

Rediscovering Chico-Sapote in Hyde Park at: *The Culinary Institute of America*

By: Chef Alain Dubernard and Marnely Rodriguez

Bakeshop One, for all the Culinary students out there, is the last “bakeshop” class in the AOS curriculum. Bakeshop 1, Restaurant Production Desserts, is popularly known as “Plated Desserts”, where we are open two days in the block to the public and serve a la minute desserts from our stations and everyone can enjoy a delicious dessert, free of swipe! After this, we head into Apple Pie Bakery and Café.

Chef Alain Dubernard CHE CMB, of French-Mexican descent, has been with the CIA for the past 6 years and has developed an excellent curriculum based on techniques and experiences he has learned from his years of owning his own business and working in the industry. Once a block, Chef Dubernard has a tropical fruit lecture and mystery basket. Chef has direct contact with **Louise King, President of the South Florida Tropical Fruit Growers Association** (<http://www.tropicalfruitgrowers.com>) and the growers are happy to send Chef fruits in an effort to give the students an opportunity get to know new and interesting fruits and find and discover different ways to present and cook with them. Bakeshop One has been graced with the presence of Mamey, Carambola, Longan and Sapodilla.

Chef D: “Normally, in my class my students are adventurous when it comes to exploring new foods and new ideas about creating desserts. You have not yet become stuck in a comfort zone. With your fresh approach, you can really come up with amazing ideas. As an instructor, I relish the opportunity to introduce as many new tropical fruits to my students as possible. I want to encourage you to work with these fruits to develop recipes and presentations.

My class is the last classroom setting for the students of the baking and pastry AOS program. This is your opportunity to extend your product knowledge and reassert your skills using all of the different techniques you learned previously. What makes these tropical fruits interesting from a pastry chef’s perspective is the challenge to enhance those delicate flavors without overwhelming them. And that challenge is one that I believe my students are ready to tackle. To that end, I created a specific activity to introduce you to the fruit.”

When Chef D said that the tropical fruit that would be shipped to us was Chico-Sapote, I was excited to say the least. Chico-Sapote is a common fruit found in stands on the streets of home, the Dominican Republic, and not one I would ever expect to enjoy in cold, snowy Hyde Park. But it was reality in Bakeshop One and when the boxes arrived with the fresh fruit carefully wrapped in bubble wrap, my eyes that had been very concentrated making my dessert

for the day darted rapidly and watched Chef Dubernard unwrapped them as precious jewels. As some of my classmates made it up to the station where it was being unwrapped, I just kept a look out. I knew the fruit and it was common, even too common at times so I didn't need to get to know it again. But I could not wait and left my station to taste the fresh fruit. Chef had cut up pieces for us to try and when I placed the ripe, juicy fruit in my mouth, memories of home flashed into my head and mouth and I was happy. Who would've though this amazing fruit would come meet me all the way up in Hyde Park, New York?

Chef D: "I personally like this fruit very much. It reminds me of San Rafael, Veracruz one of my favorites places in the Gulf of Mexico. We have a beautiful Chico-Sapote tree in that place, it's an ever green tree, distinguished and sumptuous, its leaves are notably ornamental. Eating a fresh Chico, from the tree in a hot sunny day enjoying its shade is great. Mature near ripe fruit will fall when the tree is shaken. Never leave a car under a Chico Sapote tree it can be a pain to clean. "

Our task was the following: take the Chico-Sapote fruit and the techniques applied in class and come up with an original dessert that showcased the fruit in its entire splendor. With a rind that can act as a serving plate and an earthy, brown pulpy interior, Chico-Sapote is a sweet fruit with nuances of cream because of the soft texture and mouth feel. Originating in Southeast Mexico, this particular fruit, Manilkara Sapota, Known in the United States as "Sapodilla" it's also called "Chico Sapote", "Naseberry", "Chicle" or "tree potato," It's related to the Lucmo, the Canistel and the Green Sapote (the Sapotaceae.) The name comes from the Nahuatl word Zapotl used to identify several types of plants. The Tzictli-Zapotl which means *the gum tree* is believed to be native of the Yucatan, the north of Guatemala and Belize. It is grown in Mexico, Central America, parts of South America, the west Indies and thankfully now in South Florida by to the **South Florida Tropical Fruit Growers Association**. Thanks to their efforts, we can enjoy them today in the United States. The Sapodilla flowers twice a year.

Chef D: "They can be seedless but usually has from 2 to 12 hard, black shiny and flattened seeds in the center of the fruit, the seed kernel can be toxic due to the content of saponine, and the ingestion of more than six seeds can cause abdominal pain and vomiting. It is important to eat the Sapodilla when completely ripe otherwise they are astringent due to the saponine. It is aromatic with a very pleasant flavor, very sweet from a fruity pear to brown sugar and sugar cane with a touch of maple.

The Chicle (Tzictli in Náhuatl, Ya in Mayan), or Latex tapped from the trunk of the tree was once done to produce candles and chewing gum. The dried Chicle was chewed by the Mayas and the Mexicas these last ones used to chew it in private a matter of politeness a custom that still prevails. It was introduced to the US by the General former president of Mexico Antonio Lopez de Santana about 1866 while he was on Staten Island awaiting clearance to enter

this country. He had a supply in his pocket for chewing and gave a piece to the son of Thomas Adams. He found he could easily add flavor to it, and soon launched the Chicle bases chewing gum industry. In 1930 at the peak of production nearly 14,000,000 lbs of Chicle was imported (Chiclets Adams). At this time the chewing gum is made with chemical substances, basically with polyvinyl acetate, not with Chicle. The latex from the Chico these days is used for adhesives, paints and stains. The lumber made with this tree is strong and used in marine construction, musical instruments, fine furniture and arts and crafts.”

