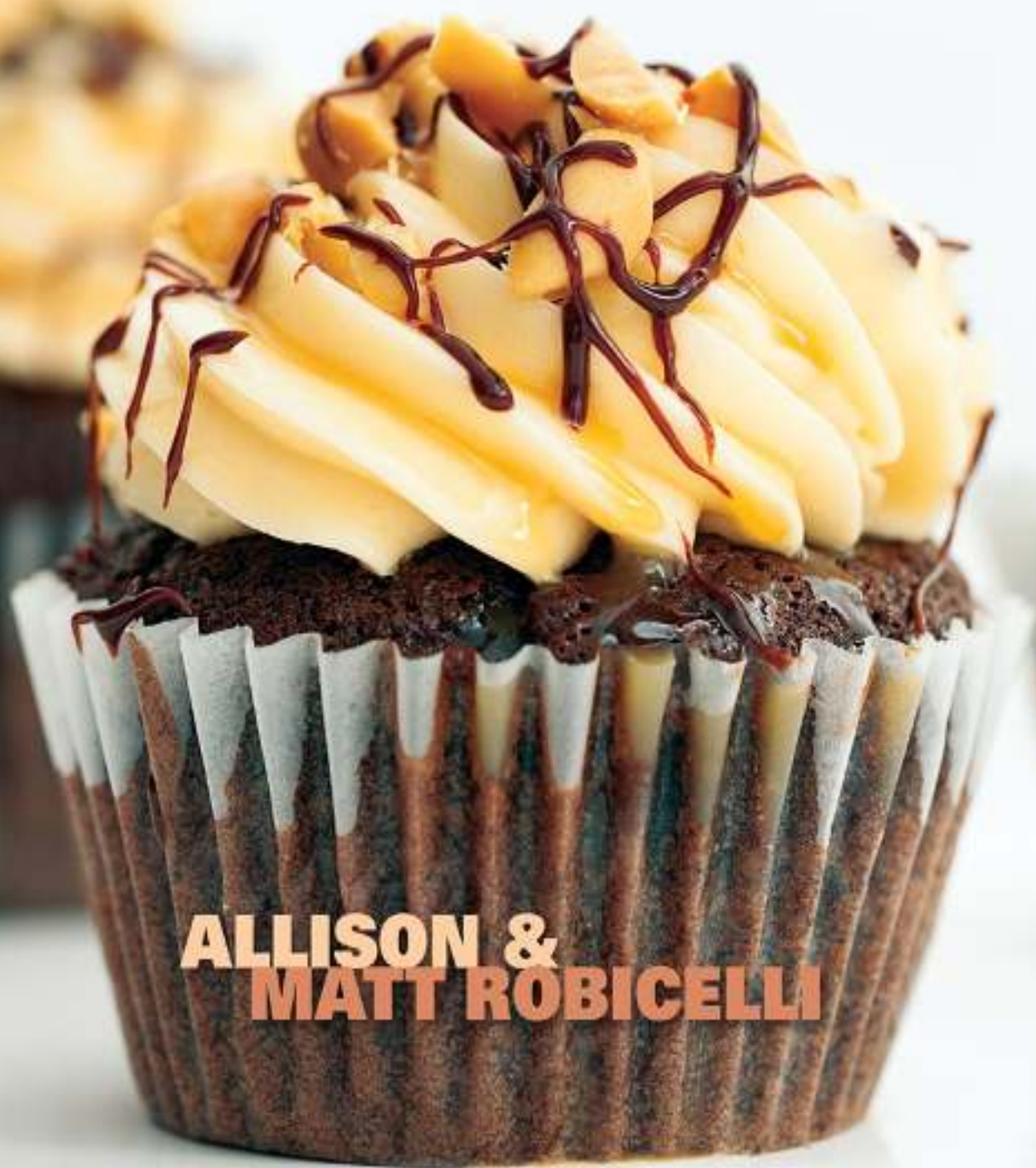


# ROBICELLI'S

A LOVE STORY, WITH

# CUPCAKES

WITH **50** DECIDEDLY  
GROWN-UP RECIPES



**ALLISON &  
MATT ROBICELLI**





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Photographs by Eric Isaac

Viking Studio

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FOR ATTICUS & TOB

because you inspire us to try, to be brave, to attempt to become  
the people we hope you boys will be when you grow up.  
You show us the possibility and magic in the everyday,  
and you are the only thing that's ever truly mattered.

