Steve’s Mocha-Top Nanaimo Bars

This is a variation on a Canadian national treasure (the name Nanaimo refers to a town) that, so the story goes, can be traced back to the 1950s, when the original recipe came first in a competition held by the local Women’s Institute.

Ingredients

Biscuit Base:

150g unsalted butter – melted (plus extra for the tin)

100g digestives – broken into pieces

60g walnut pieces

40g cocoa powder – sifted

100g golden caster sugar

80g desiccated coconut

2 medium eggs

Custard Cream:

100g unsalted butter – softened

2 tbsp custard powder

½ tsp vanilla extract

250g icing sugar

2 tbsp milk

Mocha Top:

150g dark chocolate (about 70%) cocoa

25g unsalted butter

4 tbsp strong black coffee

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180ºC/160ºC fan oven/gas mark 4.
2. Butter a 23 cm square x 4 cm deep cake tin or brownie tin (or equivalent tray bake tin, for example, 25 cm x 20 cm).
3. Whizz the digestives and the walnuts to crumbs in a food processor. Add the cocoa powder and sugar and whizz again, then transfer the mixture to a large bowl.
4. Mix in the coconut. Stir in the melted butter, then add the beaten eggs, stirring until combined. Transfer the mixture to the tin and level the surface. Bake for 15 minutes, then remove from the oven and leave to cool.
5. Using an electric whisk, whisk the butter for the custard-cream filling in a large bowl for about a minute until pale and fluffy. Whisk in the custard powder and the vanilla and then the icing sugar. Once the mixture appears crumbly add the milk and continue to whisk until you have a pale, moussey filling. Spread this over the biscuit base using a palette knife and chill for about an hour until set.
6. For the top layer, break up the chocolate and gently melt it with the butter in a bowl set over a pan containing a little simmering water. Remove the bowl from the heat and whisk in the coffee – it may separate a little at first but just keep beating until the butter is completely amalgamated and the mixture is smooth and glossy. Smooth the chocolate mixture over the custard cream and, if wished, fluff the top using a teaspoon. Loosely cover the tin with clingfilm and chill for several hours until set.
7. Cut into bars about 3 cm wide and half the width of your tin (or you could cut them half this size for bite-sized treats). You should get about 14 bars or 28 small squares. They keep well for several days and are best served chilled.

Yield – makes 1 x 23 cm traybake