

The essentials list: ‘Top Chef’ alum Fabio Viviani shares his 7 baking essentials

By Mara Reinstein, CNN Underscored
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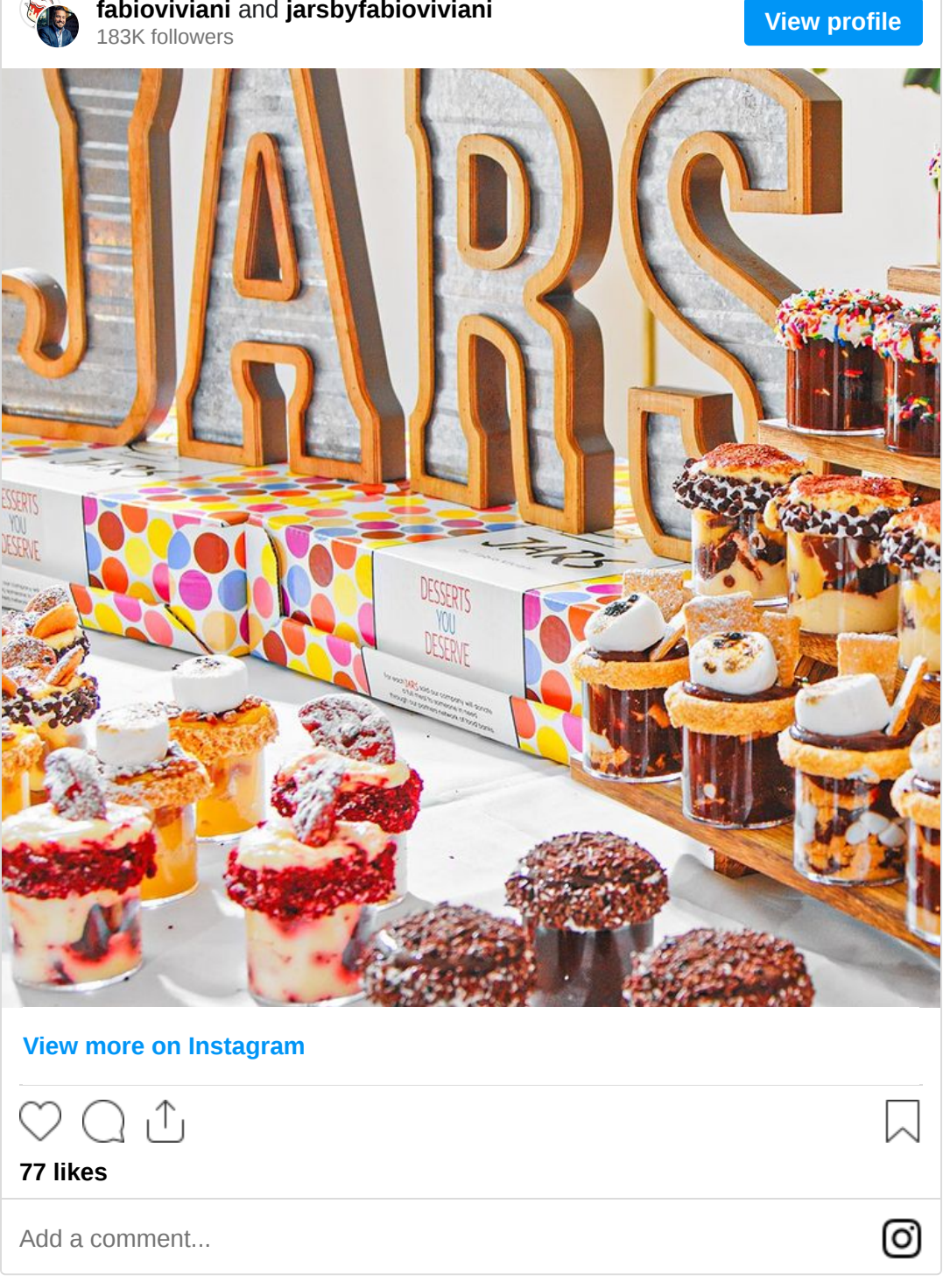
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"I love cooking and baking during this time of year," [Fabio Viviani](#) says. "To me, there's nothing better than preparing and sharing a deliciously memorable dessert with the people who matter the most to me!"

