

COOKING AT REN

February 20, 2012

Cauliflower Vichyssoise

2 Tbl unsalted butter
2 large leeks, white and tender green parts, thinly sliced
One 2-pound cauliflower, cut into large florets
6 cups water
1/3 cup crème fraîche
Salt and freshly ground white pepper
2 Tbl finely diced peeled cucumber
2 Tbl minced chives
1 Tbl minced shallot

1 Tbl rice vinegar
1 Tbl extra-virgin olive oil

Melt the butter in a large saucepan. Add the leeks and cook over low heat until tender, about 8 minutes. Add the cauliflower and water and bring to a boil. Simmer over low heat until the cauliflower is soft, about 35 minutes. Add the crème fraîche, bring back to a simmer and remove from the heat.

Puree the soup in a blender in batches until very smooth. Season with salt and pepper and chill thoroughly, if serving cold

Just before serving, combine the cucumber, chives, shallot, vinegar and olive oil in a small bowl. Ladle the soup into 4 shallow bowls and spoon the cucumber mixture in the middle of the soup.

Serves 4-6

Tomato Verrines

2 tablespoons pine nuts
4 medium tomatoes-peeled, seeded and finely diced
1/2 cup finely diced zucchini
1 garlic clove, minced
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
Pinch of ground cumin
1 tablespoon finely chopped basil, plus small basil leaves for garnish
1 tablespoon finely chopped dill
1 tablespoon finely chopped chives
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1/2 cup mascarpone cheese, at room temperature
2 large eggs, separated
1/3 cup finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese (about 2 ounce)
3 very thin slices of prosciutto, cut in half

In a small skillet, toast the pine nuts over moderately low heat until golden, about 4 minutes. In a bowl, toss the tomatoes, zucchini, garlic, olive oil, lemon juice, cumin and chopped herbs. Season with salt and pepper. Spoon the salad into 6 small glasses or jars.

In a medium bowl, mix the mascarpone with the egg yolks you separated and grated parmigiano cheese. In another bowl, beat the egg whites with a pinch of salt until soft peaks form. Using a rubber spatula, fold the beaten whites into the mascarpone until no streaks remain. Season with salt and pepper.

Spoon the mascarpone cream into each glass over the zucchini salad. Cover each glass with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 4 hours.

In a large nonstick skillet, cook the slices of prosciutto over moderately low heat, turning once, until browned and just crisp, about 5 minutes.

Transfer the prosciutto to a paper towel-lined plate.

Sprinkle the pine nuts over the mascarpone cream, top each verrine with a prosciutto crisp and a few basil leaves and serve.

Serves 6

Provençal Braised Lamb Shoulder

4 (1/2-inch-thick) lamb shoulder chops (1 3/4 pounds total)
 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
 6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced lengthwise (3/4 cup)
 2 medium onions, sliced
 1 bay leaf
 1 1/2 cups dry white wine
 3 large thyme sprigs
 1 cup oil-cured black olives
 16 oz can chicken stock or broth

Preheat oven to 375°F with rack in middle.

Pat chops dry and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat until it shimmers, then cook garlic, stirring constantly, until golden, about 1 minute. Transfer garlic to a plate. Brown chops in 2 batches, turning once, about 4 minutes total per batch. Transfer to a plate.

Add onions, bay leaf, salt, and pepper to same skillet and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned, 10 to 12 minutes. Add wine and bring to a boil, scraping up brown bits, then remove from heat.

Scatter half of onions in a shallow 3-quart baking dish, then top garlic, thyme, and olives over onions, then top with lamb chops. Repeat layering remaining onions, then pour wine, broth, and meat juices over top.

Bake, uncovered, basting top with juices once or twice, until meat is tender when pierced with tip of a knife, about 1 1/2 hours.