# Contents

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[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Preface](#)

## [\*\*A Love Letter to Cupcakes\*\*](#)

[FRENCH BUTTERCREAM](#)

[AMERICAN FROSTING](#)

## [\*\*A Love Letter to True Love\*\*](#)

[Dom Deluise](#)

[Tarte Bourdaloue](#)

[Car Bomb](#)

[The Iona](#)

## [\*\*A Love Letter to Bacon\*\*](#)

[Elvis](#)

[The Maltz](#)

[The Noah](#)

## [\*\*A Love Letter to the East End\*\*](#)

[The Duckwalk](#)

[The NorthFork](#)

[Red Wine & Peaches](#)

[Cherries Jubilee](#)

## [\*\*A Love Letter to Bad Luck\*\*](#)

[Carrot Cake](#)

[Chocolate PeanutButter Pretzel](#)

[Tres Leches](#)

[Tiramisù](#)

[Pecan French Toast](#)

[Butterbrew](#)

---

## **A Love Letter to Christopher Guest**

[The Laurenzano](#)

[El Melocotón de la Muerte](#)

[El Guapo](#)

[Root Beer Float](#)

[Pecan Potato Chip](#)

## **A Love Letter to Old Brooklyn Bakeries**

[Brooklyn Blackout Cake](#)

[Pastiera di Grano, aka Pizza Grana](#)

[Kiwanis](#)

[The Hinsch](#)

## **A Love Letter to The Golden Girls**

[Bea Arthur](#)

[Estelle Getty](#)

[Rue McClanahan](#)

[Betty White](#)

## **A Love Letter to Compromise**

[Chicken 'n' Waffles](#)

[Buffalo Chicken](#)

## **A Love Letter to Columbus Day**

[Apple MapleCrisp](#)

[Butternut Spice](#)

[Pear Mascarpone](#)

[The Julia](#)

[Pumpkin Spice Latte](#)

## **A Love Letter to Emergency Cake**

[Banana Cream Pie](#)

[Liddabit](#)

[Banana Nutella](#)

[Cinnamon Bun](#)

[Strawberry Rhubarb Crisp](#)

[Banana Cashew](#)

---

[S'mores](#)

## [\*\*A Love Letter to Christmas\*\*](#)

[Crème Brûlée](#)

[Chocolate Chestnut](#)

[The Hansel \(he's so hot right now\)](#)

[The Blatt](#)

[Coquito](#)

[Fruitcake](#)

[\*Acknowledgments\*](#)

[\*Index\*](#)



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“It’s such a fine line between stupid and  
clever.”

—*This Is Spinal Tap*

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# Preface

**Thank you for opening this cookbook!** I know there are many, *many* people out there thinking, “Ugh. This is just what America needs—another fucking cupcake cookbook,” so honestly, just getting you to the opening page is a great start. I mean, you could be reading *any* cookbook right now: *Jacques Pépin’s Techniques*, *Guy Fieri’s Slamma Jamma Porkorama*, *101 Jell-O Shots for Passover*. Yet here you are with *us*, and that’s incredibly special. Welcome! Your presence is appreciated!

As the title suggests, this book is about more than just recipes. Robicelli’s is far more than just a brand—it’s the name of the family Matt and I started the night we met and fell in love.

And because right now, as you and I are entering into a relationship of sorts where I talk and you listen, it seems only right that I give you a quick primer before you metaphorically “jump into bed with us.” Unless you made it through the Jell-O shot book first, in which case you’re free to take off your pants and meet us in whatever damn chapter you’d like.

The first thing you need to know is that our life is about so much more than cupcakes, and so is this book. As much as we’re writing this to teach you how to make our world-famous buttercream or to answer questions like “how do I select a good wine for baking?” we’re also here to tell you about other things we’ve learned along the way: what it’s like to be a struggling mom-and-pop business in the worst economy since the Great Depression, how to keep your sanity when hitting rock bottom, why you should keep at least one “emergency cupcake” in your home at all times, or why we named a collection of cupcakes after *The Golden Girls* (hint: because it’s the greatest television show in human history and so tremendously awesome that I don’t understand why my eyes don’t literally melt when I watch it). Okay, maybe that was more of a straight answer than a hint, but let’s be honest here—the answer was totally obvious. Not like all the questions I’m going to be posing later, such as what the different types of butter and cocoa powder are. The answers to those questions are going to shake the very fiber of your being.

Second thing you need to know is that we’ve both spent just about our entire lives in Brooklyn, meaning that yes, there will be plenty of foul language in this book. Four-letter words, seven-letter words—we’re also planning to make up some brand-spanking-new ones just for this book because this is kinda a big deal for us. While there are people out there who



may take issue with the cursing, I need to remind you that this is pretty much a cornerstone of our native tongue. I could argue that I find it just as offensive when people butcher the English language by saying things like “y’all,” “arsle,” “hella,” or “Kardashian.” If it wasn’t for curse words and grandiose hand gestures, I don’t know if Brooklynites would even be able to communicate. In fact, I had requested that holograms of me making dramatic hand gestures be included in the book, but my publisher said it was “too expensive,” which is total fucking bullshit.

**Matt says:** *You can’t put a price on awesome, motherfuckers!*

And finally, know that we love you. Yes, *you*. Some of you are just discovering us; many don’t know our full story except for the fact that we’re two of the most lauded cupcake bakers in the country. None of this happened overnight, none of it was easy, and none of it would have happened if it wasn’t for people just like you supporting us. We’ve had only one dream in our lives, and that was to make millions of people happy. If you make one or two of our recipes, share them with friends, help us make more people smile, then we love you for it. Thank you.

