



## Canelé de Bordeaux



The canelé de Bordeaux (a.k.a. cannelé bordelais) is a magical bakery confection, a cake with a rich custardy interior enclosed by a thin caramelized shell. It's a brilliant construction developed long ago by an anonymous Bordeaux cook, whose innovation has been subjected to 300 years of refinements.

Nearly black at first sight, bittersweet at first bite, the crunchy burnt sugar canelé-shell makes an exquisite complement to its smooth, sweet filling, fragrant with vanilla and rum.

Small enough to eat out of hand, these little cakes have recently gained cachet after years of neglect to the extent that they may one day rival the popularity of crème brûlée in the category of caramelized French sweets.

Many recipes don't carry a tale; the canelé carries many. One of the oldest refers to a convent in Bordeaux, where, before the French Revolution, the nuns prepared cakes called canalize made with donated egg yolks from local winemakers, who used only the whites to clarify their wines. Any records that might verify this were lost in the turbulent revolution, thus relegating the convent story to legend.

But the alternative tale may be even better: residents of Bordeaux, who lived along the docks, gleaned spilled low-protein flour from the loading areas, then used it to make sweets for poor children. The small canelé molds, fluted and made of copper or brass, were nestled in embers to be baked.

Whatever the actual derivation, the popularity of canelés has risen and fallen numerous times over the years. Twenty five years ago, when I first started working in Bordeaux, I never heard of these little cakes. No local guide or notable cookbook published since the start of the 20th century even mentioned them. Later, I heard that a few Bordeaux bakers were working to revive their local specialty.

Soon, the little cakes, described by a local culinary historian as shaped like "a Doric column without a base," began cropping up in all sizes and flavorings throughout France. In 1985, stunned by this surge in popularity, 88 Bordeaux patissiers formed a confrérie, or brotherhood, to protect the integrity of their canelés. They staged a "linguistic coup d'état" by removing one of the n's from the old spelling (cannelé) to differentiate their cake, with its secret method of preparation, from bastardized versions. Today, canelé de Bordeaux is the official cake of the city, while cannelé bordelais is a generic name used in Paris, New York City, Osaka, Los Angeles, etc.

"Our canelé de Bordeaux had to be protected and promoted as our own," says Daniel Antoine, a jolly, stocky patissier who operates patisserie Antoine in Bordeaux. "Recently, chocolate and orange canelés have appeared," he tells me. "We don't want them confused with the real thing."

The official recipe, he told me, has been written down and locked in his vault. All 88 patissiers have sworn to protect its secrets. This much is known: the general recipe calls for a

cold batter to be poured into an ice-cold fluted, tin-lined copper mold, then placed in a very hot oven and baked for a very long time. After baking, the canelés are firmly tapped out onto a grill while still hot, then left to cool while their exteriors harden. They're at their most glorious one hour out of the oven; within five or six hours they begin to turn spongy. patissiers have all sorts of tricks to revive them, ranging from putting them back in a hot oven for a few minutes, to flaming them with quality rum to crisp the shells. I believe they're so delicious that they're worth the expense of buying the special copper molds. (See below in recipe notes.) Silicone-coated Gastroflex molds are also available although I don't think they produce as good a result. On the other hand, the Cannele Silicon Flex 2.2" x 1.9" mold available at Bridge's Kitchenware.com is a decent substitute for the copper molds. I brush the insides with a thin coating of "white oil" before using.

"The canelé is an artisanal product, so sometimes it doesn't come out perfectly," Antoine says. When I tell him that my canelés sometimes have pale yellow spots on their tops, he replies, "Oh, sure, I know that problem well. It's due to the puddling of oil in the crevices of the molds. When they come out that way, we say they have 'a white ass!'"

Antoine then compliments me on having figured out one of the major secrets, the special method of combining flour and butter. I had based my findings on a letter I received from him several years back. He smiles as I tell him how I finally succeeded in making delicious canelés with a custardy center. "Yes, I see you understand," he says unbegrudgingly.

Many patissiers line their molds with a film of "white oil" containing beeswax, a messy and highly flammable substance that may deter home cooks. In my opinion, this step is helpful if you want to successfully make canelés (see Cooking Notes below on an easy handling of beeswax).

To fully understand the fabulous quality of a true canelé de Bordeaux, eat it out of hand as a snack, with a glass of wine or a cup of coffee.

