (by Momofuku standards) new location. I pushed as hard as possible for a soft-serve machine. I had been hell-bent on having dessert at the original tiny Noodle Bar, but it was a turn-and-burn operation. Diners would sometimes be in and out in an hour. So the idea of instituting a dessert program that would keep them in our tiny place for any longer than usual was not a popular one. But soft-serve was the easiest

way for me to make dessert in bulk form, serve it quickly and affordably at the larger Noodle Bar location, and maintain a thoughtful perspective on food with interesting flavors—steeping milk was something I learned to love doing at wd~50.

Once Noodle Bar was running smoothly in its new location, Ko opened. We quickly flipped the space into a tasting-menu-only, online-reservations-only establishment. We had a lot of bad ideas for tasting-menu desserts, and deep down, I think Dave, Serp (Peter Serpico, the chef de cuisine, who runs the restaurant), and I knew I was just going to have to hide out in the Ssäm Bar basement and, come hell or high water, figure something out. The only productive thing that came from the original group meetings was a collaborative love affair with the idea of a deep-fried apple pie and the fact that I was going to need a little help in the form of an FCI extern. Enter Marian Mar.

Dave and a few other Momo guys went to the FCI career fair one day, mostly in search of savory cooks for their kitchens, and Dave promised he'd find me someone. Most people didn't even know the Momofukus served dessert, let alone thought of dropping off a pastry résumé. Except Marian.

Mar showed up at Ssäm Bar one night at 8 p.m. for the first night of her "externship" and helped me prep until about 2 a.m. We wore winter hats and turtlenecks because the basement was freezing. Giggled and figured shit out. This continued once or twice a week for the next few months. Little did either of us know Marian would become the anchor, lifesaver, soulmate, sister, and sous-chef who made and saved our little pastry department.

Mar stood next to me watching me pull out my hair trying to make a deep-fried apple pie. She looked at me like I was a little insane when, days before Ko was set to open, I told her about this cereal milk idea I had instead. I mean, I had to start looking at other options if I couldn't get the fried apple pie I promised figured out.

We tasted my next few attempts at an apple pie with Serp, as well as the cereal milk panna cotta I was working on. The panna cotta had a pretty boring banana cream with it, and he wanted something slightly different. He said, "I may be crazy, but what about avocado?" Both me and Mar perked up. Being a California girl, Mar loves avocados, and we'd really wanted to use them in a dessert. In fact, we had an avocado puree all ready, waiting for inspiration to strike. And there it was.

This is the essence of how we come up with things. We make things that we are interested in. We make them taste good. Then we stand in front of our fridge, with the door open, just like you do at home when you're trying to figure out what to make for dinner or eat for a midnight snack. We pick and pull out things we've been working on and see where we can merge ideas and flavors. We try to be intelligent about it. But most of the time, it's a eureka moment that we didn't even know we were working toward.



I finally came up with a deep-fried apple pie—a kind of take on the Hostess or McDonald’s apple pies we all grew up on—through some messed-up, backwards, forget-everything-you’ve-ever-learned-about-pie-dough stroke of stupidity and kept moving. We opened our two-man pastry department at Ko by packing up five large pails of staple ingredients and a toolbox of equipment and moving them from Ssäm to Ko in the back of a lovely little ’93 Subaru station wagon, the “company car.”



Once we had a little prep table to call our own and more regularish hours, we began menu developing, putting better systems into place in the restaurants for our dessert programs, and of course, making family-meal dessert daily. I developed a firm belief while working in restaurants in this city that family meal, the one prepared daily for your peers, is one of the most important meals you’ll cook. The respect and integrity you put into it speaks very highly of you as a cook—and of how much you care about your fellow cooks. Often pastry is exempt from being required to contribute to family meal. But once I started full time at wd~50, I made it a personal requirement.

I would joke with anyone I worked next to that making family meal was my zen moment. I went back to my self-proclaimed roots; I baked without measuring (sacrilege to most accomplished bakers) and used whatever mise-en-place was over- or underbaked or left over. Family meal is meant to be delicious and nurturing. I made what I knew from years of baking for myself—something I affectionately called crack pie because you can’t stop eating it, cookies galore, brownies, etc. If there was a birthday within our three growing restaurants, I would make a layer cake with the same notion, using fillings we had on hand for our desserts.

Little did we know that making family-meal desserts with our in-house mise-en-place for the other restaurants would be recipe testing for our next project.

One day, tumbling down the stairs from the sidewalk into Ko’s basement, Dave said, “Hey, if we could get you a bakery space, would you do it? The Laundromat next to Ssäm is closing, and we need to scoop up that space before someone else does.”

