

FRANÇOIS PERRET
Pastry Chef at the Ritz Paris
with **ÉRIC NEBOT**

The Chef in a
TRUCK

The Fabulous Culinary Odyssey
of a French Pastry Chef in California



Flammarion

The Chef in a
TRUCK

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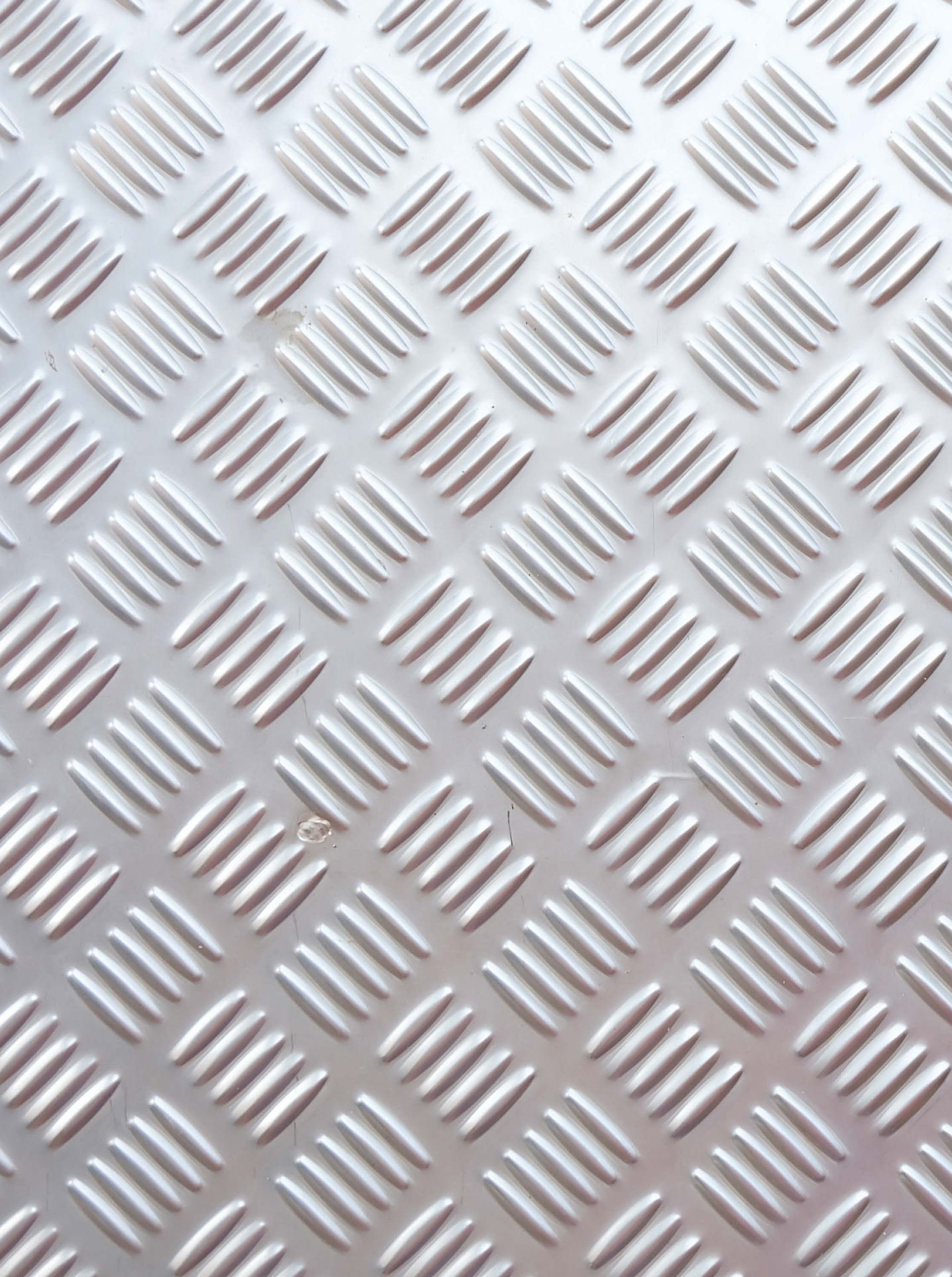
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MY GRANDMOTHER AND I: A TALE OF LOVE AND CUISINE

It was love imparted through taste. The love of flavorsome food. The love of passing down knowledge, of cooking, relishing, talking, and sharing. Cooking was my grandmother's unbreakable bond with others, with her family, and with me.

