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Belinda's flourless coconut and chocolate cake

Every month or so, we gather in the test kitchen with our pastry chefs. It's an open forum, with the chefs presenting their offerings, which we then taste and discuss. It's always exciting, as ideas are constantly being improved and implemented. This cake was a product of one of those meetings, brought to the table by Francesca Venzon, herself inspired by Belinda Jeffery's version of the cake. We've played around with the shape—baking it in a loaf pan—and added a chocolate ganache, but the base is all Belinda's.

There's something about a cake showcasing its flourlessness or gluten-free nature that can often make it sound a little bit lacking. Unfairly so, in a case like this, where the feeling of eating it is the very opposite of "free from"; it's utterly buttery and decadent.

serves 8

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3/4 cup plus 2 tbsp/200 g unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus extra for greasing

1 1/4 cups/250 g granulated sugar

2/3 cup/60 g finely shredded coconut

scraped seeds of 1 vanilla pod

¼ tsp salt

4 large eggs

1 2/3 cups/180 g almond meal

water ganache

2 oz/55 g dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids), roughly chopped into 1/3-inch/1-cm pieces

2 tbsp granulated sugar

1 tbsp light corn syrup

3 tbsp water

scraped seeds of ¼ vanilla pod

1 1/2 tbsp unsalted butter, at room temperature, cut into 3/4-inch/2-cm cubes

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Preheat the oven to 325°F/160°C. Grease the base and sides of a standard 8 1/2 x 4 1/2-inch/900-g loaf pan or a 9-inch/23-cm round springform pan and line with parchment paper, then set aside.

Place the butter, sugar, coconut, vanilla seeds and salt in an electric mixer with the paddle attachment in place. Beat on medium-high speed, until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add



the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Turn the speed to low, add the almond meal and mix until just combined.

Scrape the mixture into the pan and bake for 70 minutes if using the loaf pan or 50 minutes if using the round pan, or until the cake is golden brown on top and a skewer inserted into the middle comes out clean. Remove the cake from the oven and set aside to cool in the pan before inverting onto a serving plate. Set aside until completely cool.

To make the water ganache when you are ready to serve, place the chocolate in a medium bowl and set aside. Put the sugar and corn syrup in a small saucepan and place over medium-low heat. Stir to combine and, when the sugar has melted, increase the heat to medium and bring to a boil, stirring gently from time to time. Continue to boil for about 7 minutes, until the color is a pale amber. Remove from the heat and carefully pour in the water. Don't worry if the mix seizes; just return the pan to the heat, add the vanilla seeds and stir gently and continuously until it returns to a boil and the sugar has melted again. Remove from the heat and wait for a minute before pouring the water-caramel over the chocolate. Allow to stand for about 3 minutes, then whisk to combine. Add the butter, a couple of cubes at a time, whisking after each addition. Continue until all the butter has been added, whisking to combine until the consistency is that of thick syrup.

Spread the ganache over the top of the cake, letting it run down the sides a little, and serve.



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