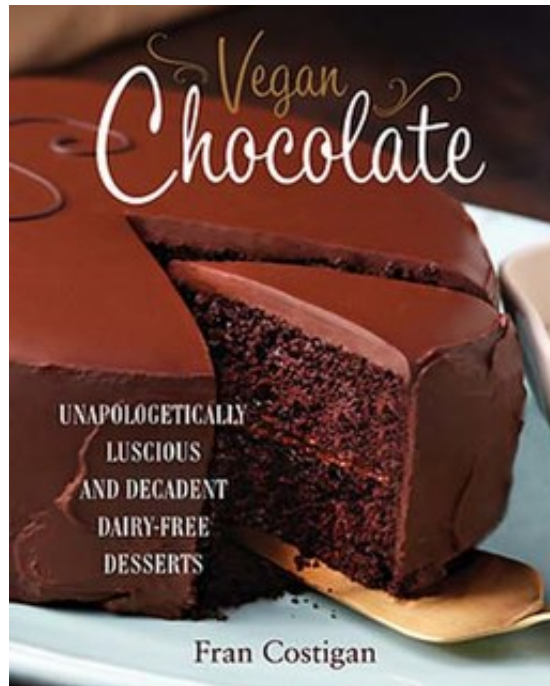


Fran Costigan

Vegan Chocolate - Imperfect copy

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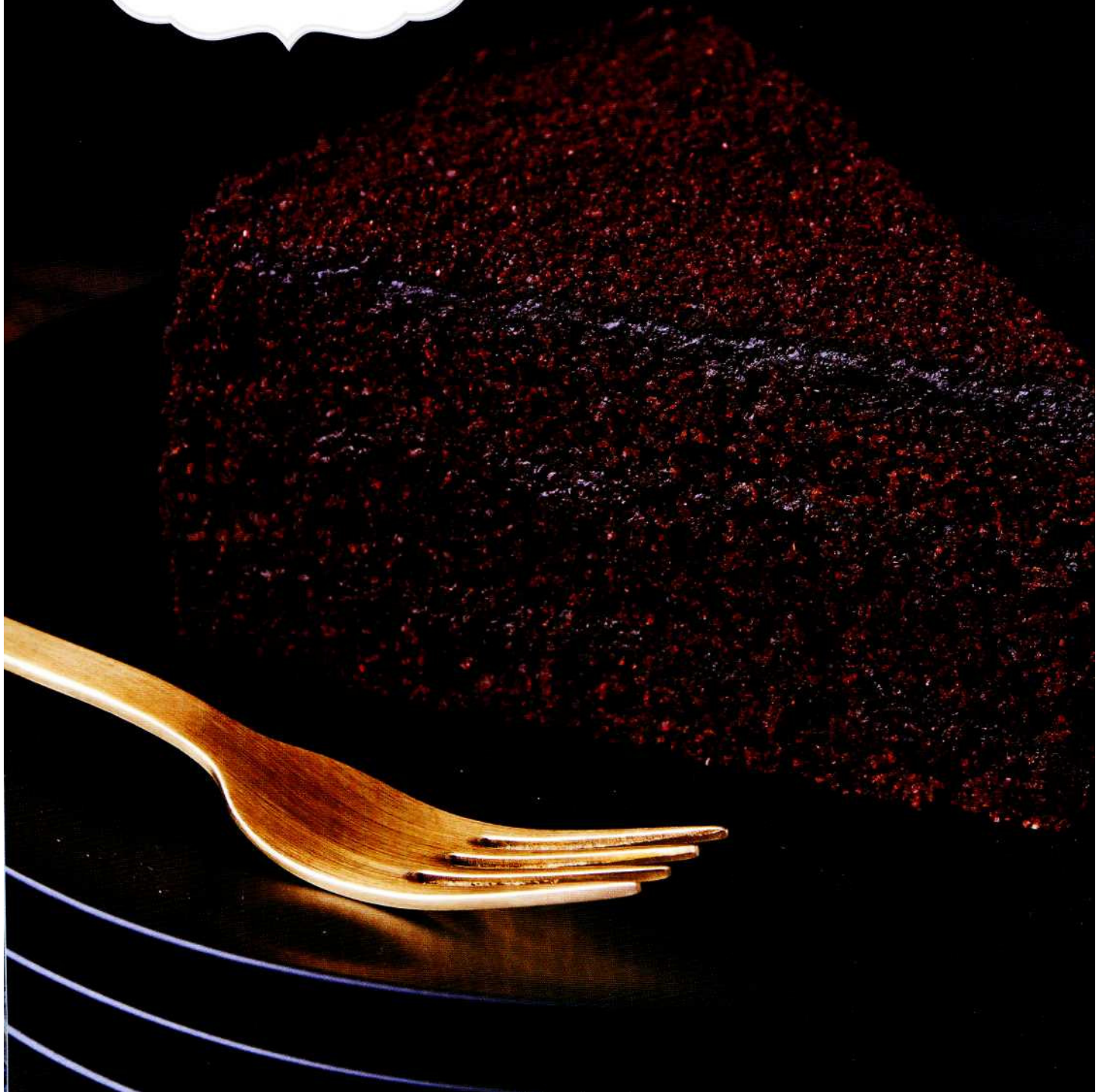
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Introduction



