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LOBSTER DUMPLINGS IN LOBSTER BUTTER SAUCE

SERVES 10 AS A FIRST COURSE

Force meat refers to an emulsified sausage mixture. Add cream and egg to puréed meat or fish, and you have mousseline. Those may sound like fancy cooking school terms, but it's a basic technique/ratio that can be used for an infinite number of preparations. At Fins, we have served millions of lobster dumplings and thousands of pot stickers.

SEAFOOD FORCEMEAT BASE

- 8 ounces drum or any lean white meat, very cold (place in freezer for 10 minutes)
- 2 tablespoons beaten egg, chilled
- 1 cup heavy cream, chilled
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- ½ cup (about ½ bunch) trimmed and thinly sliced green onions
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 ½ teaspoons tobiko, optional
- 1 tablespoon lobster base (see page 163)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 4 ounces fresh lobster meat (about ½ of the meat from a 1-pound Maine lobster, cut in ¼-inch dice (An alternative is crab))

DUMPLINGS

- 1 tablespoon cornstarch (plus a little more for dusting), mixed with ¼ cup cold water
- 50 gyoza wrappers

SAFFRON-FENNEL GARNISH

- 1 cup water
- 1 small fennel bulb, thinly sliced crosswise
- 1 small pinch of saffron threads

Lobster Butter Sauce (page 163), triple recipe, warm

Finely diced ripe tomato, peeled, seeded, and diced

Have all ingredients and tools (food processor bowl and blade, large metal bowl, rubber spatula) well chilled before you begin. Fill a container large enough to accommodate the bowl with ice.

SEAFOOD FORCEMEAT BASE Grind the well-chilled fish in the food processor fitted with the metal blade until it gathers into a ball. Blend in the egg, and then slowly add the cream in a thin stream until emulsified. The mixture should be the consistency of soft-serve ice cream. Transfer to the chilled metal bowl, set the bowl in the container of ice, and stir occasionally until it thickens while you prepare the rest of the ingredients.

Heat oil to medium in a small skillet. Add green onions and sauté until tender. Remove from heat and let cool. Fold green onions, mustard, tobiko, lobster base, and salt into the puréed mixture with a rubber spatula. Fold in the lobster. Refrigerate for 1 hour. (May be covered and refrigerated up to 2 days on ice.)

DUMPLINGS Dust a baking sheet lightly with cornstarch.

Set a gyoza wrapper on a work surface, keeping remaining wrappers covered with a dampened cloth while you work. Place about 2 teaspoons of the seafood mixture in the center. Dip a finger in the cornstarch-water mixture and run your wet finger around the edge of the wrapper to make it sticky, fold one side over the other to enclose, and pinch and crimp the edges together to seal. Place on the baking sheet so the dumplings don't touch. Repeat with the remaining wrappers and filling. Cover the baking sheet with plastic wrap and refrigerate.

SAFFRON-FENNEL GARNISH Bring water to a low boil in a small saucepan; add the fennel slices and saffron and poach until fennel slices are crisp-tender. Strain off the liquid and spread on a plate to cool.

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil on high heat. Add the dumplings all at once and cook 2 to 3 minutes, or until they are tender but still firm to the touch. Transfer to a heated pasta bowl, with a slotted spoon.

Ladle about 3 tablespoons of the Lobster Butter Sauce into each of 10 heated pasta bowls. Add 5 dumplings to each; sprinkle with diced tomato and the Saffron-Fennel Garnish.

SUGGESTED WINE PAIRING: Frank Family Vineyards Chardonnay (Carneros, California). Creamy with flavors of baked pear and lemon curd.

SALMON TARTARE WITH HARD-BOILED EGGS, CAPERS, AND ONION

4 SERVINGS AS AN APPETIZER OR 2 SERVINGS AS A MAIN COURSE

I learned how to make this rich-tasting and striking-looking tartare from John Carver, who now owns the wildly successful Red Ash in Austin, Texas. We worked together in the late 1980s, when he was the executive chef at the Fish Market at Lenox and I was the sous chef. Back then, towering appetizers like this one—layered with fish tartare, egg yolk, and egg white, and “iced” with a layer of caviar—were indicative of expense-account dining. The combination holds up just as well today, and it’s still one of the best I know of to showcase impeccably fresh and responsibly farmed (aquacultured) salmon. It’s also quick and easy to make. I like the striated belly meat for this—it’s the fattiest and most flavorful.