The following are some common uses of the Chico-Sapote fruit in the culinary and baking world:

- ❖ Ideally eaten chilled straight from the fresh fruit, added to fruit salads
- ❖ Dessert sauces can be made by peeling and seeding, pressing the flesh through a colander, adding orange juice and reduced
- ❖ Chico-Sapote milk shakes

Chef D: “This is a fruit that can be eaten raw or featured fresh in a tart. Chico can also be pureed and made in to a frozen dessert or ice cream, in to custard or a soufflé. A dash of lemon makes the fruit seem less sweet and more balanced, It pairs well with nuts, coconut, orange, tamarind, banana, black persimmon, rum, cinnamon, ginger, rosemary, nutmeg, chocolate, honey, coffee, white wine, vanilla, fresh or mozzarella cheese, balsamic vinegar and other tropical fruits; it can be cooked, baked, sautéed, preserve and dried. It is important to be careful when puréeing this fruit because it contains a high amount of resin and the tools need to be very well cleaned.”



Recipe tested: Bread Pudding

The recipe that my partner Jessica Reed and I tested was Bread Pudding. We adapted the recipe to a plated desserts item, as to not make it so casual. The bread pudding was flavored with orange zest, dark chocolate chunks and cinnamon. Then we folded in the Chico-

Sapote cubes and baked in metal rings for about 18 minutes. Served with a spiced Chico-Sapote cubed, Orange and Grand Marnier Chico-Sapote Sauce and Tangerine Spuma, our dessert was comforting with a tropical twist.

Bread Pudding: we decided to sauté the fruit to obtain the best flavor possible and we did so by dicing Chico-Sapote fruit and sautéing in clarified butter, vanilla bean and cinnamon sticks. It sautéed for about 4 minutes on all sides, searing and caramelizing. When the fruit was then folded into the custard bread base and baked, it stayed with the same shape but I noticed the color turned from a light brown to a pastel pink. The flavor of the fruit was a bit overpowered by the dark chocolate chunks, noting that next time it would be better to fold in milk chocolate chips, something smaller and lighter in flavor.

Chico-Sapote Compote: a simple recipe that consisted of quickly sautéing small, Chico-Sapote cubes with orange juice and Chico-Sapote puree and at the end flambéing with Grand Marnier, seasoned with cinnamon, nutmeg and salt. The juices from this were turned into a sauce by the addition of a clear gel slurry.

Tangerine Spuma: we decided on Tangerine because of the counter balance it would provide to the sweet Chico-Sapote fruit and it worked extremely well. The tartness of tangerine paired very well with the creaminess of the Chico-Sapote.

Feedback Session with Dean Vaccaro, Chef Haymon, and Chef Schorner



Although the feedback session was scheduled at a certain time, all throughout the class Chef D guided us with this guest fruit and discusses with us his experiences with it. His enthusiasm was contagious and made us even more interested in this project!

Chef D: "The class is divided into teams in this project. The timeline is 3 hours. At the end of that time, the different teams will present their creation with a brief explanation of the techniques they used and the reasoning behind their choices. You will receive feedback from three chef/instructors. The desserts the students create will be judged according to the following standards: Has a creative characteristic and enhances the fruit, Dessert is produced in a professional manner, Accurate work using a game plan , ability to analyze and explain your dessert, supported by research."

The feedback session of the project was extremely helpful because it was great to hear what these chefs had to say about the product that we had created. One of the most important key points of being a professional is knowing how to accept criticism and make it productive in ones work and for this we was thankful because the session was very constructive.



Other recipes tested and presented were: Chico-Sapote Doughnuts, Chico-Sapote "Crema Catalana" Pairings, Brioche with Chico-Sapote Twist, Chico-Sapote "Carpaccio", and Chico-Sapote Polenta.

Culinary Conclusions

Ripening Chico-Sapote: the fruit arrived to Hyde Park unripe so Chef D individually wrapped it on brown paper and set it aside for a few days.

Fresh Chico-Sapote: this is an excellent fruit to consume fruit, specially chilled due to the sweet factor that it carries.

Sautéing Chico-Sapote: possibly the BEST technique to apply to this fruit, it caramelized beautifully and enriches the flavor and texture.

Pureeing Chico-Sapote: easily pureed with water or juice, this provides a base for ice creams, sorbets and sauces.

Baking in “Papillote”: this cooking technique led to the discovery that when cooked in papillote for an hour the fruit will harden, not soften as you would expect.

Deep-Frying Chico-Sapote: this technique did not benefit the fruit at all, the flavor disappeared. This was tested out on Chico-Sapote doughnuts, as a fruit fritter worked well.

Chico-Sapote and Chocolate: a mild fruit that seems to be overpowered by dark chocolate, possibly test out with milk or white chocolate.

Chico-Sapote Ice Cream: the creaminess of the fruit pairs perfectly with cream and sugar to make this ice cream, an unforgettable one!

The project as a whole was a very constructive one and I am glad to see something like this take place at the CIA bakeshops; we normally do not get to constant experience with exotic fruits and to have Chico-Sapote a project helps everyone understand not only the flavors of other countries, but at the same time the cultures that surround it. We would once again like to thank **Louise King, President of the South Florida Tropical Fruit Growers Association** for their contribution to the constant presentation of tropical fruits and for making them so readily available.