

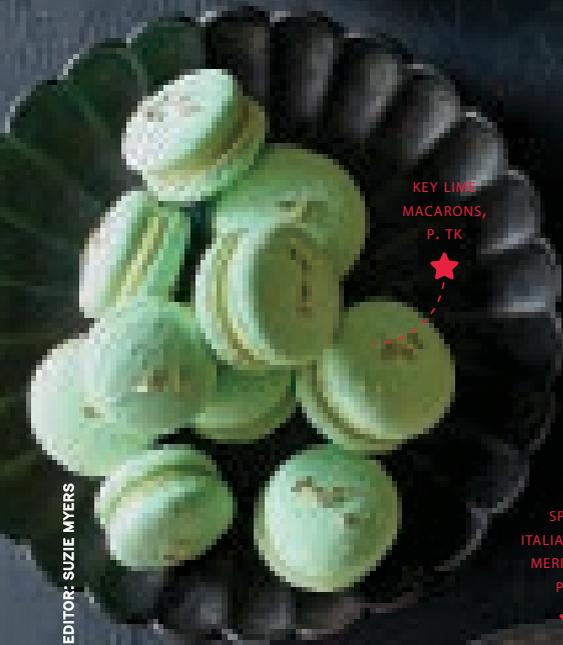
Sugar Rush

HOW LOS ANGELES CHEF DAVID LEFEVRE'S LOVE OF HIS MOM'S CHRISTMAS TREATS INSPIRED A CHARITABLE HOLIDAY COOKIE SWAP THAT HAS FANS MARKING THEIR CALENDARS.

BY JANE SIGAL PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN KERNICK



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FOOD STYLIST: SIMON ANDREWS; STYLE EDITOR: SUZIE MYERS

TODAY DAVID LEFEVRE is a cookie pro, but there was a moment when his family endured a mild panic about who would roll, cut and shape the holiday treats known as St. Nicholas Day letters. “When I was growing up in Wisconsin, my mother always made them at Christmas,” says the

Los Angeles chef, who owns a trio of beachside spots: The Arthur J, Fishing with Dynamite and Manhattan Beach Post. He recounts how his mom baked an almond cream-filled version of the letters, one of the cookies traditionally made to celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas, observed on December 5 or 6. She would churn out dozens of them, trading some with relatives and neighbors for their cookies and saving the rest for Christmas morning. “We kids were allowed to open all the stockings and one present before the adults got up,” LeFevre says, “and we could eat the St. Nick letters.”

But when LeFevre was 20, his mother was hospitalized, and her absence left a gaping, letter-shaped hole in the holiday. So LeFevre, then a student at The Culinary Institute of America, stepped into his mom’s baking shoes.

His first batches were clumsy, but over the years he learned just the right amount of almond cream to use and how to flawlessly pinch the dough into letter shapes so the filling didn’t spill out. “Eventually, they were perfect,” he says, “but my sister wasn’t really excited by them. What she loved most were the imperfections.”

LeFevre has tried to find a place for the cherished recipe on one of his restaurant menus, but it’s never quite fit. Then last year,

the memory of his mother’s cookie exchange gave him the idea of doing his own swap, for a good cause: On one night in December, a group of prominent chefs across L.A. would serve plates of bartered cookies at their restaurants, with proceeds going to the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank.

He reached out to friends, like Ted Hopson, his old sous-chef who’s currently the executive chef and co-owner of The Bellwether in Studio City, and Della Gossett, a cook he knew from his days working for Charlie Trotter and who now heads up the pastry kitchen at Spago Beverly Hills. And he contacted people he admired, like Joshua Graves, the pastry chef at Rose Cafe in Venice, and Ivan Arturo Marquez of Broken Spanish in downtown L.A. Cumulatively, the six participating chefs baked, swapped and sold more than 1,000 cookies, raising \$2,500 for the food bank.

After its successful debut, the cookie exchange is back again this year, on December 3—but with changes. For one thing, the chefs will make more cookies. They drastically underestimated demand the first time around. Plus, they will offer patrons the option of ordering an assortment for takeout.