But the celebrity chef and restaurateur, who jump-started his career after excelling on "[Top Chef](#)" in 2008, isn't just content whipping up decadent treats for friends and family. He recently launched [JARS](#), a dessert experience that features the likes of s'mores, tiramisu, red velvet cheesecake and birthday cake in a reusable single-serve jar. Its first brick-and-mortar store opened in Chicago earlier this year, and the eye-catching desserts are also available [online](#).

As Viviani explains, the idea was as obvious as pairing marshmallows with graham crackers and chocolate: "I saw a void in the marketplace and decided to fill it. *Everyone* does cakes and cookies. I wanted to bring something fresh and exciting to the dessert space." He adds that the unique presentation requires "minimal labor and kitchen equipment, which allows us to focus on creating amazing flavor combinations."



For amateurs crafting desserts in the kitchen this season? Viviani advises using signature flavors like gingerbread, pumpkin and peppermint in moderation so you don't overwhelm the taste buds, and to look to other cultures for inspiration. "Up your game by pairing classically decorated sugar cookies with [pizzelles](#), [kourabiedes](#) or [macarons](#)," he says of the respective Italian, Greek and French delicacies.

And to top it all, he adds, "A little sprinkle goes a long way. Multicolored sprinkles, metallic nonpareils and sugar pearls can make any dessert more fun and festive."

Ahead, Viviani shares his baking essentials with CNN Underscored.

Williams Sonoma French Tapered Marble Rolling Pin



Crafted from hand-finished hard marble and stainless steel, this rolling pin features angled ends and a flat, slim center. The result? "It's easy to maneuver, which makes it simple to shape the dough to your desired thickness," he explains. (For enhanced cooling, place the pin in the fridge for up to 30 minutes prior to use.)

\$40 at Williams Sonoma

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Gir Silicone Grip Whisks



"A good whisk is a must for all kinds of baking," he says. He advises picking one with an easy-grip silicone handle "because it keeps your hand from slipping while you're using it." This whisk also has 12 evenly spaced wires, which creates more air while prepping everything from whipped cream to cookie dough.

\$25 at Food52

DecoPac Disposable Pastry Bags



These clear and hygienic disposable pastry bags are handy for both hot and cold controllable handling and consistent piping. "These make filling homemade Italian cannolis a breeze," he says. **Tip:** Use one with a no-slip exterior surface and a plain, half-inch round tip.

From \$16 at Amazon

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Best Tested

KitchenAid Artisan Stand Mixer, 5-Quart



Though a mixer can be a splurge, Viviani stresses that the right one can be the ultimate fixer: "It will save you a lot of time and effort, so it's worth investing in a great one!" This powerful 10-speed appliance comes with a stainless steel bowl, coated flat beater, dough hook, six-wire whip and pouring shield. Best of all, he notes, "It can handle heavy-duty mixing and kneading, so it's perfect for denser doughs and breads."

\$450 at Target

\$450 \$429 at Amazon

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Sondiko Butane Torch



When it comes to dessert baking, "torches can be used for so much more than just *crème brûlée*," Viviani says, singling out brown meringues on fruit tart, pies, baked Alaskas and roasted marshmallows for s'mores. Plus, "it can bring cold butter to room temperature quickly before adding it to a recipe." This adjustable and refillable torch, he notes, "is easy to use and has a number of safety features."

\$17 at Amazon

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Valrhona Dulcey 35% Baking Chocolate



Viviani's chocolate brand of choice "is exceptional for baking," he says. And while the semisweet, bittersweet and dark varieties enhance any treat, he raves that its smooth and creamy Dulcey caramelized blonde chocolate — which consists of 35% cocoa — "adds incredible flavor to any dessert that calls for white chocolate."

\$24 at Amazon

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Honey Maid Graham Crackers



Your favorite childhood snack can do wonders as a gourmet sweet. "Honey Maid graham crackers are a super-versatile, easy-to-use ingredient that can add just the right crunch to texture to almost any dessert," he says. At JARS, he uses finely crushed graham crackers to coat the rim of the jars of his Key Lime Pie and Very Very Blueberry Cheesecake.

From \$6 at Target

Note: The prices above reflect the retailers' listed price at the time of publication.

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