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Recipe Redux: Chocolate-Rum Mousse, 1966

By **AMANDA HESSER**

Chocolate-rum mousse, which ran in The Times in 1966, was a remarkably efficient recipe in two distinct ways. First, it invoked nearly every food trend of its moment: **chocolate** desserts were an exotic new fix; any respectable grown-up dessert contained rum; mousse suggested that you understood French cooking, or at least pretended to; two cups of cream was *de rigueur*; and the recipe assumed you owned one of the kitchen's latest appliances, the home blender.

Second, the newfangled blender actually did make the recipe a wonder of efficiency: all you had to do was layer the ingredients and blend, and a dinner-party mousse was yours.

The only problem with the dessert, as Alex Talbot, who co-wrote "Ideas in Food" and co-founded the popular blog IdeasInFood.com with Aki Kamoza, points out: it's not actually a mousse. "Aki was like, 'This is really like a thicker panna cotta,' as opposed to a mousse, which is light and bubbly and melts on your tongue," Talbot said. (Panna cotta is thickened with gelatin; **pudding** uses cornstarch and eggs; and mousse has air whipped into it.)

A thicker panna-cotta-like dessert works for me but not for them, so they set out to come up with a new and modern take on the recipe. Talbot and Kamoza considered making a terrine lined with the chocolate mousse and layering it with popcorn and more mousse, so the popcorn would behave like the chocolate wafers in icebox cake, softening and melding with the mousse.

"Mmm," I said as Talbot explained it.

"Well, we didn't do that," he said.

Instead they homed in on the chocolate flavor, and this led them to beets. Talbot explained: "Think of red velvet cake — it was chocolate cake colored with beet."

"But wasn't that from cochineal?" I asked.

"Hmm, maybe," Talbot said. "Maybe this idea comes from our lack of knowledge."

A lack of knowledge is a lovely thing, because what they dreamed up will change your view of mousse, beets and maybe cochineal too. Talbot and Kamoza substituted beets for chocolate in the original recipe and Steen's cane syrup for sugar; they added more salt and kept the rum intact. After blending it together, 1966-style, they had a mousse that they liked a lot but didn't quite love. It still wasn't moussey enough. So they whipped out their handy ISI dispenser (handy for some; it's that magical tool that drove the foam craze) and made the mousse into a cloud.

I asked Talbot whether readers might be daunted by a recipe that calls for an ISI dispenser. "We've grown and matured," Talbot said, "and realized any recipe you put out there, no one really follows it. All it is is a suggestion: you might want to do this."

Indeed, you might. And don't feel bad for not owning an ISI contraption: their beet-rum mousse is spectacularly good, even without that extra step. It's a little like eggnog and a little like beet purée, and you'll wonder how these two had not met before.