Italian Chocolate Almond Cake – Torta Caprese

(Serves 12, *Cooks Illustrated*)

Leave it to the Italians to whip up a version of flourless chocolate cake that's slightly lighter. For the best results, use a good quality bittersweet chocolate and Dutch-processed cocoa powder: Ghirardelli 60% Cacao Bittersweet Chocolate Premium Baking Bar, and Droste Cacoa (Dutch cocoa). Either almond flour or almond meal will work. Serve with vanilla whipped cream, amaretto whipped cream, or orange whipped cream.

- 12 T unsalted butter, cut into 12 pieces [1]

- 6 oz bittersweet chocolate, chopped

- 1 t vanilla extract

- 4 large eggs, separated

- 1 C (7 oz) granulated sugar

- 2 C (7 oz) almond flour

- 2 T Dutch-processed cocoa powder

- ½ t salt

- Confectioner sugar (optional to sprinkle on top of completed cake)

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees.

    a. Lightly spray 9-inch springform pan with vegetable oil spray.

2. Microwave butter and bittersweet chocolate in medium bowl at 50 percent power, stirring often, until melted, 1 ½ to 2 minutes. Stir in vanilla and set aside.

3. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, whip egg whites on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute.

    a. Increase speed to medium-high and continue to whip, slowly adding ½ cup granulated sugar, until whites are glossy and thick and hold stiff peaks, about 4 minutes longer. Transfer whites to a large bowl.

4. To the mixer bowl, add egg yolks and remaining ½ cup granulated sugar and whip on medium high speed until thick and pale yellow, about 3 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed. Whipping the yoks

with sugar traps more air and allows the sugar to draw in moisture, so the mixture becomes sturdier. The yolk mixture gets dispersed throughout the batter, giving the cake a more tender texture and strengthening the egg white foam.

    a. Add chocolate mixture and mix on medium speed until incorporated, about 15 seconds.

    b. Add almond flour, cocoa, and salt and mix until incorporated, about 30 seconds.

5. Stir batter a few times with large rubber spatula, scraping bottom of bowl to ensure almond flour is fully incorporated.

    a. Fold in one-third of whipped whites to batter bowl, mix on medium speed until no streaks of white remain, about 30 seconds, scraping down bowl halfway through mixing.

    b. Fold remaining egg whites into batter. Using a large rubber spatula, gently fold whites into batter until no streaks of white remain.

    c. Pour batter into 9-inch spring form pan, smooth top with spatula, and place pan on rimmed baking sheet.

6. *Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out with few moist crumbs attached, about 50 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.*

    a. Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 20 minutes. Remove side of spring form pan and let cake cool completely, about 2 hours.

    b. Cake can be wrapped in plastic wrap and stored at room temperature for up to 3 days.

7. Dust the top of the cake with confectioners' sugar, if desired. Using offset spatula, transfer cake to serving platter.

    a. Cut into wedges and serve with whipped cream if desired.

Vanilla Whipped Cream

1 C heavy cream, chilled

1 t Vanilla

1 T + 1 t, confectioners' sugar

Orange Whipped Cream

1 C heavy cream, chilled

2 T Cointreau Liquor (or Grand Marnier)

1 T confectioners' sugar

¼ t grated orange zest

Amaretto Cream

Substitute Amaretto liquor for the Cointreau, and omit the orange zest.

Whip all ingredients in a mixer until foamy. Increase speed to high and whip until soft peaks form. 1-3 minutes total.

[1] T = tablespoon, t = teaspoon, C = Cup