Serves 4-6

Vichy Carrots

2 lbs carrots, coarsely chopped
3 cups sparkling water
4 Tbl Butter
Salt & Pepper
1 Tbl chopped parsley

In a large saucepan, cover the carrots with the sparkling water and bring to a boil over moderately high heat. Stir in 3 tablespoons of the butter and 1 teaspoons of salt. Reduce the heat to moderate and simmer until the carrots are tender when pierced with a knife and the cooking liquid is reduced to 1/4 cup, about 25 minutes.

Transfer the carrots and their cooking liquid to a food processor and let cool for 10 minutes. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon of butter and process until smooth. Add the chopped parsley and pulse until just incorporated. Season the carrot puree with salt and pepper, transfer to a bowl and serve.

Serves 4-6

Jerusalem Artichoke and Sweet Potato Gratin

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 leek, white and tender green, thinly sliced
1/4 cup homemade dry bread crumbs (or Panko)
2 tablespoons freshly grated Gruyère cheese
1 pound Jerusalem artichokes, thinly sliced crosswise
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 medium sweet potato (about 1/2 pound), peeled and thinly sliced crosswise
3/4 cup heavy cream

Preheat the oven to 350°. Using 1 teaspoon of the butter, grease a 9-inch glass pie plate and a 12-inch square of foil.

In a medium skillet, melt 1 teaspoon of the butter. Add the leek and cook over moderately high heat until softened but still green, about 2 minutes. Transfer the leek to a plate.

Melt the remaining 1 teaspoon of butter in the skillet and add the bread crumbs. Cook, stirring, until coated and lightly browned. Transfer the crumbs to a plate and toss with the Gruyère.

Layer half of the Jerusalem artichoke slices in the prepared pie plate and season with salt and pepper. Cover with half of the leek slices and half of the sweet potato slices, reserving the nicest slices for the top. Season with salt and pepper and repeat with the remaining

Jerusalem artichokes, leek and sweet potato. Pour the cream evenly over the top.

Cover the pie plate with the foil, buttered side down, and bake for 30 minutes, or until bubbling and the vegetables are just tender. Remove the foil and bake for 20 minutes, or until lightly browned. Sprinkle the crumbs on top and bake for 20 minutes longer, or until golden. Let stand for 15 minutes before serving.

Serves 4-6

Apple Beignet

1 large apple, peeled and grated
(about 1 1/2 cups)
1/4 cup sugar
1 stick butter
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup water
1 cup flour
4 eggs
Oil for frying

In a medium saucepan combine the butter, salt, sugar, and water over medium heat. Bring to a boil. Take pan off the heat and stir in the flour. Return the pan to medium heat and stir continuously until mixture forms a ball, about 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer the flour mixture to a medium bowl.

Using an electric hand mixer on low speed, add eggs, one at a time, incorporating each egg completely before adding the next. Beat until smooth. Add the grated apple and stir to combine. If not frying immediately, cover with plastic wrap and reserve in the refrigerator.

Pour enough oil into a large frying pan to reach a depth of 2 inches. Heat the oil over medium heat until a deep-fry thermometer registers 325 degrees F.

Using a small ice-cream scooper or 2 small spoons, carefully drop about a rounded tablespoon of the dough into the hot olive oil. Turn the beignet once or twice,

and cook until golden and puffed up, about 4 minutes. Fry the beignet in batches so as not to overcrowd the pan. Drain on paper towels. Sprinkle with powdered sugar using a small sieve. Serve with the cinnamon whipped cream alongside for dipping.

Cinnamon Whip Cream

1 cup whipping cream
2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar, plus more for dusting
1 teaspoon cinnamon

Combine the whipping cream, 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar, and cinnamon in a medium bowl. Whip until medium soft peaks form. Transfer the whipping cream to a serving dish.

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Cooking At Ren **Meet The Chef**

Chef Mark Wright dining restaurants cooking is an
has been cooking in the Chicago experience that
since his area. He combines anyone can enjoy
childhood. He his passion for given the right
received his formal food with his inspiration.
training from two desire to educate
renowned culinary and delight with
programs and has every meal he
worked at several prepares. His
restaurants fine philosophy is that