

WILL WORK FOR FOOD

Madame Chocolat

IRISH-BORN TRISH DESEINE MOVED TO FRANCE AND FOUND THAT CHOCOLATE IS THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS OF THE KITCHEN

By Nanette Maxim



Chocolate blonde: Deseine schools a hungry nation in the beauty of the bean.

The cookbook writer and UK TV personality Trish Deseine has had her Sally-Field-at-the-Oscars moments (Field, in disbelief at receiving the award for a second time, famously gushed, “I can’t deny the fact that

you like me, right now, you like me!”). But for this Belfast-born farmer’s daughter, who has lived in and around Paris for the better part of two decades, it wasn’t the Irish who made her *verklemt*. It was the French, who

awarded her the 2006 Prix La Mazille, a top culinary literary honor, for her 11th book, “Ma Petite Robe Noire” (My Little Black Dress). The people who would no sooner heed a non-native’s advice about their food

than banish stinky cheese from their diets, like her. They really like her.

"My visceral love for France is so obvious," says Deseine. "Plus, I'm not much of a threat." Her chatty, personal style has helped sell more than a million copies of her 18 cookbooks (all written in French, with 11 of them available in English), which celebrate chocolate ("Je Veux Du Chocolat!"), caramels ("Du Caramel Plein la Bouche"), and even celebrating itself ("Petits Plats Entre Amis"). Her "I'm sure you'll be better at this than I am" vibe also endeared her to viewers of the BBC and RTE (Ireland's national broadcaster) as she took them through the paces of quiches and terrines in "Trish's Paris Kitchen" and, later, bouillabaisse and grilled sardines in her "Mediterranean Kitchen" series. But "Ma Petite Robe Noire," written, she says, "on the heels of a hard divorce and a mid-life crisis" was more concept, less homey. Deseine tied together deeply French notions about fashion and food, and the individuality of the moment and the choice. "If you dress up, you'll do it well" — that's the French way, she

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says. "We can think of our recipe repertoire as a wardrobe — the classics, the fashionable and that one thing, that one recipe, that will always make us look good."

Chocotherapy

Now, the prolific Deseine is marching head-on into the thing that makes us *feel* good as well. It's the piece in her culinary wardrobe that serves as her little black dress, her jeans and maybe even a pair of perfectly well-worn slippers. It's chocolate. You could say she's returning to the land of her first success in the food world, but the truth is, she never left it. The "Irish tornado," as French Elle called her, has been in self-proclaimed "chocotherapy" since childhood, when she sought out sweet comfort in Cadbury bars and what used to be called Mint Munchies (now After Eights).

This time, though, Deseine's not just demonstrating how to cook with chocolate; she's gone out and consulted with French manufacturing giant Cacao Barry to make her own brand of *couverture*, the chocolate that pro bakers prize for its high percentage of cocoa solids. With the help of the Barry chocolatiers and pâtissier Sébastien Godard (Pierre Hermé's former right-hand man at the renowned Fauchon), Deseine chose beans from Tanzania and Venezuela for her Chocolate By Trish line and has created blends of high-quality chocolate, including two spicy, fruity darks she refers to as the



With the help of renowned pastry guru Sébastien Godard, Deseine selected cacao beans from Tanzania and Venezuela to use in her Chocolates By Trish products.

"balanced" (64 percent cocoa mass) and the "bespoke" (74 percent); a rich milk chocolate (64 percent solids); white chocolate ("the love child of the chocolate world"); and various shards and cocoa dust ("perfect for hand-rolled truffles"). She has partnered with England's Selfridges to be the exclusive Chocolates by Trish retailer. And if home bakers need an additional leg up, Deseine offers a group of chocolate molds and tools, the better to sculpt those dusted truffles with.

This from a woman whose first memories

of chocolate cake involve Kake Brand cocoa powder. "A lesser quality cook's chocolate won't melt and work with butter or eggs. But *couverture* makes the melting process and tempering easy," Deseine says. "It's simply more fluid and malleable. People are intimidated by baking chocolate, and I want to make it easy."

Life Is Messy

For Deseine, "easy" is a relative term. The 45-year-old blonde, who grew up Protestant in Northern Ireland during the Troubles,

imagined a homeland where life wasn't laced with discord. "Because of the political situation, there was never a sense of belonging," she says. That sense of belonging she found in Brittany, and she may have a few working girls to thank for her subsequent culinary education. "I had been booked through an employment agency to work on the housekeeping staff of a hotel there for the summer, but when I showed up for the job I realized the 'hotel' was actually a brothel," she says, laughing. "So I went to the tourist office and they placed me as a guest in the home of Louise Vezin."

The French housewife whisked the teenager off to markets and invited Deseine to join her in the family's tiny kitchen to show her the way of simple, classic French food.

Food Does Not Equal Sex

Deseine is inevitably compared with the culinary equivalent of the "three tenors" — Julia, Nigella and Martha. She's a little bit classics, another part curvy sensuality, and a bit of blonde ambition. Deseine, however, isn't buying it. "I'm too lazy and clumsy," she says. "When you write cookery books, it would be easy to fall into a sweet image, or do the antiseptic thing that most food shows do. And the whole 'food equals sex' thing is a bit tired. I just want to go to that place in cooking that's rich and alive. We're all entitled to that."

Salted Caramel and Milk Chocolate Mousse

Combining Deseine's passions for chocolate, caramel and simple preparation, this rich, frothy mousse is from her "Caramel" cookbook, called (more lyrically) in the French edition, "Du Caramel Plein la Bouche" (Some Caramel Fills the Mouth).

- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 3/4 cup plus 1 1/2 tablespoons heavy whipping cream
- 2 1/2 tablespoons good-quality salted butter (I use unsalted butter, and a quite healthy pinch of salt)
- 7 ounces milk chocolate, roughly chopped
- 3 eggs, separated

1. Combine the sugar and 2 tablespoons water in a medium saucepan. Do not stir. Cook over medium-high heat to a dark caramel, swirling as it begins to brown to distribute the sugar. Take off the heat and deglaze with the cream and butter. Add the chocolate, wait for a minute or two for it to melt and mix until smooth. Mix in the egg yolks.

2. Whisk the egg whites until they form firm peaks and then fold into the chocolate mixture. Divide between 6 4-ounce ramekins and chill for at least 6 hours.

Yield: 6 servings. 🍴



As a child, Deseine indulged in what she calls "chocotherapy" via Cadbury bars and Mint Munchies. She's since upgraded. Pictured are sweet morsels from Deseine's Chocolate By Trish line.