Yield 10 - 11 canelés

2	cups whole milk	4	extra-large egg yolks
2	tablespoons unsalted butter, chilled	1	Tbsp. dark rum
3/4	cup cake flour	1	tsp pure vanilla extract
	Pinch of salt		"white oil" (see <a href="#">Cooking Notes</a> )
1	cup minus 2 tablespoons baker's sugar		

1. Rinse a saucepan with cold water; add the milk; set over low heat; heat to 183 degrees F
2. Place butter, flour, and salt in the bowl of a processor; pulse until combined. Scatter sugar on top; pulse once or twice to mix.
3. Add egg yolks; process until mixture begins to tighten.
4. With the motor running, quickly and steadily pour hot milk into batter; stop motor; strain through very fine sieve into clean container; press any congealed yolk through; stir in rum and vanilla extract; cool to room temperature; cover; refrigerate 24 to 48 hours.
5. About 6 to 7 hours before serving, lightly brush the interior of each copper mold with lightly warmed white oil; set on paper towels crown side up to avoid pooling of oil in crevices; set molds in the freezer at least 30 minutes before baking.
6. Heat oven to 400 degrees F; SEE STEP 8 IF USING A CONVECTION OVEN.

7. Place chilled molds 1 1/2" apart on baking sheet; gently stir or shake batter; fill each mold almost to the top; place on lower oven rack; bake 1 3/4 to 2 hours, or until canelés are deep, deep brown in color, or if desired, almost black.

8. If using a convection oven, bake at 375 degrees F for 1 hour, 15 minutes for deep, deep brown canelés.

9. Remove the molds from the oven. Unmold as quickly as possible. To unmold, use an oven mitt to grasp a hot mold; firmly rap the crown side against a hard surface to loosen the canelé; tip out onto a rack; cool to room temperature before serving (about 1 hour); repeat procedure with other canelés while they're still hot (if any canelés resist, bake 5 to 10 minutes longer; OR if necessary, use a toothpick to loosen).

### Notes:

Canelés de Bordeaux is the "politically correct" name for this recipe. Additions or alterations to the recipe will run afoul of the "canelés gendarmes," transforming the baked product into cannelés Bordelais.

To season new molds: heat oven to 350 degrees F; wash the molds in soapy water; rinse; dry thoroughly; heavily grease the interiors with vegetable shortening or oil; place on sheet tray; place in oven 1 hour; remove from oven; place upside down on a rack; return to oven; heat 15 minutes; turn off heat; leave in the oven until room temperature.

After baking, don't wash or scrub the interiors of the molds. To remove baked debris: place the molds in a moderate oven; heat until debris burns; remove debris with paper toweling.

Store lightly oiled molds in a cool covered place.

To make "white oil": Place 1 ounce round of bee's wax in a 1 pint glass measuring cup; melt in a microwave; while still warm, gradually stir in enough safflower oil to make a whitened mixture, light enough to coat the back of a spoon); cool to room temperature; store in the glass container at room temperature.

To coat pre-seasoned canelé molds with "white oil": use dabs of warmed oil to coat the interior and shake out excess.

Canelé batter can be frozen up to two weeks; defrost in refrigerator.

Canelés turn spongy and heavy after 5 to 6 hours. To refresh: heat (without molds) in 450 degrees F oven 5 minutes; remove from oven; let cool until exteriors hardens.

Leftover baked canelés can be frozen up to 1 month; to freeze, wrap individually in plastic wrap; to serve, remove from the freezer; while still frozen, bake unwrapped in 500 degrees F 5 minutes; remove from oven; let rest 30 minutes; bake 5 minutes; remove from oven; cool until exteriors harden.

Canele Molds: The copper, tin-lined molds can be ordered from J.B. Prince (800/473-0577; [jbprince.com](http://jbprince.com)), which carries three sizes (1 1/2" round by 1" high, 1 oz. capacity; 1 1/2" round by 1 1/2" high, 1 1/2 oz. capacity; 2 1/4" round by 2" high, 3 oz. capacity), or from the Parisian culinary equipment store Culinarion (011-33-141-90-09-11; [culinarion.com](http://culinarion.com)). Culinarion carries only one size, the three-ounce capacity mold, because it is the only one that is "politically correct."

Beeswax can be ordered from J&N Sales (765/459-4589 ; [jandnsales.com](http://jandnsales.com).)

Note: You can substitute Nordic Ware's mini-bundt molds available at [cooking.com](http://cooking.com). You will not need to use the "white oil."

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