

CHEF JOHN ASH

Joseph Jewell Wines

SOUP OF KING SALMON IN A COCONUT CURRY BROTH

Serves 4 to 6

Anything could be added to this soup in place of the salmon including cod, halibut or shellfish like shrimp and scallops. Prepared Thai curry pastes are available in Asian markets. My favorite brand is Mae Ploy.

4 ounces thin rice vermicelli noodles
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 cups sliced white onion (1 medium)
1 – 2 tablespoons yellow or green curry paste
5 cups chicken or vegetable stock
2 cups or so stirred coconut milk
3 large kaffir lime leaves, bruised
2 tablespoons fish sauce or to taste
2 teaspoons chili garlic sauce or to taste
1 tablespoon palm or brown sugar or to taste
1/4 cup or so cup fresh lime juice
1-pound king salmon fillet, skin and bones removed and cut into 2-inch pieces
3 cups gently packed baby spinach leaves
1/4 cup scallions cut on the bias
Thai basil and/or cilantro sprigs

Soak the rice noodles in hot water for at least 15 minutes in a bowl. Meanwhile heat the oil in a deep soup pot and sauté the onions until just softened but not brown.

Add the curry paste and cook for another minute and then add stock, coconut milk, kaffir lime leaves, fish sauce, chili garlic sauce and sugar and bring to a simmer.

Stir in the lime juice and salmon and cook until fish is just done, about 5 minutes. Adjust the sweet/hot/sour/salty elements to your taste.

To serve: Drain the noodles and divide among deep bowls along with the spinach leaves. Ladle the hot soup over and top with scallions, Thai basil and/or cilantro sprigs.

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GRILLED ASPARAGUS WITH BURRATA AND CRISPY PROSCIUTTO

Serves 4

One of the simplest and best ways to cook asparagus is to give it a light coating of olive oil and grill it. Grilling brings out the sweetness and I prefer it to steaming or boiling which seems to bring out more of the “vegetal” notes. I’m convinced too that keeping the asparagus away from water minimizes that interesting condition called “asparagus pee”. I won’t go any further but see if it works for you! Add some good olives if desired. Lemon infused olive oil is available in Italian markets and good gourmet stores. Agrumato brand from Italy and “O” from California both make great citrus infused oils.

1-pound fresh asparagus, tough ends discarded
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Flaky sea salt such as Maldon’s
Freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons or so Italian or California lemon infused extra virgin olive oil
6 ounces fresh buratta cheese
8 very thin slices prosciutto or coppa
2 tablespoons capers, drained, patted dry and fried till crisp in olive oil
Lemon wedges

Brush the asparagus with the olive oil and season generously with salt and pepper. Over hot coals or a gas grill preheated to medium high grill the asparagus till it takes on a bit of color. Roll and turn so that it’s marked on all sides but still green and crisp. Place on a plate and drizzle with lemon olive oil. Cut buratta into wedges and arrange attractively on the asparagus with the prosciutto. Scatter capers around. Serve lemon wedges on the side. Add more salt and pepper if desired.

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PINOT NOIR BRAISED SHORT RIBS WITH BLUE CHEESE POLENTA

Serves 4 – 6

Anything can be added to flavor the rich braising liquid such as dried porcini (rehydrated and sautéed along with the onions), a little ancho or chipotle chile, etc. The dish is even better when made ahead and reheated and it freezes beautifully. Vine Hill Pinot Noir would be terrific with this.

3 pounds boneless short ribs, trimmed of fat
Salt and freshly ground pepper
4 tablespoons olive oil
6 large cloves garlic, clove separated and peeled
2 cups diced white onions
1 cup diced carrot
1 cup diced celery
2 cups chopped mushrooms
2 cups canned diced tomatoes
1 bottle (or more) hearty dry red wine
3 cups rich beef, chicken or vegetable stock
1 tablespoon each chopped fresh rosemary and thyme (2 teaspoons dried)
2 teaspoons fennel seed
1 tablespoon cornstarch softened in 1/3 cup wine or water (optional)
Soft polenta (recipe follows)

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Season short ribs generously with salt and pepper. Heat 3 tablespoons oil in a deep heavy bottomed pot or Dutch oven large enough to hold the short ribs in one layer. Over medium-high heat, brown the ribs on all sides. Remove short ribs, reserve and discard all but 2 tablespoons of the fat from the pot.

