

Nice ice baby

Food



After a vigorous taste test at Bacio Gelato, *Karen Iley* reckons gelato maestro **Cesare Cellie** has got it licked

For kids, ice cream is the bee's knees. They could quite happily slurp away on strawberry, chocolate and vanilla until their brains froze over. We parents, however, reserve the cool stuff for special treats, suspecting that it's laden with fat, and packed full of preservatives, colourings, emulsifiers, stabilisers and a whole host of other nasty additives their little bodies don't need.

But, here's the real scoop: if you stick with the quality fresh stuff, ice cream can be good for you. It was with such happy thoughts in mind that I skipped down to Al Barsha to sample authentic Italian gelato at

Bacio Gelato Italian Caffè & Gelateria.

The gelato maestro, Cesare Cellie, is a cuddly bear from Bologna. Typically Italian, the owner and gelato chef is convivial, expressive and passionate about what he creates to the point of fanatical and, while he forgives me when I persistently refer to his carefully crafted gelato as ice cream, I can tell it's kind of getting on his nerves. 'The trouble is,' he patiently explains, 'is that gelato translates into ice cream, when, in fact, it means frozen. Gelato is quite different to ice cream.'

It certainly is. I know, because I sampled every variety in the shop. Softer and denser than ice cream with

a far more intense flavour, the fruit concoctions are incredible. A mouthful of mango whisks me back to days in Africa where I picked the plump fruit from the ground, split it with my fingers and wolfed it down in all its sticky, sweet glory. The lemon – more like a sorbet (I can say that without incurring Cesare's wrath) is sweet, sharp and utterly delicious. And, oh, the creamy, nutty flavours are astounding. You can really tell the difference between the hazelnut, the pistachio and the walnut – none of that random nuttiness here – while Bacio Gelato's signature concoction (a mix of chocolate, hazelnut and crunchy choc-chips) will quite possibly bring tears of joy to your eyes.

Surely something so delicious cannot be good for you? Oh yes it can, says Cesare. 'Gelato contains only four to five per cent fat, while commercial ice creams have around 13 to 16 per cent fat,' he says. 'The nutty gelato are amazing – they're really healthy,' he adds, taking a spoonful of pistachio, his personal favourite. 'They have protein, vitamins, power, energy. In fact, in Italy, gelato is often an alternative to lunch or dinner in summertime because 200g contains everything you need and is rich in liquid – just what you need.'

So, what's the secret? For the fruity flavours it's the freshness of the ingredients. Every morning, Cesare trots to Lulu Hypermarket to find the tastiest, juiciest, ripest fruits to create that day's display. What's in the gelato cabinet depends on the fruit in the shop. Melon and pineapple were popular over the summer; dates are good now, and expect to see a fig concoction popping up soon. Strawberries, Cesare says, are 'simply something that must be' and that's what he's whipping up for us today, using just an average-looking, if rather large, hand blender and a batch freezer. 'It tastes like strawberries!' I exclaim after stealing a spoonful of 'fragola' as it oozes out of the freezer. I immediately feel rather foolish. I have, after all, just stood and watched him blend the mix and know it contains nothing but fresh fruit, ice and a little sugar.

The Bacio Gelato team prepares gelato the way mama (or papa) used to make. For the creamy versions, that means pasteurising their own 'fiore di latte' (flower of the milk) – a luscious base of milk, sugar, cream and

condensed milk. To this, Cesare adds the flavours, be it fine Belgian chocolate, nut pastes imported from Italy or caramel and pine nuts (Carapino – you've got to try it).

'The most important thing,' says Cesare, thumping his chest with such force that I jump, 'is the heart. The love, the attention, the passion – this is the secret of success at everything.'

I see my daughter licking the gelato display case

You have to put your heart and soul into something like this. You have to believe in it, you have to love the product and you can't take any shortcuts.'

As I sip my 'affogato', a divine combination of quality Italian espresso with a scoop of fiore di latte or hazelnut gelato (affogato means 'drowned' in Italian), I briefly wonder if such high standards will be lost on the unsophisticated palates of children. But then I see my daughter, having demolished one scoop of strawberry and another of chocolate, licking the gelato display case. Now that's what I call customer endorsement. *Bacio Gelato (04 323 2949). Open Sun-Thu 7am-10pm; Fri-Sat 10am-10pm. Gelato scoops start at Dhs10, takeaway tubs cost Dhs44 for 500g, Dhs79 for one kilogram. Gelato cakes cost Dhs185-Dhs205*

LET THEM EAT CAKE

Why not try a gelato cake for a special occasion? Pick your two fave flavours and Cesare will create a cake especially for you to share with friends and family

