Chocolate Cake with Mocha Frosting
Serves 12

The original purpose for icing a cake was to keep it moist for days, which is a good make-ahead tip. You can make this rich chocolate cake in advance or bake the cake, freeze it, and then make the frosting the day you want to serve it. Either way, your guests will be very happy!

12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 cups sugar
1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
3 extra-large eggs, at room temperature
1¾ cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon kosher salt
⅔ cup hottest tap water
⅔ cup unsweetened cocoa powder, such as Pernigotti
1 teaspoon instant espresso powder
⅔ cup half-and-half
Mocha Frosting (recipe follows)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9 × 13 × 2-inch baking pan. Line with parchment paper, then grease and flour the pan.

Place the butter and sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and beat on medium speed for 4 to 5 minutes, until light and fluffy, scraping down the bowl. On medium speed, add the vanilla, then beat in the eggs, one at a time, until incorporated and the batter is smooth.

Sift the flour, baking soda, and salt together in a medium bowl. In another bowl or a liquid measuring cup, whisk together the hot water, cocoa powder, and espresso powder until smooth. Add the half-and-half and whisk until smooth. With the mixer on low, add the flour and chocolate mixtures alternately in thirds, starting and ending with the flour. With a rubber spatula, scrape down the bowl to be sure the batter is well mixed. Pour the batter into the prepared pan, smooth the top, and bake for 25 to
35 minutes, until a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool completely in the pan. Turn out onto a flat platter or board and frost the top with the mocha frosting. Cut in squares and serve.

MAKE IT AHEAD: Prepare the cake with frosting and leave at room temperature for up to 6 hours. The cake alone can be frozen for up to 2 months. Frost before serving.

Mocha Frosting
Frosts one 9×13-inch cake

12 ounces bittersweet chocolate, such as Lindt, ¼-inchchopped
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, diced, at room temperature
2 teaspoons instant espresso powder
1¼ cups heavy cream
1 tablespoon Kahlúa
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Place the chocolate, butter, and espresso powder in a bowl. Heat the cream to simmer and pour it over the chocolate mixture, stirring occasionally, until the chocolate is melted. (If the chocolate isn't melted, microwave the mixture for 15 seconds.) Stir in the Kahlúa and vanilla and stir until the mixture is smooth.

Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes only, until cool but not cold.

Scrape down the bowl and beat the frosting with a handheld mixer on high speed for 15 to 20 seconds only, until the mixture forms soft peaks. (If you overbeat it, it will curdle!) Spread on the cake immediately with a metal spatula.