

Seasonal cook

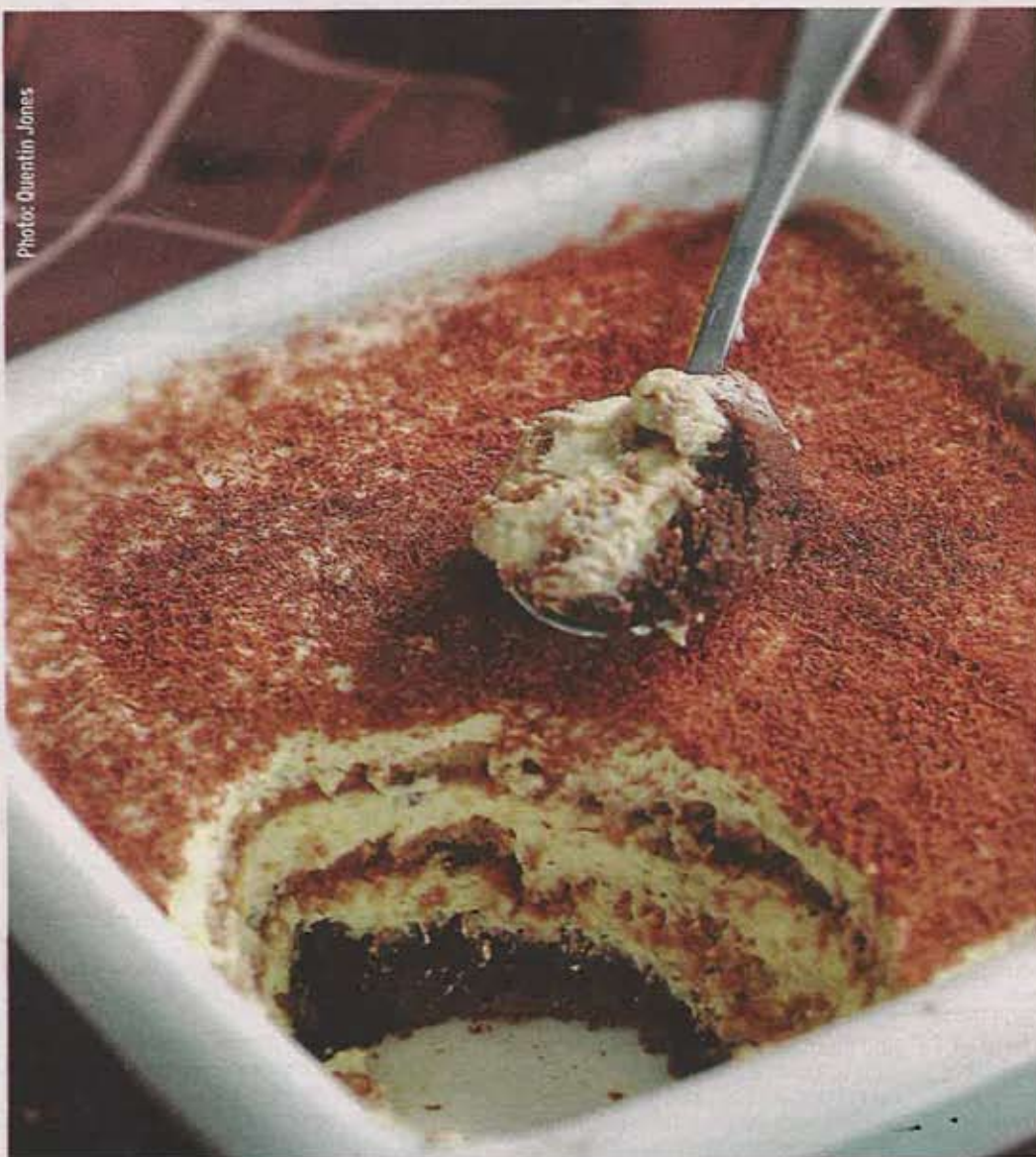


Photo: Quentin Jones

Sacred grounds

Give your taste buds a wake-up call with coffee, writes STEVE MANFREDI.

Hi, I'm Steve Manfredi and I have a caffeine addiction. Sure, I can kick it. Like a couple of months ago, when I had that horrible flu and everything tasted foul. I stopped drinking coffee for a week. I couldn't tell if feeling like crap was bug-related or whether I was experiencing caffeine withdrawals.

But the first coffee I had after a week was like falling in love all over again. My morning espresso is one of the most important rituals in my life. I love the smell, the taste and, most of all, the way a great coffee focuses not only the mind but also all the senses. A poor coffee, on the other hand, is disappointing on all those levels.

There is a lot of marketing hype dressed up as "fact" about this small roasted berry. For example, that 100 per cent arabica coffee is better. Not

necessarily. There are two families of beans, arabica (*Coffea arabica*) and robusta (*Coffea canephora*). Arabica grows at higher altitudes and contains about half the caffeine of robusta.

Arabica is responsible for complex notes in a good coffee but there are some wonderful, high-quality robustas that can add body and kick to a blend.

Another myth is that organic and fair-trade coffees are better quality. They might be good for the planet and growers but these certifications do not guarantee superior quality.

A great espresso depends on three factors: high-quality beans, a well-maintained espresso machine and the maker's skill.

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TIRAMISU

Savoardi biscuits are also called ladyfingers, sponge fingers, trifle sponges or boudoir biscuits. They are readily available in shops and supermarkets. If you can find Pavesini, a much lighter version of Savoardi, they're even better.

3 eggs, separated
100g castor sugar
300g mascarpone
30 Savoardi or Pavesini biscuits
750ml strong espresso coffee
75ml rum
Cocoa powder

Beat egg yolks and sugar together until mixture becomes pale. In a separate bowl, beat egg whites until they form fluffy peaks. Mix yolk and sugar with mascarpone, then fold in egg whites gradually. Soak biscuits in a mixture of coffee and rum. Arrange a layer of 10 soaked biscuits on the bottom of a small rectangular ceramic or glass container. Top with a layer of mascarpone mixture, repeating the process until all the biscuits have been used. Finish with mascarpone on top. Sprinkle with cocoa powder and refrigerate for 4-5 hours before serving.

Serves 10 as dessert (pictured)
Wine Tawny port

ESPRESSO FINGER BISCUITS

250g unsalted butter
125g castor sugar
2 tsp vanilla extract
300g plain flour
70g freshly ground coffee
1/2 tsp sea salt

Cream butter and sugar in an electric mixer, using the paddle attachment. Beat in vanilla, then on low speed mix in flour, coffee and salt until well combined. Flatten dough and shape into a rough rectangle a few centimetres thick. Wrap in cling film and refrigerate for 2 hours. Roll dough between 2 sheets of wax paper to a thickness of 5mm. This may be more manageable if dough is divided into 2 or 3 pieces. Cut into fingers 2cm wide and 8cm long. Place fingers on a baking sheet at least 3cm from each other and chill in refrigerator for 20 minutes. Bake for about 20 minutes in a preheated 160C oven. Remove biscuits from tray and place on a cooling rack. Serve with cafe latte.

Makes about 30 biscuits
Wine Good quality rum, grappa or Armagnac