“OK,” I said. I’d come to realize that having a bakery was what I wanted as an end goal. I just didn’t think it would come so soon.

“No, but seriously—if we could get that space for you to have as a bakery or something, would you really do it?” he asked.

“I said yes. I’ll do it,” I shot back, puffing up my shoulders.

It’s funny to think that’s how most of our big conversations go. They’re quick and to the point. Dave and I get each other, I think, on a level that most people don’t, or maybe it’s just that no one has understood either of us before. It’s usually just a few sentences of dialogue; we figure out the hard stuff later. We are both people of our words, fearless of a challenge, and self-confident to a fault. We will do anything to make something work. It’s one-half rock-hard work ethic, one-quarter pride, and one-quarter spite, I think.

With a skeleton crew of me, Mar, and Emily, an amazing Culinary Institute of America extern we picked up along the way, we began menu developing for a bakery that had no rules and no bounds. We would finish our daily prep for the restaurants as quickly as possible and make ourselves sick from testing and tasting thousands of versions of cookie dough, cake batter, and soft-serve ice cream bases.

A separate skeleton crew of Joshua Corey, our handsome “handyman” if you asked him his title, Dave, Drew Salmon, Momofuku’s COO, and I began designing, contracting, and building out the space. We bought pendant lamps at [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) and contemplated what furniture, if any, should exist. None of us had ever opened a bakery, and the bakery I ran on Star Island was nothing like this, except I sure did know how to use an old eighty-quart mixer and wasn’t afraid of scooping cookie dough out of it.

Long days turned into long nights, into yelling at contractors and slamming down phones. Our lives became mudding ceilings, sourcing the right nondescript display case, and painting the walls and ceilings in “hint of mint” when we should have been sleeping.

Only a small handful of people knew that Momofuku even had a pastry department, but we were determined to build a bakery that belonged to us, and we were going to do it as best we could. And by small handful, I mean really small. Milk Bar started with very few employees working seven days a week, seventeen hours a day or more. Helen Jo joined our team for no good reason that I could see except that Marian, Emily, and my zombie-like state somehow enchanted her. James Mark, formerly the low man on the totem pole at Ko, who had baked different loaf of bread for practically every family meal, became our overnight bread baker.

It wasn’t long before the doors officially opened and the place was packed. Lines out into the cold all times of day. Customers were often confused by the crazy ice cream flavors we

served morning till midnight, by the series of flavors that were always expanding and contracting, and we didn't begrudge them the confusion. We were making it up as we went along, but—and I can't express this more sincerely—we were truly surprised at how much people were into it. At a certain point, Anderson Cooper was plugging our crack pie on television. Things had turned surreal. Dave swears he knew it was going to work all along.

A year and a half passed. We opened our second Milk Bar location in midtown. Business was booming, but we were on top of each other, mixing and baking from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. in 700 square feet of space. We'd hoist sheet pans of cookie dough over the heads of our patrons several times a day to get them to a refrigerator to chill for an hour or two before we hoisted the pans back to our oven to bake off for the evening and late-night crowds.

We needed a bigger boat. There are only so many chest freezers from Craigslist you can squeeze into an already cramped basement, so many cookie fridges you can surreptitiously put out on the floor of Milk Bar, and so many tables you can take over for shipping and special orders while telling guests they have to stand somewhere else to eat their slice of pistachio layer pie.

We found and signed a lease on a huge warehouse space that would be our castle, our kingdom, our home. Cue noise: car screeching to a halt. Only thing is, it wouldn't be rezoned and kitchen-ready for another four months.

So we chose the next best (and only other) option: schlepping our kitchen up to Spanish Harlem to bake in a stranger's fourth-story rental kitchen, using a stranger's dingy refrigerators, a stranger's elevator that always seemed to break down when the deliveries were obscenely large, and, even worse, a stranger's wonky ovens.

And there we perched, in a barely-air-conditioned 90- to 100-degree kitchen for a long summer. We baked, and we developed a delivery system, a packaging system, an "oh, shit" list to keep us on top of every single disaster we could and surely did encounter at 113th Street and Third Avenue. We were in boot camp all over again. We climbed those stairs with fifty-pound bags of flour on our shoulders or wobbled down them with twenty-four-quart tubs of soft-serve ice cream to take to Noodle Bar. We screamed, we sweated. We tried to hide it when we were down at the restaurants. We scrubbed sheet pans at 3 a.m. until we hired and trained a dishwashing staff. We carpooled up and down the FDR Drive at all hours of the morning and night.

Then, just when the summer of 2010 cooled off, our new kitchen in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, was ready. And by ready, I mean empty, clean, and ready for us to do it all over again, one more time.