So, welcome to this book. *Robicelli’s: A Love Story, with Cupcakes* is more than just, well, a love story with cupcakes. It’s a recession survival story. It’s about being as brave as you can when life throws its worst at you, and coming out on top. It’s about challenging yourself, laughing at yourself, making mistakes and forgiving yourself for them. It’s falling on your face over and over again and not letting that stop you. It’s about never giving up on what you love no matter how bad things seem to get.

And in between all that, it’s about cupcakes. And yes, they are ridiculously delicious.





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# A Love Letter to Cupcakes



**Dear Cupcake Haters, Cupcake-Hating Media, Cupcake Conspiracy Theorists, Etc.,**

**We get it, okay?** We get why you hate cupcakes. We get how your toes curl at the “tweeness” of them, how you have a biological impulse to reject any edible that comes in colors not found in nature, how you have a natural suspicion of food that can be customized to feature a cutout of Justin Bieber’s head on top of it.

We accept this. We understand. We agree.

Do you know what’s *not* okay? Generalizing and dismissing the entire genre. Just because there are plenty of mindless, gimmicky, cutesy-wootsy bakeries out there whose saccharine sweetness is only outdone by the glitter-enhanced pure-sugar bombs they create does not mean that there are not literally thousands of excellent bakeries all across the world that are making something exceptional. If you could get over your shit for five minutes, go inside one of these places, and try something, you’d see that.

In case you’ve never seen the list of things that are irrefutably wonderful in the world, here’s an excerpt of the first five entries:

- 1. Baby animals**
- 2. Regular ol’ babies**
- 3. Cats in funny outfits like they think they’re people or something!**
- 4. Watching a guy get hit in the nuts**
- 5. Cake**

Please tell me of one child you know who has anxiously looked forward to blowing out the candles on his hunk of small-batch farmstead birthday cheese. A happy couple who eschewed a delicious tiered wedding cake for a celebratory artisan pickle bar. An adorable grandma who has invited her loved ones over to catch up over some locally sourced spelt crackers and kombucha.

*Everyone* likes cake! Any time something really awesome is going down, cake gets involved: birthdays, bar mitzvahs, going-away parties, good-intentioned kinky sex that doesn’t work out as well as *Cosmo* implied that it would, weddings—the list is endless. Cake means something wonderful has happened; cake makes everyone smile a little on the inside.

Problem is, you normally have to buy a whole cake to get in on the action. But now, by the grace of God, we no longer need to wait for a special occasion, nor do we have to shamefully



eat an entire cake by ourselves while watching TV movies and crying. We can buy a piece of cake meant to serve only one person! When you're having a bad day, you can buy a cupcake to turn the day around and make yourself feel special. You can call an old friend, ask him or her to meet you over a cupcake and a few cups of coffee, and just talk. You can buy several for the office to win the love of your coworkers.

Who of you has a problem with that? Who hates joy and happiness and catching up with people you love? If anything, the most maddening thing about this whole cupcake nonsense that I can't believe it took someone so long to think of this. It's really such a smart idea.

Yet despite this logic, the media have been wondering what brand-new sweet is going to knock the glorious, beloved cupcake off its proverbial perch, when universally it will be rejected by every red-blooded American and reporters can finally leave cupcakes in the past. "Surely it's only a trend," they say. I mean, it's a trend that's been going on for close to twenty years now, but that just means it's all about to go south soon. Unlike fucking *normal* foods, desserts secretly hate one another and are incessantly plotting how to destroy all their competitors! Especially the Napoleons!

You don't see people getting this pissed off about sandwiches, do you? What do you think sandwiches are? They're just an entire meal made portable and personal size. How about burgers, which are portable steak? Or buying a slice of pizza instead of getting the entire pie. All the same logic. Yet I've never once seen a food writer say that burgers as we know them are over because he stopped at McDonald's for lunch or wondering what the "next" sandwich would be.

Maybe it's because of the sprinkles thing. Or because some people are just allergic to joy and too myopic to understand. Or maybe because for the first time in forever an entire arm of the food-service business is being owned and operated predominantly by women, and lord knows we can't have that. That's right, I said it. You hate cupcakes and therefore you're a sexist pig just like A. C. Slater. You should go put on some Z. Cavaricci pants, sit in a corner and feel terrible about yourself. (You know what makes us feel better when we feel like that? Cupcakes. You may want to [click here](#) and we can help you out.)

Cupcake haters, you're beginning to sound like that crazy old man who sits in front of the diner yelling about how Asian people are taking over the country and he has the microfilm in his bread box to prove it. You can either bitch about something or fix it. We're trying to do the latter.

We decided to buck the "stupid cupcake trend" that we so hated and do things our way. Nothing pink and cutesy and covered with sprinkles and ever so adorable. Nothing that tastes like asbestos or pure sugar. We don't use food coloring (and absolutely will *not* make "red velvet"). We don't rely on making cupcakes look like fuzzy bunnies or puppy doggies to help them sell. We don't cloak ourselves in a borderline condescending-girly aesthetic. In fact, one of us is a dude, and a gigantic behemoth of one who could probably take you down with one punch if he has enough gin in him.