Special equipment: thin rubber gloves; a small, very sharp knife; 4 ring molds about 2 inches in diameter and 1 ½ inches deep, or 2 larger molds, about 3 ½ inches in diameter (see NOTE)

8 ounces farmed Scottish or Irish salmon (not wild salmon), preferably the striated belly meat
 2 tablespoons finely diced Vidalia onion
 2 large hard-boiled eggs (see Tip)
 1 teaspoon minced fresh chives
 1 tablespoon drained, chopped small capers
 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 2 tablespoons heavy cream
 Pinch of sea salt
 1 teaspoon finely chopped chervil (or parsley)
 1 ounce domestic sturgeon caviar, optional
 Edible flowers and/or microgreens for garnish

Before proceeding, follow the raw fish handling guidelines (page 2). Set a small bowl in a larger bowl of ice to chill. Place another small bowl and 2 or 4 serving plates in the refrigerator to chill.

Wearing rubber gloves, set the salmon on a dark surface, such as a black napkin (I find that I can see what I am doing better). Cut the salmon into 2- or 3-inch chunks. If using the belly meat or fillet, cut the pieces into very fine dice. If using the tougher tail meat, use the tip of a spoon or a small, sharp knife to scrape the flesh from the white sinew then discard the tough tissue. Place the fish in the bowl over ice.

Place the onion in a clean cloth napkin and bring up the corners to form a bundle in your hand. Rinse the bundled onion under cold water then squeeze dry to cut the sharpness of the onion.

Peel the eggs and set them on a paper towel or napkin (this will absorb moisture and make them easier to handle). Cut the eggs in half, separate the egg white and yolk, and chop each very finely, keeping them separate. Add the onion, chives, capers, and olive oil to the salmon in the chilled bowl; keep on ice. This can be covered and refrigerated for several hours until you’re ready to serve.

Whisk the cream in the small chilled bowl from the refrigerator until soft—not stiff—peaks form. Add the salt and chopped herbs and carefully combine.

Set each mold on a piece of parchment paper and divide the salmon mixture equally between them. Add a thin layer of diced egg white, then yolk, and if you’re flush enough, add a layer of caviar. (Alternately, you can sprinkle the egg and caviar over the top or mix it in.) Dollop a spoonful of whipped cream in the center of each of the chilled plates and spread it out with the bottom of a spoon to about a 4-inch diameter circle. Slide the mold onto the plate in the center of the whipped cream and unmold the tartare. Repeat with the rest of the molds. Garnish with edible flowers or microgreens, if desired.

SUGGESTED WINE PAIRING: Mistinguett Brut Rose (Spain). The soft bubbles in this dry cava brighten the raw salmon. Or breakout the Dom Pérignon or your favorite champagne.



Note: You can get cooking ring molds at most cookware stores. Or you can do what I do and make them yourself out of 2-inch PVC pipe cut into 1 ½-inch sections. (A clean, empty tuna fish can with the bottom cut out will also do the trick.)

TIP: PERFECT HARD-BOILED EGGS

Place the egg in a small pot and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil and let boil for 5 to 15 minutes, depending on the altitude of where you live. Remove from the pot into a bowl of ice water and, when cool enough to handle, peel and return the egg to the ice water—this prevents the yolk from greening.



TUNA-MUFFULETTA-NIÇOISE SALAD WITH CRISPY POACHED AND FRIED EGG

SERVES 4 AS A MAIN DISH

Here's a New Orleans riff on the Mediterranean classic, tuna niçoise, using fresh oil-poached tuna and a salad based on the olive relish we use for our muffuletta sandwiches. Instead of using hard-cooked eggs, I like to poach the eggs so their centers are still runny. I dredge them in breadcrumbs and fry them until crisp. At the restaurant, we often use sea beans—a salt marsh plant that tastes like a salty green bean—in place of the traditional green beans, which we then dip in the batter we use for our fish tacos and deep-fry until crispy. Even though this recipe involves multiple components, each one is fairly simple and all can be done ahead of time—even the eggs, which can be poached and refrigerated, then rolled in the breadcrumb mixture and quickly fried a few minutes before serving.

Special equipment: thermometer

POTATOES AND BEANS

½ pound haricot verts or thin, fresh green beans, trimmed
¾ pound small Yukon Gold potatoes

CRISPY POACHED AND FRIED EGGS

4 large eggs
About 2 cups vegetable oil for frying
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 egg, beaten with 1 tablespoon water to make an egg wash
1 cup panko breadcrumbs

SALAD

4 to 6 ounces spring greens
½ cup Sherry Vinaigrette (page 5)
1 cup Italian Olive Salad (page 5, or purchase premade)
1 recipe Oil-Poached Tuna (page 5), sliced

Place 4 dinner plates in the refrigerator to chill.