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It doesn't matter where I am—

a cocktail party, the dentist, the hairdresser—as soon as people learn about my work the conversation immediately turns into a discussion about diet, health, and chocolate. "Does dietary restriction mean chocolate deprivation?" (No, it doesn't!) "Can I eat safely and healthfully and still eat chocolate, too?" (Yes, you can!) "Can vegan chocolate desserts possibly taste as good as my old favorites?" (Absolutely! As good as, if not better!)

The same thing happens in my cooking classes. My chocolate-themed classes sell out the fastest, and in any class, faces brighten and hands shoot up whenever chocolate is mentioned. Opinions and memories of favorite chocolate desserts are always readily shared. But very quickly the usual concerns take over: "Is chocolate vegan?" "Are premium high-percentage vegan chocolates available?" "Is it organic? Fair? Single origin?" "Where can I buy it?" "How can I be sure it's safe?" I understand all their questions and concerns, and this book will answer those questions, address those concerns, and more.

My lifelong love of sweets—chocolate in particular—started very early: My mother, Shirley Bernstein, fed me chocolate ice cream for breakfast when I was a toddler. Truthfully, I have no memory of ice cream for breakfast. I do know I've always found milk impossible to swallow, so it is possible Mom resorted to this irresistible treat as a solution to the doctor's order, "Get milk into that child!" It also would have laid the earliest foundation for my chocoholic tendencies.

Not that my taste differed then from most children. Most of my childhood chocolate memories revolve around the standard fare of most of my neighborhood friends: Hostess Cupcakes, Devil Dogs, Oreo cookies, and the iconic Blackout Cake from Ebinger's Bakery in Brooklyn—perhaps the greatest chocolate cake of all time. For those who have never experienced that New York classic, it was a spectacular three-layer chocolate cake filled and frosted with thick chocolate pudding and then showered all over with chocolate cake crumbs.

That Blackout Cake and the home-style, frosting-swirled chocolate layer cake from Custom Bakers in Island Park, New York, were the two special-occasion treats I loved most growing up, and they remain among my favorite dessert memories. (My recipe for a vegan version of the Brooklyn Blackout Cake is in the "Show-stoppers" chapter, page 94.)

Flash forward to my first job out of the New York Restaurant School: pastry chef at a gourmet takeout shop on Manhattan's Upper East Side. It was a dream come true. To everyone's delight, especially my own, I baked muffins, scones, popovers, cookies, pies, and cakes all day, using loads of butter, cream, eggs, and white sugar. Of course I tasted everything I made, but within a short time I began to experience digestive upsets and fatigue that made it increasingly difficult for me to work. After just nine months, I had to leave the job I loved in order to find out what was wrong.