This season’s lineup will have an incredible variety of deliciousness—homey bar cookies, Rice Krispies Treats flavored with matcha tea, Parisian-style macarons, Mexican-inspired thumbprint cookies, nutty einkorn shortbreads and homages to Mallomars and Oreos.

“This project brings together people in our community who see the big picture,” says LeFevre. “It’s about helping others and enjoyment. The greatest thing about being a chef is making people happy through food.”

“The cookies were perfect, but my sister wasn’t really excited. What she loved most were the imperfections.”

—DAVID LEFEVRE

St. Nicholas Day Letters

David LeFevre twists his flaky, buttery almond cream-filled cookies into the letter S in honor of his sister, Suzanne, but they can be adapted to make any letter. Whatever the shape, a hit of fleur de sel just before baking kicks up the flavor.

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Active **50 min**; Total **3 hr 15 min**
Makes **16**

1½ cups all-purpose flour

2 sticks unsalted butter, cubed and chilled

½ cup ice water

4 oz. almond paste

1 large egg white

⅓ cup granulated sugar

2 Tbsp. light brown sugar

½ tsp. pure vanilla extract

¼ tsp. ground cardamom

1 large egg

2 Tbsp. whole milk

Fleur de sel, for sprinkling

1. In a food processor, pulse the flour with the butter until the mixture resembles coarse meal. Add the ice water and pulse just until the dough comes together. Divide in half and press into disks. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until firm, at least 1 hour or overnight.

2. Meanwhile, in a stand mixer fitted with the paddle, beat the almond paste with the egg white, both sugars, vanilla and cardamom at medium speed

until smooth, about 4 minutes. Spoon the spiced almond paste into a pastry bag fitted with a ½-inch tip or use a sturdy, resealable plastic bag and snip off a corner.

3. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. In a small bowl, lightly beat the egg with the milk. On a lightly floured surface, roll out 1 disk of dough into a 14-by-8-inch rectangle. Cut the dough crosswise into eight 1¾-inch strips.

4. Pipe a line of almond paste down the center of each strip. Brush one side of each strip with the beaten egg. Roll one side over the filling and pinch the seam closed. Transfer the logs to one of the prepared baking sheets seam side down.

Form each log into an S shape. Repeat with the remaining disk of dough, almond paste and beaten egg. Freeze the cookies until firm, about 1 hour.

5. Preheat the oven to 375°. Brush the cookies with the remaining beaten egg and sprinkle with fleur de sel. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until golden. Transfer the cookies to a wire rack and let cool slightly. Serve warm or at room temperature.

MAKE AHEAD The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to 3 days.



Key Lime Macarons

These tangy, one-bite sandwiched meringues from **Uyen Nguyen**, the executive pastry chef at Manhattan Beach Post, get a surprise pop of flavor courtesy of fennel seeds.

Active **1 hr**; Total **3 hr**; Makes **70**

FILLING

- 3 large eggs**
- ½ tsp. powdered gelatin**
- ¾ cup fresh Key lime juice**
- ¾ cup granulated sugar**
- 1½ sticks unsalted butter, cubed and chilled**

MACARON SHELLS

- 2 cups almond flour**
- 1⅔ cups confectioners' sugar**
- 5 large egg whites, at room temperature**
- 2 tsp. finely grated lime zest**
- 30 drops of green food coloring or 5 drops of green food gel**
- 1 cup granulated sugar**
- 1½ tsp. fennel seeds**

1. Make the filling In a medium bowl, beat the eggs to mix. In a small bowl, whisk the gelatin

with 1 tablespoon of water. In a medium saucepan, combine the Key lime juice with the granulated sugar and bring to a boil over moderately high heat, stirring occasionally. Slowly pour the juice mixture into the eggs, whisking constantly. Scrape the egg mixture back into the pan and cook over moderate heat, stirring, until bubbles appear and the mixture thickens, about 3 minutes. Add the gelatin mixture and stir until melted.

2. Set a fine sieve over a small heatproof bowl. Strain the custard into the bowl; discard the solids. Gradually whisk the butter into the custard until it is fully incorporated. Cover with plastic and refrigerate until cold, at least 2 hours. Spoon the custard into a small pastry bag fitted with a ¼-inch tip or use a sturdy, resealable plastic bag and snip off a corner.

