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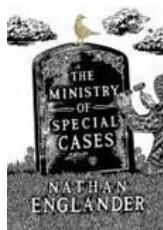
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may 20, 2008

Tahiti Vanilla



Long-time readers of this blog (and those who sift through the archives while pretending to work) may remember me [mentioning](#) that my source of choice for **vanilla** was a small family-run company based in [Mayotte](#).

Alas, when my sizeable stash dwindled and I decided to place a new order late last year, I found that the online shop had been dormant for months. My email enquiry was left unanswered and, a few weeks later, the website had evaporated. La Vanille de Mayotte had, for all intents and purposes, gone under.

I felt sorry for the owners, as I knew them to be real people (with a young child, too) and I liked their producer-to-consumer approach, but once I'd gotten past this stage, the real, **angst-ridden question** was: where would my next bean come from?

And then I remembered reading about **Alain Abel**, who runs a [vanilla plantation](#) in [Tahiti](#) and has won multiple awards for the exceptional quality of his beans, also acknowledged by the star-spangled list of his [professional clients](#).

What's good for [Alain](#) and [Guy](#) is good for me, I figured, so I asked two [dear friends](#) if they'd join forces with me to order online. They said they would (of course, what are friends for?) and because we're worth it, we splurged on the [Bora Bora vanilla](#) -- just like wine, Abel's beans come in different *crus* depending on the piece of land where they're grown.

Three days later, the parcel arrived, and I opened the vacuum-sealed half-pound package to reveal the most **flamboyant** beans of vanilla I've ever had the good fortune to touch and smell. Plump, waxy, and sappy-fresh, their astonishingly potent aroma lingered on my fingers long after I'd divided the bounty. And, just like yesterday, when I met and shook hands with [Olivier Roellinger*](#), I vowed not to wash my hands ever again.

But the proof of the bean is in the baking, and more specifically in my opinion, the baking of [œufs au lait](#), a recipe with so few ingredients that the quality of each (farm-fresh eggs and milk, cane sugar, world-class vanilla) sings through with clarity.

And well, let's just say that when I'm done with this inaugural order, Monsieur Abel will be **hearing from me again**.

* Olivier Roellinger was signing [Trois Étoiles de mer](#) (= three starfish), his gorgeous new cookbook-cum-travelogue, at [La Librairie Gourmande](#).

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Comments (24)

While I am reading at the office (pretending to work) your post makes me long to be in my kitchen! The oeufs au lait sounds heavenly. Have fun with your new stash!

Posted by [paperbackwriter](#) on May 20, 2008 7:04 PM

Oh, thank heavens for this post, just what I needed since the Mayotte site went down. Will go order imideatly.

Posted by [Paula Schramm](#) on May 20, 2008 7:55 PM

Is there anything like opening a package with fresh vanilla beans? Thanks for the source.

A chef in Mexico once shared a water bottle's worth of the most luscious vanilla extract with me--she'd been to the plantation in Very Cruz and come back with a liter bottle--and it transformed me into a baker. I could drizzle a bit into creme anglaise or add a dash to pie crust and they'd be simply sublime. Sadly, my stock ran out about five years ago and my baking prowess has returned to its pre-vanilla pumpkin state. So I'll have to give Alain Abel a try!

Posted by [swirlingnotions](#) on May 20, 2008 8:06 PM

Because we're worth it, I agree ! I just used one pod yesterday for cannelés, and the result was quite great. Too bad I washed my hands :-). Thank you for sharing this treasure !

Posted by [Ester](#) on May 20, 2008 9:16 PM

aiee! The beans sound wonderful, but pricey. Just how many of them does one get for 80 Euros?

Posted by [jill](#) on May 20, 2008 9:32 PM

I don't think I've ever wanted vanilla beans so much in my life. You make them sound so good. I should probably buy some regular beans, as I don't think I've ever cooked with them before - just extract.

Posted by [andy](#) on May 20, 2008 9:42 PM

Jill - The packages are sold by weight (250g, or 8.8oz) and the exact number of beans can vary, depending on the type of vanilla in particular.

Our package of Bora-Bora vanilla contained 18 very fat beans, about twice as big as the ones I'm used to, so when a recipe calls for one vanilla bean, I'm using just half or even a third of mine. And of course, I'm saving the empty pods to flavor sugar and olive oil.

Lastly, when I enquired by email, I was told that a 250-gram package of the less pricey Tahaa vanilla contained 45-60 beans.

Posted by [clotilde](#) on May 20, 2008 11:24 PM

I love Tahitian vanilla. When I visited Tahiti some years ago I was struck by how the air smelled of vanilla and coffee. I took home bundles of vanilla beans for myself and friends.

Posted by [barbara](#) on May 21, 2008 1:14 AM

This is the first time I have posted on here, but I love reading your blog and really admire all you have

accomplished!

I just used a vanilla bean yesterday for the first time in a tapioca pudding and it is awesome! I looked for the beans at the store and saw how expensive they were so I did not buy them. The next day, my brother just happened to bring me some from work (weird coincidence!). Do you think that the price of your new supplier is reasonable compared to others you have seen? (I am a poor college student, so price is an issue!) Thanks a lot!

