

Ti Couz Buckwheat Crêpes

Ti Couz ("the old house" in Gaelic) is a popular San Francisco *crêperie bretonne* conceived, owned, and run by Sylvie Le Mer, who was born and raised in Quimper, Lower Brittany. Her name is one of the most evocative of anyone I know. Once a staple in the diet of both the rich and the poor, the savory buckwheat crêpes, known as *kramouz*, are traditional in this area of France. This recipe combines domestic buckwheat flour with a small percentage of whole-wheat and white flours in an effort to approximate the unique French buckwheat flour, which is unavailable in America. To Sylvie's delight, visitors from Brittany say her San Francisco version taste very similar to those on the continent.

Enjoy the nutty-tasting crêpes "grandmother style:" straight off the hotplate and eaten grasped in your fingertips, generously spread with sweet butter and folded in fours. They are also good filled with cheese, topped with a gently fried egg, or wrapped around a grilled sausage. Wash them down with the traditional accompaniment: a good dry or sweet cider drunk from a ceramic bowl. When I ran this recipe in the San Jose Mercury News, word spread there wasn't any buckwheat flour to be had for a 25 mile radius as so many people made this beautiful recipe.

Makes about 24 large crêpes

9 cups water
3 cups milk
1 large egg
4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, melted
2 3/4 cups whole-wheat flour
1 2/3 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
1 1/4 cups buckwheat flour
2 teaspoons salt
About 1/2 cup vegetable shortening, for brushing pan
Unsalted butter or Breton Herb Butter (recipe following)

1. In a large ceramic bowl with a large whisk or in the work bowl of a large food processor fitted with the metal blade, combine the water, milk, egg, melted butter, the 3 flours, and salt. Beat well until creamy, about 30 seconds. The batter may also be beaten with your outstretched hand for 10 minutes, in the old farmstead fashion. The batter will be the

consistency of smooth liquid heavy cream. Cover and let stand at room temperature about 1 hour. The batter can also be covered and refrigerated, up to 1 day and brought to room temperature before baking.

2. Assemble your work space with everything you will need for cooking the pancakes before baking, so as to be able to work uninterrupted. Spread out a large clean kitchen towel on which to lay the pancakes after baking (in Brittany there are ribbed wooden boards specially for this purpose). Set out a measuring cup or a 6 ounce capacity ladle for the batter, a wide spatula or wooden pancake spreader (a *rozell* is traditionally used), and a wide, elongated wooden spatula for flipping (a *spanell*). Have a piece of paper towel for scooping out the shortening and greasing the hot pan. The pancakes are traditionally cooked on large, round hotplates (a *bilig*), but I use a 14- or 16-inch sauté pan or heavy paella pan.

3. Heat the pan over medium-high heat. Sprinkle the pan with a few drops of water. If the water sizzles, the pan is ready. Brush the pan lightly with some shortening. Stir the batter. Ladle in a full 2/3 cup of batter with one hand on the left side of the pan and using the spatula, immediately pull the batter from left to right in a round clockwise motion, spreading in little strokes. (If you are left-handed work in the opposite direction.) You will be pulling the batter back over itself to make a thicker pancake than a crêpe. Do not tilt the pan. It will take a few pancakes to get the rhythm. Cook until the edges are lightly browned and lifting up slightly off the pan. Slide the long spatula under it and turn carefully. Cook briefly, just until brown in spots but not until crispy. These crêpes should remain soft. Lift gently onto the towel. Continue to make the crêpes in this manner, stirring the batter and greasing the pan lightly before cooking each pancake.

4. Eat immediately with plain or with a sweet or savory butter, or let cool and refrigerate in plastic up to 2 days, or freeze up to 1 month. After being frozen, the *krampouz* must be brought back to room temperature before using to avoid tearing.

Breton Herb Butter

A savory bright green *beurre parfumé*. Spread the butter between two crêpes and cut into wedges.

Makes 1 cup

2 tablespoons *each* loosely packed fresh parsley, chives, chervil, and watercress leaves

16 tablespoons (2 sticks) lightly salted butter, room temperature

2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

1 large shallot, minced

In a blender or a food processor fitted with the metal blade, chop the herbs. Add the butter, lemon juice, and shallot and process just until smooth and evenly combined. Alternately, the herbs may be chopped by hand and creamed in a small bowl with a fork or an electric mixer. Scrape the sides as needed. Pack the butter into a covered crock or form into a log wrapped in plastic. Herb butter keeps 1 week refrigerated, or it may be frozen up to 3 months.