In researching my symptoms, by chance I picked up the landmark book *Food and Healing* by Annemarie Colbin, Ph.D. Her theory that food and health are linked made sense to me. I decided to eliminate all dairy and eggs—in fact, all animal foods—as well as refined sugar from my diet. I resolved to eat only seasonal, organic, wholefoods. In other words, I began following a healthy, plant-based vegan diet. Almost immediately, I felt better—great, even. (It was not until sometime later that I learned, unsurprisingly, I was among the 75% of people worldwide who are lactose intolerant.)

For a while, keeping with my new way of eating, I shunned all sweets. But when my fourteen-year-old son said, "Mom, you can't put a candle in a baked sweet potato and call it my birthday cake," I realized I had gone too far! I came to my senses. I remembered that sweet treats are celebratory and an important part of a balanced life. Vegans—and all people with dietary considerations and restrictions—still celebrate birthdays, weddings, and anniversaries. We sit at the holiday table with family and friends. We love desserts as much as anyone else. My dietary considerations and

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restrictions were not going to deprive my family and me any longer.

Easier said than done, as they say. This was the late 1990s. I soon understood why my professional colleagues were skeptical, believing that "vegan pastry chef" was an oxymoron and that an "excellent vegan dessert" was a contradiction in terms. Vegan desserts were largely uncharted territory with no Facebook and only a few websites and cookbooks available to help. Unless you liked gummy and heavy health-food-style creations, you were out of luck. The biggest insult to me, as a chocoholic, were carob cakes being passed off as chocolate cakes.

Undeterred, I learned all I could about the properties of high-quality vegan ingredients. I tasted, tested, and tweaked, feeling certain that if I could link these ingredients with traditional pastry techniques, I'd get what I was after: *no-apologies-needed delicious desserts that just happen to be vegan*. I refused to accept the verdict, "Well, this is pretty good for what it is," or to use poor quality or analogue ingredients (e.g. margarine instead of butter). I dedicated myself to revamping the mediocre-to-awful vegan desserts and the inaccurate recipes I had found in first-generation vegan cookbooks. I had a lot of work to do.

My first real sense that I was on to something came after I enrolled in the Natural Gourmet Institute Chef Training Program and worked as a pastry chef at a busy organic dairy-free restaurant in Hell's Kitchen in New York City. The chef instructed me to follow the recipes exactly, since the desserts always sold out. I was puzzled by their popularity. I could taste the margarine in the frosting and understood that the tofu in the batter made the cake heavy. I knew I could do better. It took time and testing, but with the first successful version of my margarine-and-tofu-free Chocolate Cake to Live For, I knew I was right. The chocolate cake has since become my signature cake and is my most requested and discussed recipe. Love letters from fans and attention from the media continue to this day.

(The latest version of the cake, The Bittersweet Ganache-Glazed Chocolate Torte to Live For, is on page 68.)

After that breakthrough, I had ample opportunity to hone my craft as a pastry chef at New York City's renowned vegan restaurant, Angelica Kitchen, and develop new recipes for my proprietary vegan pastry classes at the Natural Gourmet Institute. I learned that pesticide- and herbicide-free ingredients are safer for consumers, growers, and the environment, and I committed to using organic ingredients. I realized new techniques were needed to make tender baked goods and started using whole grain flours, healthy plant-based liquid fats (like extra-virgin olive oil and other plant oils), and natural sweeteners. After researching the links between slavery and the production of sugar and chocolate, I opted to buy from companies with ethical policies in place. I was overjoyed to confirm that unsweetened cocoa powder and many fine chocolates—two of the most important ingredients in the pastry chef's pantry—can be vegan, organic, and fair trade.