POTATOES AND BEANS Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Have an ice bath ready. Add the beans and cook 3 to 5 minutes or until tender-crisp and still bright green; drain. Cool in an ice bath, drain again, and refrigerate until ready to use.

Meanwhile, place the potatoes in a medium pot and cover with salted water. Bring to a low boil over medium heat and cook until tender, 12 to 15 minutes.

Drain, let cool slightly, slice into ¼-inch-thick slices, and set aside.

CRISPY POACHED AND FRIED EGGS To poach the eggs, bring a medium pot of salted water to a simmer and have a bowl of ice water ready. Crack the eggs, one at a time, into a small measuring cup and carefully slide them into the water. Poach for 3 to 4 minutes, or until the whites are barely set. Using a slotted spoon, transfer each egg into the ice water, and let sit until ready to use. Drain the eggs on paper towels and trim off any loose pieces of egg. These can be made ahead, covered, and refrigerated until ready to use.

To fry the eggs, pour about 2 inches of oil into a heavy saucepan and heat to 350 degrees F. Place the flour, egg wash, and panko into each of three shallow bowls. Dredge each egg, one at a time, in the flour. Dip each egg into the egg wash until the flour is sticky, and immediately roll them in the panko breadcrumbs until covered. Add the eggs to the hot oil and quickly brown them, turning carefully to brown the other side. Transfer the fried eggs to paper towels to drain.

SALAD In a medium bowl, quickly toss the greens in the vinaigrette and divide them between the chilled plates. Overlap sliced potatoes around the greens and scatter them with some of the olive salad. Arrange the green beans around the plate. Place the tuna on top of the lettuce and add a little more of the olive mixture. Place an egg on each plate, drizzling with a little more dressing if desired.

SUGGESTED WINE PAIRING: SERVE WITH Bridesmaid Sauvignon/ Sémillon Blanc Blend (Napa, California), a clean-tasting, medium-bodied wine that lets these wide-ranging flavors shine on their own.

GRILLED REDFISH ON THE “HALF-SHELL” WITH SMOKED TRI-COLOR PEPPER AND GRILLED ONION SALSA

1 SIDE OF REDFISH PER PERSON

Louisiana anglers swear by this tried and true method of cooking redfish. Because of their heavy scales and thick skin, the fish, which typically weigh 6 to 8 pounds each, are filleted into two pieces and then cooked skin side down without scaling on a closed grill. The usual portion per person is half a fish. The thick, unscaled skin acts as a container for the fish, and you eat it right out of the “shell.” This is a great way to keep the flesh from falling apart or drying out while cooking, but since the meat doesn’t come in contact with the grill, there isn’t any caramelization and that’s where a huge amount of flavor comes from. To get that flavor, we changed the process slightly and started grilling them flesh side down.

This recipe serves 1 person, but it’s easy to scale it up to serve as many people as you like. It makes for a great casual backyard meal served with assertive accompaniments like Smoked Tri-Color Pepper and Grilled Onion Salsa.

Special equipment: charcoal or propane grill, charcoal, a few wood chips (optional)

- 1 side of redfish per person, scales on (Alternatives are red snapper, sheepshead, black drum, or other thick-skinned fish)
- 1 teaspoon Chef Paul Prudhomme’s Magic Seasoning Blends Shrimp Magic or Home Creole Seasoning (see page 7) per side

Vegetable oil spray

Tri-Color Pepper and Grilled Onion Salsa (page 7)

Light a charcoal or propane grill as directed (see GRILLING TIPS, page 7), using about 30 briquettes.

The skin and scales shield the flesh from the heat so it takes a bit more heat to cook it through.

Season the flesh side of the fish with Shrimp Magic, spray liberally with vegetable oil, and place on the grill, skin side up. Cook for about 4 minutes, just enough to get a little caramelization. Turn the fish skin side down and cover the grill. Cook until the thickest part of the fillet can be separated with a fork, 6 to 8 minutes.

Serve on the biggest plate you have with a bed of Tri-Color Pepper and Grilled Onion Salsa, and eat it right off the skin!

SUGGESTED WINE PAIRING: Serve with Girard Petite Sirah (Napa Valley, California), a red wine with bright acidity and notes of bacon and espresso, which highlights the smoky, robust flavors of the hearty fish and the salsa.