3. Make the macaron shells

Line 4 or 5 baking sheets with silicon mats or parchment paper. In a medium bowl, sift the almond flour with the confectioners' sugar. Stir in half of the egg whites, the lime zest and food coloring until a smooth paste forms; the color should be a shade or two darker than the final desired color.

4. In a small saucepan, combine the granulated sugar with ¼ cup of water and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Cook over moderate heat, without stirring, until the sugar syrup reaches 240° on a candy thermometer, about 5 minutes.

5. Meanwhile, in a stand mixer fitted with the whisk, beat the remaining egg whites at medium speed until medium peaks form, about 4 minutes. Carefully drizzle in the hot syrup at medium speed. Increase the speed to high and beat the meringue until stiff and glossy, about 5 minutes.

6. Stir one-third of the meringue into the almond

mixture. Using a rubber spatula, fold in the remaining meringue, then cut through it, pressing it against the side of the bowl to slightly deflate to a thick, lavalike consistency.

7. Transfer the meringue to a pastry bag fitted with a plain ½-inch tip; pipe onto the prepared baking sheets in 1-inch mounds, 1 inch apart. Tap the sheets on the counter and top each macaron shell with a few fennel seeds. Let dry until a skin forms, 1 to 3 hours.

8. Preheat the oven to 350°. Bake the meringues for 9 to 12 minutes, until crisp on the outside and slightly chewy on the inside. Transfer the baking sheets to wire racks and let cool completely. Using a thin metal spatula, peel the meringues off the baking sheets. Pipe the custard onto the flat sides of half the meringues. Top with the remaining meringues.

MAKE AHEAD The macarons can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

Chocolate Peppermint Marshmallow Cookies

“Mallomars are my absolute favorite,” says Spago executive pastry chef **Della Gossett**. “In my variation, the crunch of peppermint candies balances the pillowy marshmallow.”

Active **1 hr 15 min**; Total **3 hr 30 min**; Makes **4 dozen**

MARSHMALLOWS

Nonstick cooking spray

¼ cup powdered gelatin

2 large egg whites, at room temperature

2¼ cups sugar

1 Tbsp. light corn syrup

2 tsp. pure vanilla extract

1 cup crushed peppermint candies (10 oz.), plus more for sprinkling

8 to 12 drops of red food coloring

COOKIES

1¼ cups bread flour

1 cup pastry flour

½ tsp. kosher salt

2 sticks unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 cup sugar

½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped

1 large egg

1 large egg yolk

2 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Neutral oil, such as grapeseed, for brushing

GLAZE

28 oz. dark chocolate (65% to 70% cocoa), chopped

4 oz. cocoa butter

1. Make the marshmallows

Coat a 13-by-18-inch rimmed baking sheet with cooking spray. Line with parchment paper and coat with cooking spray. In a small microwavable bowl, whisk the gelatin with ¾ cup of water. Microwave on

high in 10-second increments, stirring after each one, until the gelatin is just melted, about 50 seconds.

2. In a stand mixer fitted with the whisk, beat the egg whites at medium-low speed until very foamy. Meanwhile, in a medium saucepan, combine the sugar with the corn syrup and 1 cup of water and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Cook over moderate heat, without stirring, until the sugar syrup registers 260° on a candy thermometer, about 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and carefully stir in the gelatin until melted.

3. Carefully drizzle the hot syrup into the egg whites down the side of the bowl, beating at medium speed. Add the vanilla and beat at high speed until thick and glossy, about 10 minutes. Using a rubber spatula, fold in the 1 cup of peppermint candies. Sprinkle in the food coloring, then quickly scrape the marshmallow mixture onto the prepared baking sheet, swirling the food coloring, and smooth the surface. Let stand at room temperature until set, at least 2 hours or overnight.

4. Meanwhile, make the cookies In a medium bowl, whisk the bread flour with the pastry flour and salt. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle, beat the butter with the sugar and vanilla bean seeds at medium speed until fluffy, about 5 minutes. Beat in the egg, egg yolk and vanilla extract. Beat in the dry ingredients at low speed until just combined. Divide the dough in half and press into



disks. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until firm, at least 1 hour or overnight.