*Matt says: Gin makes me fight*

What we *do* is think the same way we did back when we were making desserts for fancy-pants restaurants—balancing flavors and textures, relying on *flavor* instead of pure sugar, creating sweets that were both thoughtful and delicious. We design recipes around great ingredients and make just about everything in our kitchen from scratch—candies, compotes,

the whole shebang.

Cupcakes are *not supposed to be stupid!* They should be so much more than just aesthetics, so much more than a cutesy, polka-dot novelty. They should be a small piece of the greatest cake you have ever had in your entire fucking life. That's all.

Maybe you all could put down the torches and pitchforks and try giving cupcakes another chance? Go out and try a few in your neighborhood. Find some you love and tell everyone you know about them. Reward the thousands of bakeries that make a spectacular product, and soon enough people will stop relying on red dye 40 to stand out and start relying on nothing but quality. If you demand better from your food, you'll begin to find better options more often. If you hit a dead end, try out a few of these recipes and see what we're talking about. They're so good, someone decided there needed to be a book about them!

And if that's too much to ask? Then just shut the fuck up already and let other people be happy. It's cupcakes, people. Not anything important, like sports or something.

**Hugs and kisses, Allison and Ma**

## **WHY WE READ THINGS THROUGH BEFORE WE BAKE**

So let's say you bought this book specifically for our famous Chicken 'n' Waffles recipe. You go home, skip the intro and all the other stuff that I worked so hard on for the better part of *two freaking years*, and go straight to baking. You decide to start by making the cake and frosting it, then right when you're ready to start on the chicken, the entire point of the cupcake, you notice that you're supposed to soak it in buttermilk for *twenty-four hours* before starting anything. Or you promise your mom you're bringing fruitcake cupcakes to Christmas Eve dinner, then that morning you realize you needed to rehydrate all the fruit in brandy overnight. Or you're ready to make the buttercream for our blueberry port cupcake, only to learn that you need to reduce your blueberry port to a syrup and then chill it so it doesn't melt the butter when it goes in.

## **THIS IS WHY YOU READ THE ENTIRE FREAKING RECIPE BEFORE YOU GO JUMPING IN LIKE A LUNATIC AND DO SOMETHING STUPID.**

There are some recipes in this book you can execute within an hour, some that take a few hours, some that take a day or two. There're some with a few components, and some with so many that you'll need to use every bowl you have in your kitchen. You wouldn't drive somewhere without reading the directions first, you wouldn't go scuba diving without listening to directions from a professional, you wouldn't jump off a bridge onto a moving train just because you saw some guy do it on TV once and it didn't look *that* hard. So don't just go trying to do things without reading the directions—*all* the directions—first.

And while we're on the topic of being prepared . . .

## **WHY WE MISE-EN-PLACE BEFORE WE BAKE**

Before we start any project, professional chefs make sure we have everything out, measured and ready to go. We call this *meis-en-place*, which is French for "everything in its place." My father calls this "getting all your shit together," because he has an irrational fear of the French. I think a poodle bit him once or something—I don't fucking know. I just deal with it and

understand that we say things like “freedom fries” at my parents’ house.

Whatever you want to call it, *mise-en-place* is important. Very often in cooking, especially when you’re working with sugar, the time you have to add an ingredient is just a matter of seconds. If you’re making caramel and you don’t have your cream ready by the time the sugar is done, the whole thing will burn and you’ll have to start again from the beginning. Plus getting everything ready is going to make your time in the kitchen exponentially easier and more enjoyable, which is the whole point of doing it in the first place. If you don’t enjoy baking you just shouldn’t do it; leave it to the professionals. Otherwise, we’ll all go broke and you won’t have anyone to write cookbooks for you.

## THINGS YOU NEED

When you’re buying kitchen equipment, it’s not always necessary to break the bank, but don’t cheap out either. You’re much better off buying a piece of equipment that’s going to be guaranteed to work every time you need it rather than choosing something that’s a fraction of the price but will need to be continually replaced or, worse than that, fail while you’re in the middle of a recipe.

### STAND MIXER

If you are going to attempt to make our famous French buttercream, then you need a stand mixer. This is absolutely, 100 percent nonnegotiable. If you try to do it with a handheld one, you run a very real risk of burning yourself horribly, and nothing sucks the joy out of a day of cupcakin’ quite like skin grafts.

### HAND MIXER

In the event you’re not a serious baker and just bought this book for the sexy pictures, foul language, and perhaps for killing spiders, you probably have no intention of going out and buying a crazy expensive stand mixer just to make our cupcakes. However, you most definitely have a handheld mixer—I don’t even remember buying one in my lifetime, yet there are like six of them in my apartment. Go check your cupboard right now—it’s there. Probably came with your house.

If you don’t want to get any kind of mixer, you can make the cake parts with a whisk and a bit of elbow grease, but if your arm *literally* falls off when making American Frosting, don’t hold us accountable. And also don’t tell people that you got your stumpy-ass arm in their frosting, because that’s just gross.

