

PAIN PERDU by MARC MURPHY

SERVES 4

When I was working in Paris for a Michelin-starred chef, we used to do a version of this pain perdu, but it was smaller, daintier, and made with baguettes. We served it for dessert, dusted with vanilla sugar and accompanied by a quenelle of vanilla ice cream. It was both elegant and comforting—and our guests just couldn't get enough of it. When I came back to the United States, I wanted to do a really decadent French toast, but instead of serving it for dessert, I wanted it for brunch. Quickly scan the recipe and you'll see there's no restraint here: nine eggs, a quart of heavy cream, a quarter cup of brandy—just throw caloric caution to the wind! We put it on the Landmarc menu when we opened ten years ago, and it's consistently been one of our most popular brunch items. While dead simple, this pain perdu takes some planning on your part. Start it the day before, and give the bread twenty-four hours to soak up the custard—it makes a difference. Take the time to find bread with a hearty crust (see Note)—soft, delicate breads like challah or Pullman loaves will not work here and will fall apart in the process.

INGREDIENTS

4 (2½-inch-thick) slices country bread, such as filone
9 large eggs
1 quart heavy cream
1 cup Vanilla Sugar (page 277; see Tip), plus more as needed
¼ cup brandy
1 teaspoon kosher salt
4 tablespoons (2 ounces) unsalted butter
All-purpose flour, for dusting
Confectioners' sugar, for serving (optional)
Pure maple syrup, warmed, for serving

NOTE: For this particular recipe, it's important to use the right kind of bread. Filone has the perfect texture: a nice, rustic crust, and a soft, airy, moist crumb. Breads like challah or brioche are too soft and spongy and lack the proper crust to stand up to a 24-hour soak. French country breads, such as a miche or pain de mie, have a too-thick crust and a too-dense crumb. While looking for the right bread might seem complicated, the results you get with this pain perdu are so delicious; it makes it completely worth it.

1. Place the bread in a flat 2-quart dish. In a large bowl, whisk the eggs until combined. Add the cream, Vanilla Sugar, brandy, and salt and whisk to combine. Pour the custard over the bread slices and let sit at room temperature for 30 minutes. Flip the bread over, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 24 hours.
2. Preheat the oven to 350°F; position the rack in the middle.
3. In a large ovenproof sauté pan, melt the butter over medium-high heat. While the butter is melting, lightly sprinkle one side of each slice of the soaked bread with some flour and some more Vanilla Sugar. Place the soaked bread, floured side

down, in the pan and cook until caramelized on one side for about 5 minutes. Flip the bread over, sprinkle the other side with flour and Vanilla Sugar, and transfer the pan to the oven. Bake for 18 to 24 minutes, or until the toast is cooked through, caramelized on top, and custardy in the middle. Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar, if desired, and serve immediately, along with maple syrup.

TIP: If you don't have Vanilla Sugar on hand, use 1 cup granulated sugar and 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract instead.