5. On a lightly floured sheet of parchment paper, roll out 1 disk of dough into a rectangle, ¼ inch thick. Transfer on the parchment paper to a baking sheet and refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes. Repeat with the second disk of dough.

6. Preheat the oven to 325°. Using a square cookie cutter or a knife, cut 2-inch squares from the dough and arrange on the baking sheets 1 inch apart. Reroll the scraps and cut more squares. Bake the cookies for 10 to 12 minutes, until golden brown. Transfer the baking sheets to wire racks and let the cookies cool.

7. Lightly brush the cookie cutter or a knife with oil, repeating as needed. Cut out forty-eight

2-inch marshmallows. Place 1 marshmallow on top of each cookie and transfer to baking sheets. Freeze until cold, at least 15 minutes.

8. Make the glaze In a large microwavable bowl, combine the chocolate with the cocoa butter. Microwave on high in 20-second increments, stirring after each one, until the mixture is melted and smooth.

9. Coat 2 rimmed baking sheets with cooking spray. Line with parchment paper and coat with cooking spray. Using a fork, dip each cookie in the glaze, then set on a prepared baking sheet and sprinkle with some peppermint candy. Refrigerate until set, at least 15 minutes, and serve cold.

MAKE AHEAD The cookies can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 4 days.



Molasses Thumbprints with Cajeta

“The cajeta filling for these cookies was a natural twist at a Mexican restaurant,” says pastry chef **Ivan Arturo Marquez** of Broken Spanish. “I also like the play of the sweet goat-milk caramel, slightly bitter molasses and sharp candied ginger.”

Active **55 min**; Total **3 hr**
Makes **about 3 dozen**

CAJETA

- 4 cups goat milk**
- 1 cup granulated sugar**
- 1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest**
- ½ tsp. baking soda**
- ½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped**

COOKIES

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour**
- 1 Tbsp. cornstarch**
- 1½ tsp. ground ginger**
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon**
- 1 tsp. ground cloves**
- ¾ tsp. baking soda**
- 6 Tbsp. unsalted butter, at room temperature**

- ½ cup light brown sugar**
- ¼ cup unsulfured molasses**
- 1 large egg**
- ½ tsp. pure vanilla paste**
- ½ cup finely chopped candied ginger (2½ oz.)**
- ½ cup turbinado sugar**

1. Make the cajeta In a medium saucepan, combine the goat milk with the granulated sugar and lemon zest and bring to a simmer over moderate heat. Remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the baking soda and the vanilla bean seeds. Return the pan to moderately low heat and simmer, whisking occasionally, until the caramel is amber and the consistency of condensed milk, about 1 hour and 30 minutes. Set a fine sieve over a small

heatproof bowl. Strain the caramel into the bowl; discard the solids. Let cool slightly. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm and cold, at least 1 hour.

2. Meanwhile, make the cookies In a medium bowl, whisk the flour with the cornstarch, ground ginger, cinnamon, cloves and baking soda. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle, beat the butter with the brown sugar at medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add the molasses and beat until incorporated. Add the egg and vanilla paste and beat until smooth. Beat in the dry ingredients at low speed until just combined. Stir in the candied ginger. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate until cold, at least 1 hour.

3. Preheat the oven to 325°. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Spread the

turbinado sugar in a shallow bowl. Roll tablespoons of dough into balls, then coat in the turbinado sugar; transfer to the prepared baking sheets, spaced 1 inch apart. Freeze for 15 minutes.

4. Bake the cookies, rotating the baking sheets halfway through, for about 10 minutes, until crisp on the outside but still tender on the inside. Remove the baking sheets from the oven. Using the back of a ½-teaspoon measuring spoon, make an indentation in the center of each warm cookie. Transfer the baking sheets to wire racks and let cool completely.

5. Fill each cookie with about ½ teaspoon of the cold caramel and refrigerate just until set, about 30 minutes.

MAKE AHEAD The caramel can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to a week. The cookies can be refrigerated for up to 3 days.



