

Local Baker Brings Bordeaux Taste Treat to Center City

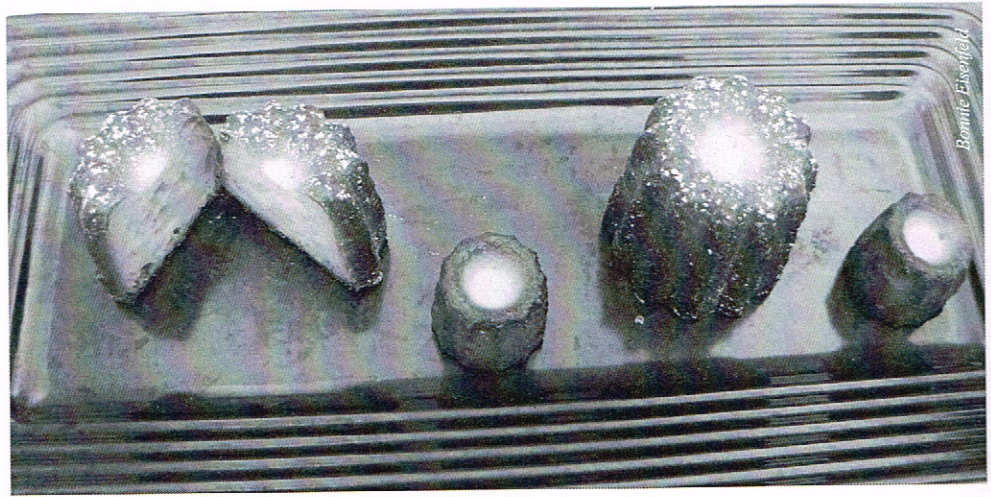
By Bonnie Eisenfeld

On Saturdays at the Rittenhouse Farmers' Market, Center City shoppers can find local produce, fresh baked goods, fish, chocolate, hummus, jam, soap, apple cider, cheese, herbs, honey, candles, flowers, plants — and a taste of Bordeaux brought by local baker Gil Ortale. Ortale's main offering is his *canelé* (pronounced "cahn-eh-LAY"), a tiny grooved cake formed in a fluted mold, encasing a smooth, sweet vanilla and rum custard interior and covered by a thin caramelized sugar shell.

Canelé originated about 300 years ago. Two stories, neither documented, explain how they came about. In one story, the nuns in a convent in Bordeaux prepared cakes from donated eggs from local winemakers. In the other, the residents of Bordeaux obtained spilled flour from the loading docks and used it to make sweets for poor children. Over time, these cakes faded from popularity but were revived in France in the 1980s but with variations. Bakers of Bordeaux formed a brotherhood to protect the integrity of the *canelé* and its secret recipe. Today *canelé de Bordeaux* is the official cake of the city, while *cannelés bordelais* is a generic name used elsewhere with variations such as chocolate and orange. The original recipe has been locked in a vault by one of the Bordeaux bakers, and all 88 of its members have been sworn to secrecy.

Market Day *canelé* are made in Philadelphia by Ortale and his team of bakers using fresh ingredients, including milk, eggs, sugar, flour, rum, butter, Tahitian vanilla and orange zest. The cakes are baked in molds brushed with beeswax to crisp the shell and allow the *canelé* to slip out when done. Recipes for the confection can be found online but are difficult to make. According to Ortale, "I spent two years perfecting the process before I started selling them." Ortale has added other products to his repertoire, including a variety of French tarts, different ones each week.

Prior to becoming an independent baker, Ortale managed food service operations at CIGNA and Jefferson University and learned culinary techniques at Frog Commissary. He discovered *canelé* in 2008 and taught himself how to make them. He sells about 2,000 every week at



Samples of *canelé*, a French dessert, are offered at Rittenhouse Square farmer's market on Saturdays.



Gil Ortale, baker, makes *canelé* and sells them at the farmer's market on Rittenhouse Square every Saturday.

farmers' markets and specialty retailers in the Philadelphia region, making him one

of the top sellers and authorities on *canelé* in the country.