We painted the creepy rooms with leftover paint from everyone's past home painting experiments (mostly mine), hung pictures of dogs and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on the empty walls, and assembled enough prep tables and metro shelves to fill thousands of square feet. My mother, aunt, and sister stuffed my poor brother-in-law's truck full of yard-sale furniture to cart across state lines for our makeshift offices. We made friends with big guys with big dollies and trucks with lifts. And we rented U-Haul trucks and moved our ever-expanding kitchen from Spanish Harlem to our home. Finally.

After just two years, we caught up on sleep (kind of). We wooed an amazingly talented staff to join us in our plight. Each one of us has a different background, a different attitude, and a different view on life and food.

Helen Jo stuck by my side, whether we were spray-painting a rusty dough sheeter gold and naming her Beyoncé, running outside to pet a puppy, or commanding an entire kitchen to work faster! Leslie Behrens entered full force with blonde like you have never seen before, and a love for key lime pie turned cake that let us know she was a lifer. Yewande Komolafe, our wanderlust Nigerian princess, reminded us daily to be fierce with attitude and never to miss an episode of *This American Life*. Helen Hollyman, with her patience and hilarity, taught us how to wrangle quirky customers with grace and poise while laughing inside all the way. Sarah Buck danced into our basement and schooled us in the art of bouncing to Reggaeton while corralling a sassy staff into banging out a prep list in record time. Courtney McBroom, cool as a cucumber, hilarious, and vulgar to a fault at times, is my mighty kitchen stand-in, silently reminding me it will all be OK, even if I take a day off (she's also half of the hilariousness of this text). Maggie Cantwell, equally nosy and hungry at all times, now runs our operations and reminds us to be good women, girlfriends, and wives, all while balancing spreadsheets and telling cooks what it was like when she was in the kitchen. Louis Fabbri, the tall, dark, and handsome Doogie Howser of Milk Bar, has somehow managed to know and love the cause among a jungle of crazy women and balance a delivery staff, an etc. staff, a technology infrastructure, and a Milk Bar world-domination scheme, all at the age of twenty-two and then twenty-three. Alison Roman, our West Coast transplant, is so ridiculous in

spirit, chatter, and skill that we just give her some jars to fill with jokes or drama—or her next amazing batch of flavored butter, jelly, or jam. Alex Wilson, God bless her, flies strong and solo most of the time, ricocheting off each Milk Bar, and generally managing our laughter levels, homemade apron distribution, cookie pars, and locations all the while.

We are a family. We call each other out on bullshit, push each other to be better everythings and catch each other when it all blows up in our faces. We have lost sanity and sleep over new desserts. We argue about and challenge the ways we make each recipe, the way we serve each item, the way we get each dessert to you with the shortest line and in the friendliest way possible.

The heart of our daily lives at Milk Bar is the core of this book—warm, hardworking, strong, humble, and straightforward. I'm excited and scared to share it with you. We are no geniuses. Putting it down on paper for someone else to read leaves us vulnerable to the ease that is the essence of our desserts' success.

There are no tricky secrets to what we do—it's about getting in there, working smart, and making something delicious out of everyday ingredients. The only things you need that are not already in your cupboards are a few funny ingredients that will make you shake your head in disbelief. Our recipes exist to appeal and to relate to everyone.

We all started off as home cooks, and we never stray far from our roots. This cookbook is a collection of the recipes from our lives and love affairs with food that we have adapted, adjusted, tasted once and tasted twice, and made in the Momofuku spirit. They are simple and tasty. They are salty and sweet. If you ever wanted to start a pastry department, then open a bakery, then grow an empire out of a few employees, young by birth or at heart—or just turn on your oven and make something super-tasty—you really only need the ten mother recipes you'll find here. Honestly, that's how we did it.

In our kitchen, **real talk** means we break it down for you. Good-bye niceties: just cold, hard truths is what real talk is all about. When one of us is not doing the right thing, copping a bad attitude, feeling sorry for him- or herself, being lazy, or underperforming (we're all human), we all know what's needed to get each other back on track. Real talk.

So. Here's how it's going to go. I'm surrendering all of my favorite recipes to you. Letting you into our world. We are a tight-knit, loving bunch, unafraid of eating too much cookie dough or of slathering our bread with too much butter. We are our own breed of home bakers with formal educations, and we strive to make thoughtful, clever food that hits home every time. We work hard. We laugh hard. We love to share our takes on baked goods with anyone and everyone. We are incredibly casual but never cavalier. We are deadly serious and deadly accurate when it matters. Spend some time understanding how we laid out this cookbook, read our ridiculous mantras, understand the need for certain ingredients and kitchenware—and you will be one of us.