Raspberry Linzer Bars

Della Gossett's linzer bars are a sturdier version of her Austrian-born boss Wolfgang Puck's adored but delicate cookies. "I added rye flour for an earthy taste," she says, "and I turned them into bars so they hold up for a cookie swap."

Active **25 min**; Total **3 hr plus overnight chilling**; Makes **24**

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour**
- ¾ cup rye flour**
- 6 Tbsp. hazelnut flour**
- 1½ tsp. baking powder**
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon**
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt**
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, at room temperature**
- 1½ cups granulated sugar**
- 4 tsp. grated lemon zest**
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract**
- 3 large egg yolks**
- Nonstick cooking spray**
- 1¼ cups raspberry jam**
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting**

1. In a medium bowl, whisk the 3 flours with the baking powder, cinnamon and salt. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle, beat the butter with the granulated sugar, lemon zest and vanilla at medium speed until smooth, about 5 minutes. Beat in the egg yolks one at a time, scraping down the side of the bowl, until incorporated. Beat in the dry ingredients at low speed

until the dough just comes together. Press one-third of the dough and two-thirds of the dough into 2 disks and wrap in plastic. Refrigerate overnight until firm.

2. Preheat the oven to 350°. Coat a 9-by-13-inch metal baking pan with cooking spray. Line with parchment paper, leaving a 2-inch overhang on the 2 long sides, and coat with cooking spray. Using the large holes of a box grater, shred the larger disk of dough evenly in the pan.

3. Spread the jam over the shredded dough, leaving a ½-inch border. Shred the smaller disk over the jam. Bake, rotating the pan halfway through, for 35 to 45 minutes, until the top is deep golden brown. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool. Refrigerate in the pan until firm, at least 2 hours.

4. Using the paper, transfer the pastry to a work surface. Dust with confectioners' sugar, cut into 2-inch bars and serve cold or at room temperature.

MAKE AHEAD The bars can be stored in an airtight container for up to 4 days.

Spiced Italian Pecan Meringues

"Don't judge the taste of these cookies by the crags and cracks," says Rossoblu sous-chef **Merrin Mae Gray**. (Their Italian name is *brutti ma buoni*, "ugly but good.") The pecans and grappa add an unexpected elegance, and the crisp outsides and chewy centers make them seriously addictive.

Active **15 min**; Total **2 hr**
Makes **about 1½ dozen**

- ¾ cup shelled pecans**
- 3 large egg whites**
- ¾ cup sugar**
- 1½ tsp. grappa**
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon**
- ⅛ tsp. ground nutmeg**
- ⅛ tsp. ground cloves**

1. Preheat the oven to 300°. Spread the pecans on a small rimmed baking sheet and toast, tossing them halfway through, for about 20 minutes, until browned. Transfer to a work surface and let cool, then coarsely chop.

2. Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper. In a stand mixer fitted with the whisk, beat the egg whites at

medium-high speed until foamy, about 30 seconds. Beat in the sugar 1 tablespoon at a time until the whites are stiff and glossy, 5 to 7 minutes. Beat in the grappa, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold in the chopped pecans.

3. Spoon heaping tablespoons of the meringue onto the prepared baking sheets, spaced 1 inch apart. Bake for 15 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 200° and bake for 1 hour and 15 minutes, until the meringues are firm on the outside but still chewy in the center. Transfer the baking sheets to wire racks and let cool completely.

MAKE AHEAD The meringues can be stored in an airtight container for up to 1 week.



Christmas Morning Biscotti

Merrin Mae Gray is Filipina, not Italian, but she really connects with Italy's soulful food: "These biscotti spiced with cocoa nibs and anise seeds are my Italian interpretation of *biskotso*, a twice-baked cookie I grew up eating with hot chocolate."

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Active **25 min**; Total **1 hr 45 min**
Makes **about 2 dozen**

Nonstick cooking spray

1¾ cups all-purpose flour

1 tsp. baking powder

½ tsp. baking soda

Kosher salt

5 Tbsp. unsalted butter, softened

⅔ cup sugar

3 large eggs

1 Tbsp. plus 1 tsp. anisette liqueur

¼ cup cocoa nibs

1½ tsp. whole anise seeds

1. Preheat the oven to 325°. Coat a baking sheet with cooking spray. Line with parchment paper; coat with cooking spray.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour with the baking powder, baking soda and a pinch of salt. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle, beat the butter with the sugar at medium-high speed until fluffy, about 3 minutes.