### MEASURING CUPS AND SPOONS

We use lots of weights in our kitchen, but we know most home cooks don’t. That’s totally okay—we’ve converted everything for you. For dry ingredients, use solid metal measuring cups with a strong handle, scoop out your ingredient, shake back and forth *lightly* to settle, then scrape straight across the top with the back of a butter knife to level. *No packing anything down!* (Unless we explicitly say to do so.) Same deal with measuring spoons.

You’ll also need a special measuring cup just for liquids. Get one that’s at least four cups, see-through, and microwavable because we do a lot of heating things up and melting things up there. We love classic Pyrex and the OXO angled model.

## CANDY THERMOMETER

This is the next piece of equipment that's nonnegotiable if you're attempting French buttercream. Working with molten sugar is just like being in chem lab back in high school—there is a ton going on at the molecular level that you cannot see, and cannot judge by sight or timing. It's a finicky material that acts differently every day due to things like humidity, barometric pressure, acidity, and altitude. I could explain further, but then we'd be venturing into the “nerd book” category, and it's specifically written out in my author contract that I'm writing a cookbook for the cool kids out there who wear leather jackets and shoot dice on street corners.\*

There are two ways to know if your sugar is done, the first being by taking a small ball of molten sugar, dropping it in water, then examining the viscosity by rolling the ball between your fingertips. Why do we recommend you buy a candy thermometer over this other, non-special-equipment-requiring method? Because unless you no longer have any feeling left in your hands like us pros, this method is dangerous. It is an outdated and imprecise technique that pastry chefs used to determine temperature in the days before candy thermometers. Sure, it looks badass, but those guys would also stuff leeches into their pants if they felt feverish so all the “devil blood” would get sucked out of them. We live in the twenty-first century now. There's no need for amateurs to be rolling hot sugar in their hands and putting animals in their pants.

*Matt says: Unless you're into that stuff. We're looking at you, Florida.*

When you see pastry chefs use this method on TV, they're really doing it to illustrate why we call the stages soft ball and hard ball, etc. In the kitchen, we all use thermometers. When it comes straight down to it, thermometers are more accurate than people. In due time, we'll all be replaced by the thermometers, who will rule our land with an iron fist as they force humanity into the ground to mine for their precious mercury.

When picking a candy thermometer, the only hard rule is that it *must* clip onto the side of the pan. Make sure what you're buying is specified as a “candy/fry thermometer”—a regular old probe thermometer you use for roasts just isn't going to cut it. Analog thermometers are the cheapest option and easiest to clean (just put them in a pot of boiling water). We prefer the type that is encased in stainless steel, because it has a guard on the bottom that prevents direct contact between the bulb and the pan. You want the bulb of your thermometer to be suspended in the molten sugar to get an accurate temp—otherwise you're getting the temperature of the pan, everything will go wrong, you'll throw it out and try again just to have everything go wrong a second time, end up just using that canned crap frosting and praying that nobody notices. (Of course, everyone *will* notice, and you'll be branded a liar for the rest of your life. See how quickly your entire life went south, all because you picked the wrong thermometer?)

If you have lousy eyesight, or plan to do a lot of candy making/sugar work and want perfectly precise temperatures, you may want to invest in a digital version. It requires a little extra care and needs to be cleaned by hand so as not to get the entire thing wet, but you really can't beat the feeling of security you get when you just *know* your sugar is done. Kinda like the feeling I got the first time I wore Spanx.

*Matt says: We're fully aware we're making this hot sugar stuff sound absolutely terrifying, but trust us, once you get the hang of it, it's easy. We just don't want anyone to get all caught up in the excitement of cupcake baking, start jumping and dancing and flinging hot suga*

*around, horribly disfiguring all the friends, then suing us. Also, if you were coincidentally looking for a way to "accidentally" horribly disfigure all your friends, we heavily discourage it, thereby releasing ourselves from all liability potentially incurred by this entire paragraph.*

## NONREACTIVE CANDY POT

By this, we mean a four-quart stainless steel saucepan that flutes out a bit at the top. There's a good reason for that lip: when tempering hot sugar syrup into a stand mixer with all its parts moving, that lip will help keep the edge of the pot steady while you slowly pour in the sugar. Make sure the pot is not so heavy that you can't easily lift it if it's full of scalding-hot sugar.

