



merci beaucoup

Photographed by Silas Fallstich
Written by Anna Constantino

I step through the French doors of *Merci Montecito* on a crisp Santa Barbara morning. The overwhelming aroma of puff pastry and baked apples draws me inside. The café is simple and understated, yet warm and welcoming. Pastel pink and white marble coat the interior, and touches of gold glimmer in the sunlight seeping through the windows. An array of gallettes, canelés, and tarts sit on dainty white plates and cake stands behind a glass casing. The aesthetic is fitting, as the café draws on Parisian inspiration.

I spot Elizabeth Colling, the owner and pastry chef, behind the counter and she greets me with a smile. Her young daughter is twirling and dancing next to her, helping serve pastries to guests (in addition to pleading for “just one more bite” of a dessert). The young girl gestures towards the counter where a fresh batch of cinnamon rolls has appeared. My eyes widen as I watch the creamy frosting melt on top of the glossy buns. Suddenly, I share a similar childlike plea—I must have one. As I unravel the bun, its warm frosting drips to the plate and notes of cinnamon fill the air. I go in for a bite and am pleasantly surprised by the unconventional frosting: a vanilla cream with hints of fresh lavender—an ingredient derived from traditional French cooking.

Before Elizabeth worked as a food editor and pastry chef in the States, she earned her degree at the Ritz Escoffier culinary school in Paris, where she drew French inspiration for her food. “In France, everything is simple and made with high-quality ingredients,” says Elizabeth, “So it was important to replicate that here, not only with desserts but with everything we make.” All ingredients used at *Merci* are locally sourced for quality and to support local farms. Alongside breakfast, pastries, and lattés, *Merci* has a lunch menu featuring a variety of house-made salads, grains, and legumes.

To complement the sweetness of the cinnamon bun, I opt for the matcha latté. My drink arrives at the table in a delicate glass mug. It is not long before I disturb the intricate foam heart on the surface. The matcha flavor is rich and creamy, subtly sweetened with raw honey and almond milk. I sip as I watch the hustle and bustle of the country mart.

TEDDYS sunglasses, Coral Casino Beach & Cabana Club
Napkin ring, The Blue Door
Clare V. net bag



Merci is the epitome of sophisticated simplicity.

I continue my “dessert for breakfast” trend and gloss over the pastry case in search of my final endeavor of the morning. I spot the salted chocolate chip cookie. Normally I refuse to settle for something so seemingly basic, but from the looks of the dark chocolate oozing from the seams of the perfectly crisped top, I can tell I’m in for a treat. The crunchiness of the browned butter exterior paired with the soft gooey inside sends my tastebuds to heaven. Dare I say it is the best chocolate chip cookie I’ve ever tried—and if you know me and my sweet tooth, that is a lot of chocolate chip cookies to choose from. Sometimes the smallest pleasures can leave a meaningful impression.

Merci is the epitome of sophisticated simplicity. The clean ingredients paired with delicious, layered flavors make for a unique and enjoyable culinary experience and a wonderful start to my day. I will certainly be back for breakfast soon, but for now, merci! *

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