



BITE by BITE

Conquering My Culinary
Bucket List One Dish at a Time

By Emily Banks Wooten

**“I LOVE MACARONI AND CHEESE. I COULD
EAT IT EVERY MEAL OF THE DAY.”**

– COBIE SMULDERS



Magnificent MAC AND CHEESE

In the event you are not familiar with it, TikTok is a social media platform for creating, sharing and discovering short videos. It's very popular with young people. I don't do TikTok. From time to time I'll find myself inclined to join the platform and learn how to use it, but then I'll decide I'm too tired or have something better to do. Not to mention the fact that I'm not young, I hate the sound of my recorded voice and I'm not about to be (knowingly) videoed dancing.

However, I do occasionally hear about various recipes going viral and when curiosity gets the better of me, I've been known to find ways to track them down for myself. We have a teenage daughter who enjoys TikTok and not long ago she discovered a mac and cheese recipe that had gone viral on the platform that she wanted to try. She fancies herself a bit of a mac and cheese connoisseur and can usually tell you whose is the best. She was fond of Chick-Fil-A's until she discovered the mac and cheese at Dave's Hot Chicken. Now that is her favorite when it comes to fast food mac and cheese.

Anyway, if you read last week's Bite by Bite, then you know that we went down to the Corpus Christi area for a few days and nights over Spring Break. She made plans to hit the grocery store after we settled into our Airbnb to get the ingredients to make it. Sounded good to me. I left her and her Daddy in the kitchen while I found other things to do. She and I don't always see eye to eye, occasionally butting heads, so we all knew it would be best if I didn't interfere. She measured and poured like a little mad scientist while



her Daddy hand-grated two and a half pounds of various cheeses.

It turned out absolutely wonderful and I think may be the best mac and cheese I've ever had. Of course, with three kinds of cheese and cavatappi (corkscrew) pasta, what's not to like? Trust me. If you're a mac and cheese lover, this is the recipe you need.

Called Tini's mac and cheese, it is a viral TikTok with over 60 million views and counting. If I understood correctly, I think Daughter said there is a paywall and you don't get the entire recipe on Tini's TikTok without paying. She chose not to pay, but ever the tenacious pragmatist, found Tini's recipe on a site called iamafoodblog.com.

Feeling a sense of familiarity that I just couldn't put my finger on and finding myself a little curious about Tini, I turned to the internet and discovered that Tini is a cook with a popular TikTok account with over 5.5 million followers and she was also on

“ONE OF THE THINGS I LOVE ABOUT NEW YORK IS THAT IT'S ONE OF THE ONLY PLACES WHERE YOU COULD HAVE AN ENTIRE RESTAURANT DEDICATED TO MACARONI AND CHEESE.”

– SAVANNAH GUTHRIE

Next Level Chef with Gordon Ramsay. Aha! That's it. Hubby and I regularly watch Next Level Chef, presently in its third season. I googled Tini and recognized her immediately. She was a contestant on Season 2 and came in 8th place. Small world!

Suffice it to say that this mac and cheese was so good that as far as I'm concerned it will be our go-to from here on out ... unless at some point Daughter finds an even better one.

I'll leave you with a couple of tips though. Please shred your own cheese. Yes, it's laborious and yes, your arm

will get tired, but I promise you it will taste so much better. While the pre-shredded bags are quick and easy, they come with an anti-clumping agent that doesn't melt well and will leave your dish tasting grainy.

Additionally, you can make this entire recipe ahead of time up until the point where you bake it. Cover it tightly and keep in the fridge for up to 3 days before baking. To bake it, cover it with foil and bake it for 30 minutes, remove the foil and continue to bake until the mac and cheese is heated through. Finish by broiling. ■



“FETTUCINI ALFREDO IS MACARONI AND CHEESE FOR ADULTS.”

– MITCH HEDBERG

TINI'S MAC AND CHEESE

iamafoodblog.com

- 1 lb. pasta, corkscrew/cavatappi preferred
- 1 lb. mozzarella cheese
- 1 lb. colby jack cheese
- ½ lb. cheddar cheese, sharp preferred
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- 3 teaspoon unsalted butter
- 3 teaspoon all purpose flour
- 12 oz. evaporated milk (1 can)
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon mustard, Dijon preferred

• Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Once at a rolling boil, add the pasta and cook it according to the package directions. When done, drain well.

• While the water is coming to a boil and the pasta cooks, shred the cheese. Grate the cheese with the coarse side of a box grater. Once you finish grating, mix all the cheese together in a large bowl, then divide into two even portions and set aside.

• Make the seasoning mix. In a small bowl, stir together the salt, pepper, garlic powder, and smoked paprika. Set it aside.

• In a large pan, melt the butter over medium heat. When melted, add half of the seasoning mix. Stir, bringing out the aromatics. Add the flour and cook, stirring constantly, until everything bubbles slightly and looks incorporated.

• Slowly stream in the evaporated milk while whisking to ensure there are no lumps. Next, add the heavy cream, whisking constantly. Whisk in the Dijon and remaining seasoning mix. Let the sauce come to a simmer and thicken, giving it an occasional whisk.

• Add half of the cheese. Turn the heat to low (or remove it from the heat if needed) and slowly melt in half of the cheese, handful by handful, making sure the cheese melts before adding more.

• Stir in the drained pasta, making sure to coat all the noodles in sauce.

• Grab your casserole dish and add half of the mac and cheese to the bottom of the dish, spreading evenly. Layer on half of the remaining cheese then the remaining mac and cheese.

• Finish by evenly layering on the last of the shredded cheese.

• Bake in the preheated oven for 25-30 minutes or until the top melts and bubbles. Broil for 2 minutes to give it a crispy crust, then remove, let sit for a bit so you don't burn yourself, scoop and enjoy!