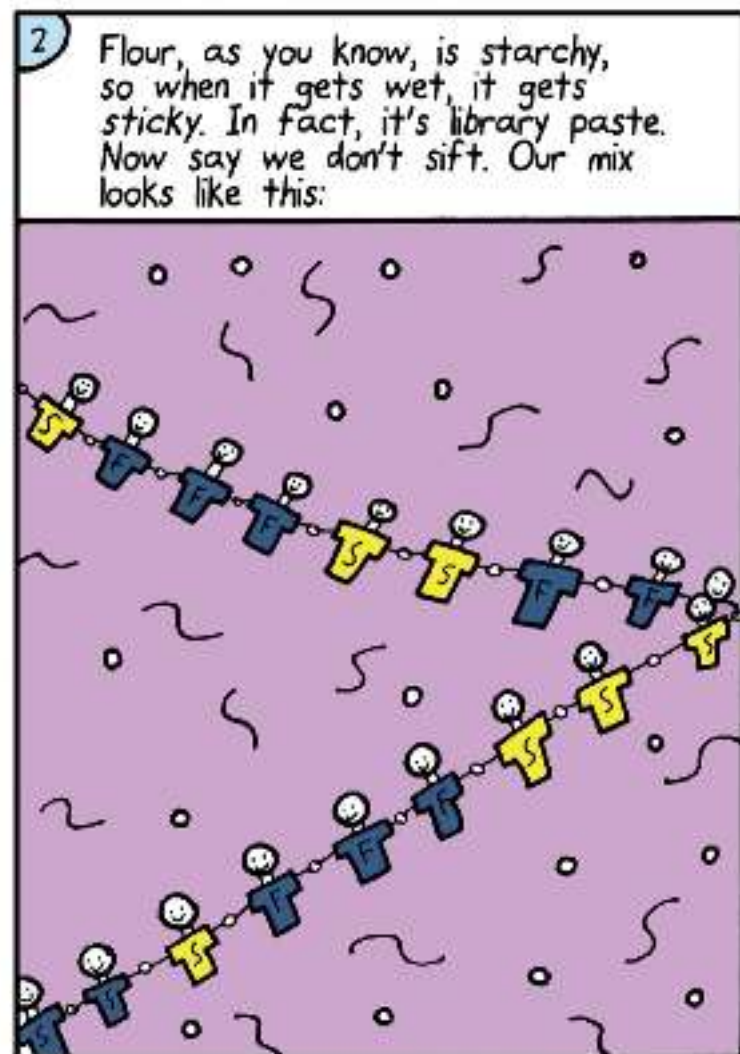
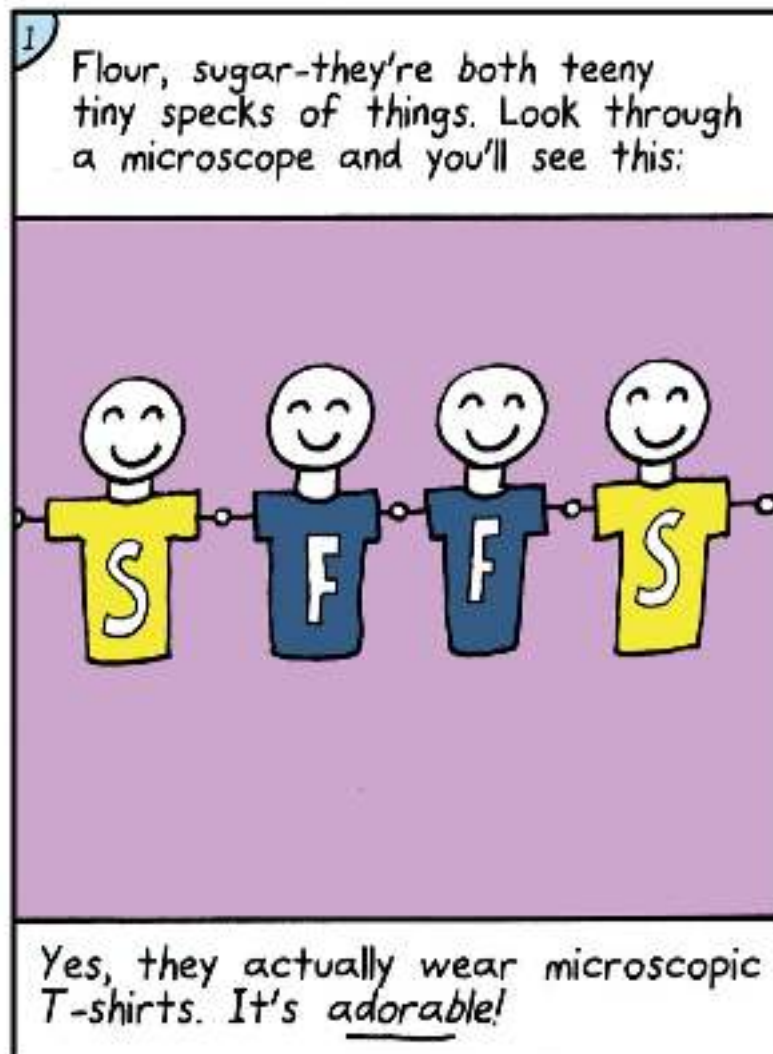
## MICROPLANE GRATER

