RECIPE FROM OUR KITCHEN: CHEF BARBARA ALEXANDER

STRAWBERRY “SALAD” WITH BROWN SUGAR MERINGUES, CRÈME FRAICHE ICE CREAM
STRAWBERRY BLACK PEPPER “MIGNONETTE”

Serves 6

Meringues:
3 large organic egg whites
6 oz brown sugar
1 pinch cream of tartar

Crème Fraîche Ice Cream:
1 pint crème fraîche
¾ cup superfine sugar
½ vanilla bean scraped

Strawberry ‘Salad’
1 pound Organic Strawberries, sliced
a sprinkling of sugar
½ scraped vanilla bean
1 branch lemon verbena, bruised
splash of booze—such as cognac, kirsh, rum

Strawberry “Mignonette”
1 cup superfine sugar
¾ cup water
1 cup strawberry puree or juice
2 tsp. freshly cracked black peppercorns

You will also need a baking tray measuring 11 x 16 inches (28 x 40 cm), lined with parchment paper or a nonstick silicone mat.

Method:
The day before serving—make the meringues and ice cream

Meringues:
• Preheat the oven to 250F
• Measure brown sugar and set aside.
• Whip egg whites with the pinch of cream of tartar in a clean bowl and whisk until they begin to form soft peaks. Gradually “rain” in the sugar, whisking vigorously until mixture is glossy.
• Spoon soft piles of meringue onto the prepared baking sheet making a divet in center of each one. Place the baking sheet on the center shelf in oven. Allow meringue to cook for one hour then turn the oven off and leave meringues overnight to dry.

Ice Cream:
• In a mixing bowl, whisk together the crème fraîche, sugar and vanilla bean
• Place the mixture in a loaf pan and wrap with plastic wrap. Freeze overnight.

Strawberry Salad:
• One to three hours before serving, slice the strawberries, sprinkle with sugar, a splash of booze and the remaining ½ vanilla bean and the bruised branch of lemon verbena and wrap with plastic wrap. Allow to sit for one hour, preferably in the sun, for optimum flavor and juiciness.
• Strain the collected juices from the berries and use for the mignonette

Strawberry Mignonette:
• Stir the sugar and water together until the sugar is dissolved.
Bring to a boil and boil until the sugar syrup becomes a gold color. Remove from the stove and “stop” with the strawberry juice. Bring back to a boil with the black pepper until all the seized sugar has dissolved. Cool to room temperature—taste for pepper intensity—it should have a nice bite.

Plating:
• In the center of a plate, place a meringue. Add a scoop of the crème fraîche ice cream
• Top with the strawberry “salad” and drizzle with the “mignonette”