Add garlic, onions, carrot, celery and mushrooms to the pot and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until softened and lightly browned. Add the tomatoes, wine and stock and bring to boil. Add the short ribs, herbs and fennel seed. Cover with a lid or foil and braise in the oven for 2 1/2 hours or until very tender.

Transfer the ribs to a platter. Strain cooking juices through fine strainer, discard the solids. Remove and discard as much fat as you can. Return strained juices to the pot and over high heat, reduce until lightly thickened and concentrated, about 10 - 15 minutes. You can thicken if desired by whisking in as much of the cornstarch mixture as you desire. Correct seasoning and add short ribs back to pot and reheat.

To serve: Spoon soft polenta onto shallow bowls. Top with short ribs and sauce.

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PINOT NOIR BRAISED SHORT RIBS WITH BLUE CHEESE POLENTA CONT...

Soft polenta

4 cups chicken stock or water
1 cup yellow polenta corn meal
2 tablespoons butter
1/3 cup blue cheese or freshly grated parmesan cheese
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Bring the stock to a boil in a deep saucepan. Gradually whisk in the polenta and then reduce heat to medium. Cook stirring regularly until the polenta is thick and pulling away from the sides of the pan, about 15 minutes. Cover and keep warm until ready to serve. If it gets too thick, stir in a bit more stock or water. Just before serving stir in butter and cheese and season to your taste with salt and pepper.

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FRENCH CREAM WITH BLUEBERRY SAUCE

Serves 6 generously

This is a very simple recipe. If good blueberries are not available, then use whatever fruit is best in the market.

2 pints fresh or IQF blueberries
3/4 cup sugar, divided
2 teaspoons grated lemon zest, divided
1 3-inch cinnamon stick or 1 whole star anise
1/4 cup dry red wine
1 teaspoon minced fresh mint

For the French cream:

1-1/2 teaspoons unflavored gelatin
1 cup heavy cream
1 cup sour cream
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Garnish: Fresh mint sprigs and Almond Lemon Lace Cookies (recipe follows)

Place one-pint blueberries, 1/4 cup sugar, 1 teaspoon lemon zest, cinnamon stick and red wine in a small saucepan over moderate heat. Simmer uncovered for 5 minutes or until mixture is syrupy. Off heat and cool and stir in remaining fresh blueberries and mint. Remove and discard cinnamon stick or star anise. Cover and refrigerate for up to 5 days.

For the cream: Combine the gelatin, cream and remaining 1/2 cup sugar in a saucepan over moderate heat. With a rubber spatula or wooden spoon, stir until sugar and gelatin is dissolved. In a separate bowl, place the sour cream, vanilla and remaining lemon zest. Gradually add the hot cream mixture stirring just until the mixture is smooth.

Rinse a 2-1/2 cup metal mold with cold water (or use individual ramekins). Shake out but do not dry. Pour the cream mixture into the wet mold. Refrigerate for 4 hours or longer until mixture is set and firm.

To serve: Unmold the cream by placing mold in a warm water bath for a few seconds to loosen cream. Turn over onto a cutting board. Slice cream into serving pieces and with a spatula place on chilled plates. Spoon blueberries around and garnish with mint sprigs and an Almond Lace Cookie, if desired. Recipe follows.

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FRENCH CREAM WITH BLUEBERRY SAUCE CONT...

Almond Lemon Lace Cookies

Makes about 16

5 tablespoons unsalted butter
1/3 cup organic sugar
2 tablespoons light corn syrup
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
Big pinch of sea salt
1/2 cup raw ground almonds or almond meal
Zest from one large lemon
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 350° F and line two baking sheets with parchment paper or silicon mat.

In a medium saucepan over low heat, combine the butter, sugar and corn syrup. Stir often until the butter is melted and the sugar dissolves. Increase the heat to medium high, stir constantly and bring to a boil. Once the contents begin to boil, remove from the heat. Stir in the flour and salt until well incorporated. Finally, stir in the ground almonds, lemon zest and vanilla extract.

Drop rounded teaspoons of the batter onto the baking sheets leaving about 3 inches between each cookie. Bake the cookies until evenly light brown, about 10 minutes. At the 5-minute mark, reverse the baking sheets and turn them around in the oven to ensure even baking. The cookies won't begin to spread till about 6 minutes into baking.

Cover a cooling rack with paper towels. When the cookies are done baking let them cool for a couple of minutes then place them on a paper-toweled covered wire rack and let them cool and crisp. Store airtight for up to 5 days.