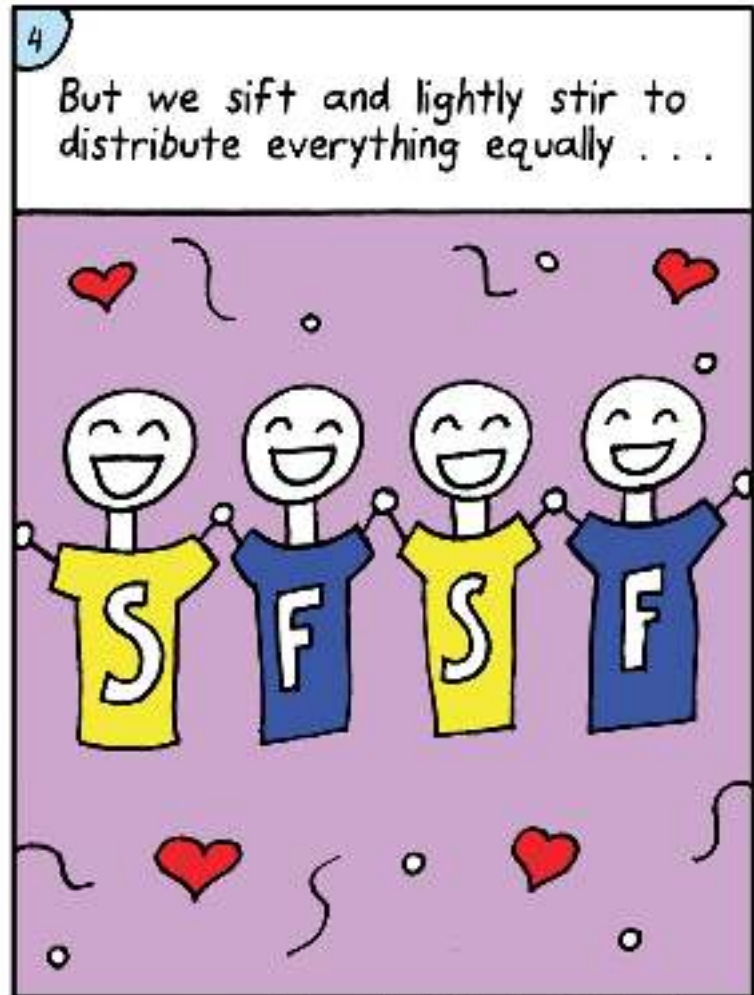
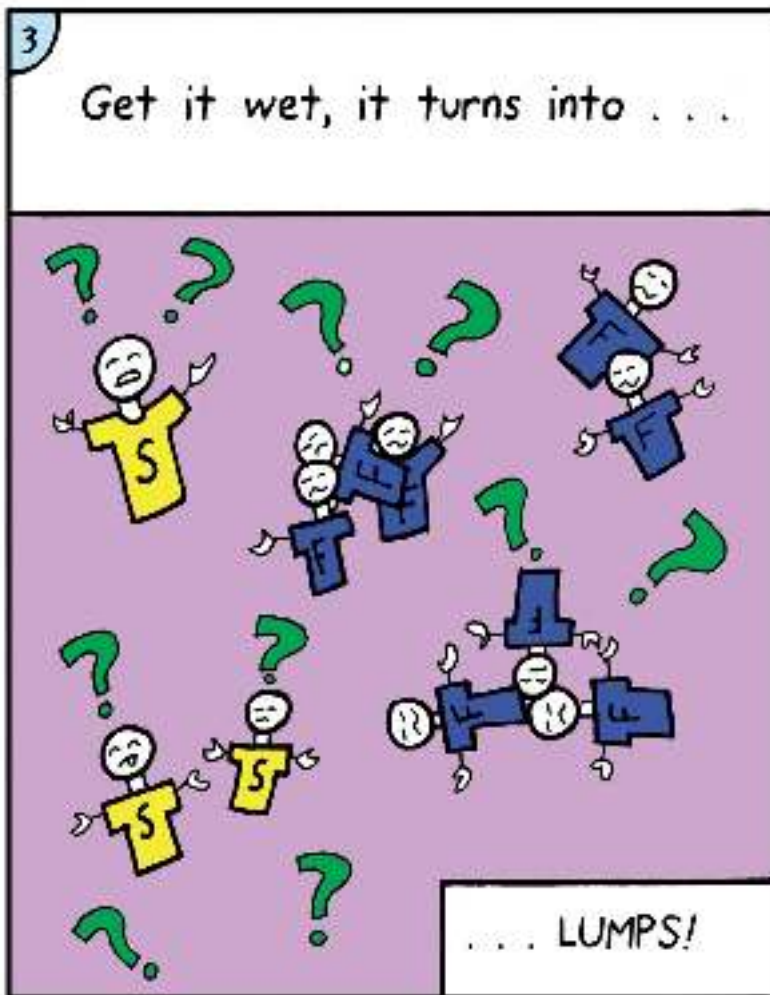
This is what we use to grate nutmeg, and yes, you really do need to grate that fresh. We also use it for citrus zest and shaving chocolate.

## SIFTER

You don't need one of those weird little flour sifters with the hand crank that makes you look like a little dancing monkey. We use a plain old wire-mesh strainer, the same kind you probably have lying around your house right now. We just saved you about four bucks. This book just keeps paying for itself!

## WHY WE SIFT





Story: Alison Robicelli Art: Abby Denson

### REALLY BIG BOWL

We sift everything together into a big bowl, then lightly stir it together so all the ingredients are combined *before* we add them to our liquid ingredients. You've got a big bowl lying around somewhere. If you don't, go buy one. It's good for popcorn, really big salads, and using as a makeshift helmet during an impromptu slap-boxing match.