My vegan recipes evolved from desserts I missed eating, as well as the desserts I see in restaurants and pastry shops, on cooking shows, in cookbooks, and in magazines. I'm inspired by requests I receive from home bakers and professionals who seek vegan versions of their favorite recipes. When I develop recipes, I work within vegan guidelines, use high-quality ingredients, adhere to foundational pastry techniques, and maintain the integrity of the original dessert. These factors result in desserts that are vegan by design only—they don't "taste vegan." I enjoy watching the joyous, if somewhat amazed, reactions when I reveal to doubters that the dessert they just devoured is vegan and I welcome the ensuing challenge: "You have to prove to me that this dessert is vegan!" (This is much more fun and satisfying than the days when defending meant proving that vegan desserts could be good at all.)

But I also know that none of this would mean anything to anyone using this book if my recipes did not



work, were impossible to make, and most importantly, did not taste great. Well, the proof is in the pudding—and the cookies, the cakes, the ice creams. . . . My recipes, from simply made Very Fudgy Chocolate Chip Brownies and Almost-Instant Chocolate Pudding to luxurious Bittersweet Chocolate Truffles and the elegant Opera Cake, will have even the most ardent chocoholics—including any "vegan dessert doubters"—too busy licking their plates to remember that every dessert is completely free of dairy, eggs, white sugar, cholesterol, and saturated fat.

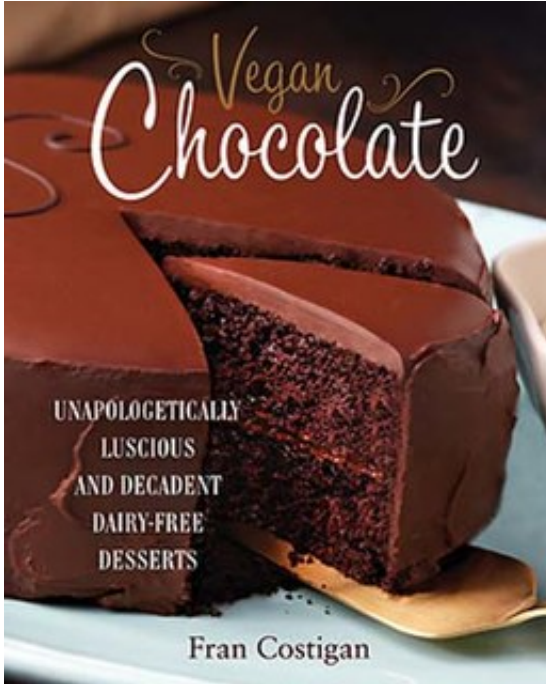
For the dessert novice, this book is a practical guide to demystifying the art of vegan desserts, and for the professionals and everyone in between, it is a comprehensive resource. That none of the recipes include chemically processed, fake, or hard-to-find ingredients is simply "icing on the cake" for the millions of us who, for one reason or another, have chosen a vegan diet.

What these recipes all do include is chocolate. In the past decade, chocolate has come a long way

from Hershey's and Baker's chocolates favored by the doyenne of baking, Maida Heatter. Today's chocolate aficionados are interested in high-percentage, fair-trade, organic, gluten-free, and raw chocolates. They are pleased about the reported health benefits of their favorite bean. Now considered an affordable luxury, premium specialty chocolate bars crowd grocery store and supermarket shelves, no longer the exclusive provenance of a few upscale shops or online vendors. This is why, with the exception of a few recipes using chocolate chips, I use high-percentage dark chocolates in my recipes. I urge you to read the informative first chapter, which is structured so you can find what you need and start cooking immediately. As long as you stay within the range of percentages listed in each recipe, I leave the choice of brand to you—the chocolate that tastes good to you is the right one to use! Because what everyone loves most about chocolate is eating it. So, let's get into the kitchen and start playing with dark chocolate!

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Fran Costigan

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Unapologetically Luscious and Decadent
Dairy-Free Desserts

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