

Salt and Serenity

Smoked Almond Shortbread Sandwich Cookies

These cookies are the creation of cookie genius Mindy Segal, from her book, *Cookie Love*. I have adapted it very slightly.

Makes about 20 sandwich cookies, using a 2¾-inch square cookie cutter.

Shortbread:

2 cups smoked salted almonds

2½ cups all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon kosher salt

½ teaspoon sea salt flakes

13 ounces unsalted butter, sitting at room temperature for about 30 minutes before you start baking

1½ cups icing sugar, sifted

2 extra-large egg yolks at room temperature

2 teaspoons vanilla bean paste or vanilla extract

Frosting:

1 cup (8 ounces) unsalted butter, at room temperature

4 ounces (scant ¼ cup) caramelized white chocolate, melted (**recipe below**)

½ teaspoon vanilla bean paste or vanilla extract

½ teaspoon kosher salt

½ teaspoon sea salt flakes

½ cup raspberry jam or preserves

To Finish:

10 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped

1. Make the cookies: Put the almonds and half the flour in the food processor and blend until a coarse meal forms and no large pieces of almond remain. Pulse in the remaining flour and set aside.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer, fitted with the paddle attachment, mix the butter on medium speed for 10 seconds. Add the sugar and mix on low speed to incorporate. Increase speed to medium and cream butter and sugar until it is aerated and looks like frosting, about 4 minutes. Scrape down sides and bottom of bowl with a rubber spatula.
3. Add yolks, one at a time, and mix until mixture resembles cottage cheese, about 5 seconds per yolk. Add vanilla and mix for 5 more seconds.
4. Add nut-flour mixture, all at once, and mix on low speed just until dough begins to come together, but still looks shaggy, about 1 minute. Dump dough out onto

- the counter and knead gently until it comes together completely. Divide dough into 2 equal pieces and shape each one into a small rectangle, about 4x6 inches.
5. Lightly flour each rectangle of dough and roll each rectangle between 2 sheets of parchment paper until the dough is 11x13 inches and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Chill sheets of dough, still between parchment paper, for about 45 minutes.
 6. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line 4 baking sheets with parchment paper and set aside. Remove one sheet of dough from fridge. Peel off top sheet of parchment paper. Lay parchment back on top of the dough. Peel off top parchment sheet and gently lay it back in place. Flip the dough over; peel off and discard second parchment layer. Roll a dough docker over the dough or pierce it numerous times with a fork.
 7. Using a $2\frac{3}{4}$ -inch square cookie cutter, punch out shapes and transfer to baking sheet. You will be able to fit about 12 cookies on each 13x18 inch-baking sheet. Repeat with second sheet of dough.
 8. Bake, one pan at a time, for 10 minutes. Rotate pan and bake until the cookies feel firm and hold their shape when touched, about 4-5 more minutes. Let the cookies cool completely on baking sheet. Repeat with remaining baking sheets of cookies.
 9. Make the frosting: In the bowl of a stand mixer, fitted with the paddle attachment, mix the butter on medium speed for 10 seconds. Add the sugar and mix on low speed to incorporate. Increase speed to medium and cream butter and sugar until it is aerated and pale in colour, about 4 minutes. Scrape down sides and bottom of bowl with a rubber spatula. Mix in caramelized white chocolate, vanilla and salts until evenly incorporated, 30 seconds to 1 minute.
 10. Transfer frosting to a disposable pastry bag fitted with a $\frac{3}{8}$ " round tip. (Ateco tip #804).
 11. Make pairs of similar sized cookies. Turn half the cookies over. Leaving an $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch border, pipe W's onto the cookies, ensuring that the middle of the W is the same height as the ends. The frosting should be about as thick as the cookie. Dab a small spoonful of raspberry jam on top of the frosting and swirl it gently into the frosting. Top each frosted cookie with a second cookie, pressing lightly to adhere. Refrigerate cookies for about 15 minutes, until frosting is firm.
 12. Line 2 half-sheet pans (13x 18 inch baking sheets) with parchment paper. Place $\frac{3}{4}$ of the chopped bittersweet chocolate into a microwave safe bowl. Microwave on 50% power for 1 minute. Stir well and add remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ of chopped chocolate. Continue stirring until chocolate is totally melted. If necessary, place back in microwave on 50% power for an additional 10 seconds at a time.

13. Dip each filled sandwich cookie about $\frac{1}{3}$ deep into the chocolate. Let excess drip off. Lay on prepared baking sheet. Refrigerate until the chocolate is firm, about 1 hour.

The cookies can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to one week.

Caramelized White Chocolate

Recipe created by Mindy Segal, from "Cookie Love".

Makes about 1½ cups.

12 ounces good quality white chocolate, chopped into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch pieces
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt

1. Preheat oven to 300°F.
2. Put chocolate pieces in an 8x8 inch, or 8x11 inch Pyrex baking dish. Bake white chocolate for 20 minutes.
3. Using a dry rubber spatula, mix the chocolate to smooth out some of the pieces and ensure that the edges aren't caramelizing too quickly.
4. Continue to bake, stirring every 5-10 minutes, until the chocolate has turned a rich caramel colour, similar to peanut butter, approximately 20 minutes more. Some brands of white chocolate melt chalky, instead of smooth. If yours appears chalky, blitz it in the food processor while it is still warm to smooth it out.
5. Stir in salt and pour caramelized white chocolate into a glass mason jar and let cool. The chocolate will harden. To use, partially submerge the jar in a pot of hot water to melt down the sides.