Posted by [maria](#) on May 21, 2008 4:38 AM

Well, I am too pretending to work... How did you know? ;-)

We got our vanilla planifloria order from Madagascar over a month ago. We shared the order with friends, too.

Unless you've done it yourself, you cannot imagine the smell on your hands AND in the whole appartement after opening the package! The smell lingered there for a week or so, it felt like being in a bakery or gelateria... We made 2kg of fine brown vanilla sugar and 1kg of white (superfine). We even bought a bottle of vodka and started our own vanilla extract. I cannot wait to start using it. The oeufs au lait sond very good. And as more and more friends want to have some pods, I think we'll order some more soon ;-)

Posted by [Janka](#) on May 21, 2008 9:32 AM

I want to post a very important hint for working with fresh vanilla pods: the flavors need time or heat to blend!

When preparing a custard, do as the recipe says and cook the vanilla beans and the pods in the milk/cream. The pods also have a lot of flavor (that's why you can use the empty ones for vanilla sugar).

When preparing a cold cream (such as mascarpone cream), prepare it hours up to a day ahead. Don't worry, it will not spoil in the fridge overnight. But the patience will pay and you'll get a heavenly vanilla flavor!

Well, now I'm hungry and have to sit in the office ;-)

Posted by [Janka](#) on May 21, 2008 10:23 AM

Sifting through archives at work... This I thought of while creating my top 10 list for reading my blog. Ha, ha, ha.

I love the smell of vanilla but like Andy never worked with the raw beans before, just extract. I stay true to pure vanilla though and not the alcohol ridden flavoring which, to me, destroys the entire experience.

Posted by [vegoftheweek](#) on May 21, 2008 4:44 PM

The first time I got my hands on a true Tahitian vanilla bean I could barely contain myself. The oil left on my fingers was intoxicating. So much so that I rubbed it behind my ears and on my wrists. Never was there a more perfect perfume.

Posted by [EB](#) on May 21, 2008 7:33 PM

That's a good tip, Janka; steeping the beans overnight in milk/cream before finishing the recipe will add a lot of flavor to vanilla ice cream. It's true, vanilla beans are expensive, but used judiciously you can get a lot of mileage from just one bean. And nothing smells better!

Posted by [Barbra](#) on May 21, 2008 8:53 PM

C'est de loin pour moi la meilleure des vanilles : bien noire, grasse et charnue et quel parfum. J'enrage comme en ce moment, je n'en ai plus et dois me contenter de celle qu'on trouve habituellement dans le commerce. Heureusement, j'attends un nouvel envoi.

Posted by [Vanille](#) on May 21, 2008 10:44 PM

What perfect timing, Clotilde! I have almost used up the last of my Mayotte vanilla beans and was just thinking about getting around to ordering some more. I'm so sorry to read that the Mayotte beans are no longer available, but thank you so much for sharing this new site. I can almost smell vanilla as I type. And how about the new Guerlain fragrance - Spiritueuse Double Vanille - delicious!

Posted by [Judy](#) on May 22, 2008 1:28 AM

Hi! I like your web site, and have a similar taste in food I think:-)

I wanted to let you know about some Hawaiian vanilla, there is a lovely [vanilla farm](#) here on my island that is a family business. They also have a little cafe. The food and presentation is so good! If you come to Hawaii, look me up and I will take you there:-)

Mahalo!

Posted by [sunny](#) on May 22, 2008 6:15 AM

Oh I do like vanilla more than chocolate (or even 'chocolat'). I could DIVE into vanilla custard.

"Vanilla & Zucchini" !

Posted by [gingerpale](#) on May 22, 2008 6:31 AM

Oh Clotilde, those vanilla beans on the photo up above look so appetizing...I could just bite into one, I swear!:)))) But I'm curious how you infuse olive oil with it? And what do you use the vanilla olive oil for?

Posted by [Liza](#) on May 22, 2008 7:00 PM

It does sound just heavenly.

Posted by [Eileen](#) on May 22, 2008 7:11 PM

OMG the prices you pay! I buy my vanilla beans from <http://www.saffron.com/>, at a full pound (more than 100 beans) for \$20. Of course, I don't know how these fare next to the very expensive ones, but they are supple and very perfumy (and way more plump than the little vials of 1 or 2 beans you sometimes see in stores).

Since they are so inexpensive, I've been using mine rather wastefully - an entire pod split in half for a glass of warm vanilla milk, etc. But I do save the sprnt pods in a sugar jar.

Posted by [cinimins](#) on May 22, 2008 10:24 PM

Here I am, joining the ranks of not-working workers . . . thank you for the information on these beans. I look forward to acquiring my own little stash soon.

Posted by [Chou](#) on May 22, 2008 10:43 PM

Yes, I noticed another comment about our very own & quite terrific Hawaiian Vanilla Farm. They serve lunch and a wonderful tea, with all the kids also helping out. And, their vanilla products are great.

Posted by [Claudia](#) on May 23, 2008 5:47 AM

Hello Clotilde,

I was wondering why you decided to choose vanilla beans from Tahiti? Madagascar seems to be the largest producer and exporter of vanilla beans? Also, I've read that Indonesia sells a rather cheap version. Have you tried it? Could you perhaps tell us the difference?

Posted by [Florence](#) on May 23, 2008 12:31 PM

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