Éric Nebot

Baking was always an important part of our relationship. When I was very young, I learned to make my first cake with her. It was a yogurt cake, and the recipe was extremely simple thanks to the foolproof memory aid of 1-2-3-4.

Tip 1 pot of plain yogurt into a mixing bowl and then, using the empty yogurt pot, add:

1 pot of oil

2 pots of sugar

3 pots of flour

4 eggs

1 tablespoon of baking powder

1 pinch of salt (never forget the salt, even in cakes and pastries!)

And the finely grated zest of 1 lemon

Stir everything together until well mixed and transfer to a cake pan.

Bake in an oven preheated to 350°F (180°C/ Gas Mark 4) for 45 minutes.

And that's it!

When my grandmother passed away, I was left with an unimaginable void in my life that I

felt a vital need to fill. I did this through a love of good food. It was as if taste had become a divine means of communication between us.

In 2017, I went to live in Los Angeles. The city's culinary culture is vibrant. The climate provides the perfect conditions for a wide range of high-quality fruits and vegetables throughout the year. There are also excellent pastries made using superior ingredients—larger than life pastries that are generous and beautiful. It's a vast city where you can often enjoy great food, when you know the right places to go.

Living as an expat for the past four years, I follow French pastry chefs on social media. I am often blown away by the photos they post on Instagram, each one more incredible than the last. I excitedly plan tastings whenever I return to France, but am frequently disappointed by the taste, which rarely lives up to my expectations and the promise conveyed by the pictures posted online. Rarely, until one day in May 2018.







AN EXTRAORDINARY ENCOUNTER!

François Perret's masterpiece—his Proustian madeleine—is testament to the mysterious magic of the art of patisserie. His trompe l'œil madeleine is a fusion of traditional and modern cuisine in a sublime wrapping. While the dessert looks exactly like a conventional madeleine, François Perret's genius becomes apparent when your silver fork divides the cake in two. Instead of finding simple sponge inside, you marvel at the slight tang of chestnut honey, the crunch of toasted almonds, the lightness of Savoy sponge, and the velviness of vanilla cream.

In 2018, I came across an article entitled, “François Perret’s Stratospheric Patisseries.” I read it, looked at the pictures, and soon developed an obsession with Perret’s creations. I had to taste them, and soon. I took advantage of a business trip to Paris to visit the hotel where François Perret works, and I ordered all the desserts. The entire menu. Everything. The madeleine may have left its impact on Marcel Proust, but the feelings of nostalgia that its shell-like grooves evoke overwhelm all generations. Everyone has their own childhood reminiscences of this little cake in France, and each mouthful of Perret’s entremets encapsulates a memory that will resonate inside you for a long time. His madeleine entremets, marble cake, vanilla meringue, caramel barquette, vanilla plated dessert, chocolate plated dessert, and . . . his iconic sugared strawberries with cream.

I’d like to take a moment to talk about this last dessert: sugared strawberries with cream.

Memories from my childhood come flooding back. The cool sea breeze that is carried all the

way across the countryside and the scent of fresh herbs mingling under my nose create a fragrance that is forever anchored to my spirit. Whenever I went to visit my grandmother between April and September (the strawberry season), I eagerly awaited lunchtime for the real highlight of my visits: strawberries with sugar and cream. Has there ever been a dessert so simple yet so satisfying? I remember one sunny spring day, when I was devouring my strawberries, my grandmother took me aside to explain to me why it is scientifically necessary to add sugar to strawberries, even the best strawberries on earth. Was there a reason? The only reason in my eyes was because it was delicious! But in fact, as I discovered that day, the love of good food can converge with science. Sugar, when added to strawberries, produces a syrup. The fruit itself contains water and natural sugars, so adding sugar to the fruit triggers osmosis. The water, concentrated in the strawberry’s juice, is drawn outward, giving it a sweeter, more syrupy taste and adding texture.