SPOTLIGHT ON REDFISH

Redfish is a mild-flavored, medium-textured fish that’s abundant in Louisiana, and there are dozens of ways to cook them. They were hardly known outside the region until the 1980s when Chef Paul Prudhomme put blackened redfish on his menu at K-Paul’s Louisiana Kitchen. Customers went wild for them, and demand skyrocketed nationwide. Schools of redfish were targeted by spotter planes and rounded up by the thousands in huge nets by commercial fishermen happy to sell them to this new market. There was no limit because, up until that point, there was no demand. Concerned about the health of the resource, Chef Paul switched to blackening yellowfin tuna. Today redfish are protected game fish that can no longer be harvested commercially anywhere in the state. The wild redfish we serve in the restaurant is almost always from Mississippi, but sometimes from as far off as the Carolina coast. But recreational game limits here are still generous, and redfish often turns up at backyard cook-outs or in a pot of Court Bouillon (page 7).

TEMPURA-FRIED LOUISIANA WHITE SHRIMP WITH CHILI AIOLI

SERVES 4 AS A MAIN DISH, 8 AS AN APPETIZER

I love the look of fried shrimp with the heads attached (including the long feelers). I've been schooled by my Vietnamese friends that the meat on the inside is the most flavorful, and I agree. To preserve the delicacy and visibly distinctive features of the shrimp, I dip them in tempura batter, which is much thinner than beer batter. I use flavorless soda water instead of beer. But the flavor difference is so minor you may use them interchangeably. If you can't find head-on shrimp, leave the tails on—it gives you something to hold onto as you wave them through the batter. I also like to serve shrimp cooked this way with Vietnamese Green Apple Salad, page 8), as pictured here.

CHILI AIOLI

1 cup mayonnaise
1 teaspoon Asian chili paste
½ teaspoon kosher salt
1 lime, juiced

SHRIMP

2 pounds fresh head-on Louisiana white shrimp (Alternatives are any head-on or headless shrimp and frog legs)
Chef Paul Prudhomme's Magic Seasoning Blend Shrimp Magic or other Creole seasoning, to taste
Cornstarch for dusting

TEMPURA BATTER

1 cup cornstarch
½ cup all-purpose flour
½ cup rice flour
1 tablespoon Chef Paul Prudhomme's Magic Seasoning Blend Shrimp Magic or Home Creole Seasoning blend (page 8)
1 teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon baking powder
12 ounces cold club soda
3 or 4 tablespoons ice water, or as needed
About 6 cups vegetable oil for deep-fat frying

CHILI AIOLI Mix together all ingredients in a small bowl until well-blended; cover and chill until ready to serve.

SHRIMP Clean the shrimp, leaving the heads intact (or leave the tails on if using headless.) Devein and season with Shrimp Magic. Refrigerate until ready to use.

TEMPURA BATTER Fill a large container with ice. Set aside. Mix together the cornstarch, flour, rice flour, Shrimp Magic, salt, pepper, baking soda, and baking powder in a metal bowl. Add the club soda and stir to incorporate. This should be a slightly thinner batter than beer batter—thin with iced water as needed. Reserve on ice; stir before using. (This can be made up to a day in advance and refrigerated.)

Pour oil into Dutch oven, deep-fat fryer, or large, heavy-bottom saucepan and heat to 325 degrees F. Line a tray with paper towels and set near the fryer.

Remove the shrimp from the refrigerator. Dust the shrimp with cornstarch and shake off the excess. Stir the batter (the cornstarch has a tendency to settle to the bottom) and carefully place the shrimp in the batter.

Pick up the shrimp by the heads, two at a time, and allow to drain well. Holding the heads, gently wave them into the hot oil, releasing them after a few seconds. This allows the batter to harden slightly and prevents the shrimp from sticking together. Quickly repeat this process until all the shrimp in one batch are frying (don't crowd the fryer). Cook for about 3 minutes, until golden brown, and remove to drain on paper towels.

Serve with the Chili Aioli.

SUGGESTED WINE PAIRING: Serve with Adelsheim Pinot Gris (Willamette Valley, Oregon), a clean, crisp white that lends itself well to seafood, spice, and rich sauces.

Variation: Fresh frog legs are a treat. The smaller ones (no bigger around than your little finger) are delicious dipped in tempura batter, fried like shrimp, and dipped in Tabasco Butter Sauce (see page 8).