Beat in 2 of the eggs one at a time. Beat in 1 tablespoon of the anisette. Beat in the dry ingredients at low speed until just combined. Mix in the cocoa nibs and anise seeds.

3. On the prepared baking sheet, using lightly floured fingers, shape the dough into a slightly flattened 12-inch log ¾ inch thick. In a small bowl, lightly whisk the remaining egg with the remaining 1 teaspoon of anisette. Brush the log with the egg mixture. Bake for 20 minutes, until pale golden. Transfer the baking sheet to a wire rack and let the log cool slightly.

4. Using a serrated knife, cut the log into diagonal, ½-inch-thick slices. Arrange on the baking sheet; bake, flipping halfway through, for about 10 minutes, until toasted. Transfer the baking sheet to a wire rack; let the biscotti cool.

MAKE AHEAD The biscotti can be stored in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

1 tsp. flaky sea salt

2 Tbsp. matcha tea powder

1. Brush a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with butter. In a large pot, melt the 5 tablespoons of butter over moderate heat. Add the marshmallows and cook, stirring with a wooden spoon, until completely melted, about 3 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat, add the cereal

Einkorn Shortbreads

In her quest to re-create the quintessential flavor of her grandmother's butter cookies, **Roxana Jullapat**, chef-owner of Friends & Family, came up with these unique cookies that get nutty, caramel-like notes from the wheatlike grain einkorn.

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Active **25 min**; Total **2 hr 25 min**
Makes **20**

6 Tbsp. confectioners' sugar

⅓ cup dark brown sugar

2 sticks unsalted butter, cubed, at room temperature

1¼ cups whole-grain einkorn flour (see Note)

1 cup all-purpose flour

1¾ tsp. kosher salt

1. Preheat the oven to 300°. In a food processor, pulse the confectioners' sugar with the brown sugar until combined. Add the butter and pulse to combine. Add the einkorn flour, all-purpose flour and salt and pulse until the dough comes together. Divide in half and press into disks. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for 30 minutes.
2. Roll out each disk of dough between 2 sheets of parchment paper into a ¼-inch-thick round. Peel off the top layer of parchment. Using a 2½-inch

round cookie cutter, stamp out cookies and transfer to 2 baking sheets, spaced ½ inch apart. Using a small star-shaped cookie cutter, stamp out a star in the upper right corner of each cookie. Transfer the stars to a separate baking sheet. Reroll the scraps and cut out more cookies.

3. Bake the cookies and stars until deep golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes for the cookies and 10 to 12 minutes for the stars. Transfer the baking sheets to wire racks and let cool completely.

NOTE Einkorn flour is available from jovialfoods.com.

MAKE AHEAD The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Matcha Tea Marshmallow Crispy Treats

Ted Hopson is generally not a cookie fan, but he loves Rice Krispies Treats. "And I especially like this nontraditional combo of tannic, floral green tea and subtly sweet white chocolate," says the executive chef and co-owner of The Bellwether.

Active **15 min**; Total **1 hr 15 min**
Makes **15**

5 Tbsp. unsalted butter, sliced, plus more at room temperature for brushing

1 lb. marshmallows

8½ cups crisped rice cereal (8 oz.), preferably Rice Krispies

1 cup white chocolate chips (6 oz.)

and stir to coat. Let the mixture stand until cool to the touch, about 2 minutes.

2. Working quickly, fold in the white chocolate and salt until just combined. Scrape the mixture into the prepared baking dish and press into an even layer. Let stand at room temperature until cool, about 45 minutes. Using a sieve, dust with the matcha powder. Cut into 3-inch squares and serve.

MAKE AHEAD The treats can be stored in an airtight container for up to 2 days.

✚ HUNGRY FOR MORE?

Get a bonus recipe for Chocolate Peppermint Sandwich Cookies at foodandwine.com/peppermint-sandwich-cookies.