### CHEF'S KNIFE

This is one item that we implore you to spend good money on—buy the right one, and it will last you so long you can be buried with it. Another plus: That will look totally badass at your funeral.

We like Wüstof, we like Henckels, and personally, we use Shun. All of these will run you well over \$100 for a single chef's knife. But before you go look them up on the Internet and pass out over the fact that a nice set of Shuns will run you several thousand dollars, know that you really need only spend a small fortune on a 10-inch chef's knife, as it's the workhorse of the group and you'll do everything with it. A home cook doesn't need a \$200 bread knife, or a special knife "just for vegetables," or \$600 worth of steak knives (unless you want everyone to know how rich you are, in which case, more power to you!).

### BIG FAT HEATPROOF SPATULA

More than once I've grabbed a spatula to use on the stove, just to realize I've accidentally grabbed a non-heatproof one and ended up with a destroyed spatula and melted plastic in my

food. This is why I say that when buying a spatula, always be sure it's heatproof. When working with batters, we always want to use as few motions as possible so that we don't develop the gluten in the flour, or deflate foams we've whipped. A nice big spatula has lots of surface area to help you fold, scrape, and do everything else with fewer motions.

## OVEN THERMOMETER

I think someone did a study once that proved that 112 percent of ovens are calibrated to the wrong temperature. Don't ask me to prove it—I have no time to be doing your Googling—but the point is that every oven has hot spots, cold spots, runs a few degrees hotter or cooler than what it says on the dial. It's a good idea to invest in an oven thermometer to keep track of what's going on in there. To check for hot/cold spots, a great trick is to layer some baking sheets with white bread and bake on the center rack of your oven at 350°F until they brown.

Those places where the bread burned are hot spots—watch out for those! Make sure you rotate your pans halfway through, and constantly keep your eye on what you're baking, particularly in the last five minutes of cooking time.



## CUPCAKE PANS

We use plain old standard 12-cup cupcake pans. The ones we used in testing these recipes were nonstick aluminum, and the baking times reflect that. If you're just starting out and buying all-new baking supplies, go ahead and buy that type. But if

*Matt says: If you ask a chef how long to cook something, we all say "until it's done." And that's not a joke—that's exactly how long you*

you've already got pans, or like using silicone, or are just trying something out once and using disposable pans, by all means go forth and bake. However, know that this will affect the cooking times we've noted, so keep an eye on things and take your own notes.

Because many of our cupcakes involve fillings, soaks, and other types of manipulation, they really don't lend themselves to mini pans (though if you're just baking off straight cake and topping it with buttercream, a mini pan would do—just cut the cooking time by two thirds and check regularly).

We do not use the “jumbo” pans to make those gigantic monstrosities of cupcakes that people are now beginning to believe are supposed to be standard size. Next time you see one of those at a warehouse store or megamart, check out the nutritional label for a minute. Those “cupcakes” are actually *two* servings. What that means is you need to look at the calorie count, the fat, the sugar, and all the other stuff you normally like to ignore—then double it. Now, I'm not saying our cupcakes are good for you—they absolutely are not. But we firmly stand by our belief that dessert should be one insanely indulgent serving, and if you want more than one (like I always do), that's up to you. We're not about fine print or deceiving people—we have far too much respect for our customers to do that.

We also don't make those giant “big top” cupcakes because when you make a gigantic cupcake, it's called a fucking cake.

## PASTRY BRUSH

In the past few years manufacturers have come out with silicone brushes that are pretty nice for working with sugar: You don't have to worry about losing bristles and having them end up in your food; they clean easily in the dishwasher; they stand up to high heat. We're big fans of the ones OXO makes.

## PASTRY BAG AND TIPS

We pipe all our buttercream because piping makes it exponentially easier for us, not to mention that it makes the cupcakes all sexified. We also use disposable piping bags that you can pick up either online or at a cake decorating store—those cloth ones are a *massive* pain in the ass to clean, especially if you don't have a washing machine or dishwasher.

I'm sure many of you are familiar with the trick of using a zip-top bag to pipe, but we've always found this technique extremely awkward. If you're going to go through all that trouble, you're better off just buying a pack of the disposable bags, because each one will probably run you less than fifty cents and save you a whole lot of headaches.

We use two different styles of tips: a plain, wide open pastry tip and a fluted open star tip (#8, if you want to be twinsies with us!). We use the plain tip for any cupcake that we're dipping in chocolate fudge, because that tip gives the cupcake a nice flat surface area for the coating to cling to, and the fudge looks silky smooth and gorgeous once it sets.

For the rest, we use a fluted tip for a good reason. Many of our cupcakes have a liquid component on top, like a fruit compote, or a sauce like caramel or ganache. The ridges made by the fluted tip not only create little nooks and crannies for these toppings to stick to, but

*cook something. Cooking times are always guidelines—every stove, every oven puts out heat differently; things change based on altitude, if the barometric pressure is high that day—there are so many variables that if we listed them all, would be insanely boring for you to read. Point is, chefs know when food is done because we're constantly paying attention to it, letting it tell us when it's ready. You should do that too.*



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