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PAVLOVA DE FRESAS CON PEPITAS CRISP MERINGUE WITH STRAWBERRIES AND PUMPKIN SEEDS

MAKES 8 TO 10 SERVINGS

My mother's favorite dessert at Contramar is the strawberry meringue cake, with layers of sugary meringue offset by unsweetened whipped cream and tons of sliced berries. For the restaurant version, the pastry chefs pipe long, skinny strips of meringue that we cut into pieces to decorate the outside edge of the "cake." Unless you're really skillful with a pastry bag and have time to make meringue pipettes, I recommend making this in a simpler Pavlova shape: one large round meringue disk, topped with cream and fruit and scattered with pumpkin seeds. It's a lot easier and no less delicious. For another variation, try a layer of lemon curd from the *Torta de Limón Amarillo*. I have also made a divine version but substituting passion fruit pulp for the lemon juice. These are nice alternatives when fresh berries aren't in season.

Meringue

5 cold egg whites
1 cup/200g granulated sugar

Topping

1 ½ cups/360ml heavy cream
14 ¾ oz/420g strawberries, hulled and sliced, or mixed berries
2 Tbsp pumpkin seeds

Preheat the oven to 250°F/120°C.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and draw a 10-inch/25cm circle on it.

To make the meringue: Put the egg whites in the bowl of a stand mixer and chill in the refrigerator for 10 minutes. Using the stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whip the egg whites while gradually raining in the sugar 1 Tbsp at a time, until firm peaks form. Continue to whip until the whites are glossy and stiff.

Pile the whipped egg whites onto the circle you've drawn on the parchment paper, smoothing the sides and the top with a knife or spatula. You want a shallow depression in the top of the circle; this will serve as the receptacle for your whipped cream and fruit.

Bake for 1 ½ hours or until completely dry (it should feel dry and crisp to the touch). Turn off the heat but leave it in the oven, allowing it to cool in there. Once the meringue is completely

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cool, remove the disk from the parchment paper. If you don't plan to serve it immediately, store it in an airtight container on the counter—do not refrigerate.

To make the topping: In a clean bowl for a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whip the cream on low speed for 1 minute, then increase to medium speed and mix for 6 more minutes until thick and airy.

Place the meringue on a serving plate and spread with the whipped cream. Top with the berries and a sprinkle of pumpkin seeds. Cut into wedges and serve. The Pavlova should be eaten right after it is assembled.