Cooking any of the recipes in this book is like working a day at Milk Bar side by side with us. But before you're even given a time card to work in our kitchen, you have to pass the ultimate test. Are you a hardbody?

**hardbody** is a term we use at Milk Bar to describe a person who goes above and beyond. Softbodies need not apply in our kitchen. (We like softbodies as people, we just don't like working next to them.) Every single person who works with us is either a hardbody or a hardbody-in-training.

A hardbody never complains—a hardbody isn't afraid to work through the toughest of times. No heat in the winter? Snowsuits under your chef's whites. No AC in the summer? Sweat to the oldies and keep working. No elevator, no room for the one hundred gallons of organic milk to be delivered, a flat tire on the van, a broken dolly? No problem. We are hardbodies. We got it.

Maybe you're mixing a huge batch of cookie dough and your industrial-size mixer shits the bed. A softbody would surely give up. But not a hardbody. You've never lived until you've mixed one hundred pounds of compost cookie dough by hand and then raced to scoop it with your lunatic boss. Just ask Heather Pelletier. The people need their cookies!

A hardbody approaches each recipe and task with a sense of humor. A hardbody keeps cool and keeps creative. As you read through this book, you'll find that a striking number of these recipes were the result of burning, or mismeasuring, or just throwing some leftovers into the mixing bowl. A hardbody knows there's always a brilliant recipe waiting to be invented with leftover Ritz crunch or overproofed mother dough.

Everybody gets a hardbody litmus test before they become one of us. Once they've shown us

their hardbody potential, they are allowed through our doors and let into the fold. They are officially a part of Milk Bar. They are family.

**clocking in** at Milk Bar means showing up. You put on your kitchen whites, pull your hair back, and get your notebook and Sharpie out to make a prep list and plan your day of baking. Turn on some tunes and get in the zone.

To get started at home, you need to clock in too—make sure you and your kitchen are ready to dedicate some time to the food. You’ve got to make the kitchen you’re about to bake in your own. Put on your favorite album, or tune your radio in to NPR. Have your favorite oven mitts, apron, and head scarf ready. Hang pictures of puppies all over the place. It matters—I promise.

This cookbook is designed to help make your life in the kitchen easy. Get yourself organized before you start. Understand how the cookbook works. Understand how we work. Know what recipes you want to make.

You must know what you’re about to get into before you get into it. In our kitchen, prep lists and clipboards abound (thirty-three is the current count—more clipboards than employees), to get each other up to speed once we’ve clocked in, so that we’re not lost in a sea of sugar and sheet pans when we start our day.



In French cooking, there are four “mother sauces.” Most every French sauce is a derivative of one of these four sauces. It is a known fact that if you master the mother sauces, you can make nearly anything in French cooking. I like to think the same is true of the Milk Bar pastry kitchen.

I flew solo at the beginning, but as the restaurants slowly grew, so did the techniques and dessert menus. I had to be smart about prep work and mise-en-place. We built three pastry

departments, three retail bakery locations, and one sweet stronghold out of ten **mother recipes**—nine sweet ones and one bread dough.

Start with a mother recipe and discover the range of desserts that stems from that recipe. Following the mother recipe in each chapter are recipe **variations**, where the main ingredients and flavor profiles change but the technique remains more or less the same.

Next to some recipes, you will see **sidebars**, or references to the hows and whys of a given technique or an ingredient used in the recipe. Recipes used beyond a single chapter—in recipes you can find **elsewhere in this book**—are also noted, to give you ideas, to help you find new ways to use your favorites. We're setting you up real good.

**“Setting yourself up for success”** is a phrase we love to use seriously and sarcastically alike in the kitchen. When someone doesn't wash the mixing bowl or leaves you without enough cornflakes to make cereal milk, they are not setting you up for success, and you let them know it. Loudly. But mostly we use it sarcastically, because we love being aware of one another and really value setting ourselves and each other up for a successful day in the kitchen.

To set yourself up at home, first decide what you want to accomplish. Are you making cookies for a bake sale or planning a fancy dinner party for later in the week, or do you just want to try out a few mother recipes and keep them in your fridge or freezer for a snack (or until you're ready to master the art of the **Cereal Milk Ice Cream Pie**, or the **Chocolate Malt Layer Cake**)? Once you've determined that, make yourself a prep list. Organize your recipe(s) before you actually start. Baking can seem difficult when you try to do too much at once. Some recipes take a little longer to execute, but they're well worth the commitment. Plan for this when you clock in.



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