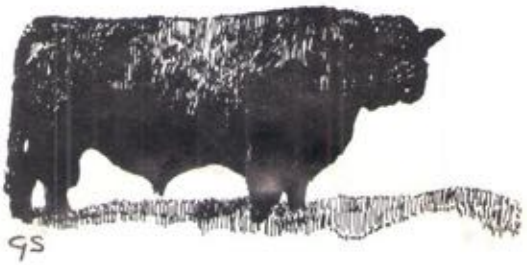

FILLET OF BEEF

THE MOST FESTIVE, the most elegant, and, indeed, even the most famous cut of beef is the fillet. Taken from the short loin, the fillet is found only in the best of company—a truffled sauce, a fine wine. Well-known cuts from the fillet are filets mignons, from the center of the strip and trimmed to include the thin outer muscle, and tournedos, trimmed slightly smaller without the thin outer muscle. When shopping for fillet, one should watch for a minimum covering of fat, a delicate marbling throughout, a smooth texture, and a light cherry-red color.

From a sprightly salad to a rich beef Wellington, fillet of beef can be transformed into a variety of dishes. The recipes below assure its place in all manner of holiday feasts.

Steak Tartare

In a food grinder grind twice 1 pound tail end beef fillet, well trimmed, and transfer it to a cutting board. Make a well in the center and add ¼ cup minced parsley, 2 egg yolks, 4 shallots, minced, 1 tablespoon each of Dijon-style mustard, lemon juice, and drained capers, 4 anchovy fillets, minced, 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce, and cayenne, salt, and pepper to taste. With the dull edges of 2 heavy bladed knives blend the mixture well, chopping it to flatten the mound and then scraping it back into a mound. Spread the steak tartare on thin slices of pumpernickel bread or rye bread, crusts removed, cut the bread into triangles, and transfer it to a serving plate. Serves 8 as an hors d'oeuvre.

Beef Salad with Cornichons and Anchovies

In a small bowl combine ¼ cup each of red-wine vinegar and minced parsley, 1 scallion, minced, 2 tablespoons minced *cornichons* (available at specialty foods shops), 2 anchovy fillets, minced, 2 teaspoons drained capers, and 1 large garlic clove, minced. Add ⅓ cup olive oil in a stream, whisking, continue to whisk the dressing until it is well combined, and add ⅛ teaspoon each of salt and pepper, or to taste.

In a large heavy skillet sear 1 pound tail end beef fillet, well trimmed and cut into ¾-inch-wide julienne strips, in batches in 1½ tablespoons olive oil over high heat, turning the strips once, for 30 seconds. Transfer the beef as it is cooked to a large bowl, add the dressing, and toss the beef well. Let the salad stand, tossing it occasionally, for 30 minutes and divide it among salad plates lined with watercress. Serves 6 as a first course.

Filets Mignons with Potato Croquettes

Pat dry with paper towels four 1½-inch-thick filets mignons, each barded or wrapped with bacon and tied with kitchen string, and season them generously with freshly ground black pepper, pressing the pepper into both sides of the meat.

In a large saucepan cook 1½ pounds potatoes, peeled and quartered, in boiling salted water to cover for 30 minutes, or until they are tender. Drain the potatoes, return them to the pan, and steam them, covered, over low heat, shaking the pan, for 2 to 3 minutes, or until they are dry. Force the potatoes through a sieve into a bowl and beat in 2 egg yolks, 1 at a time, 3 tablespoons softened butter, cut into bits, and freshly grated nutmeg, salt, and pepper to taste. Divide the

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Cuts from fillet of beef, from top to bottom: tail end beef fillet, tournedos, filets mignons, and front end beef fillet. Solingen carbon steel butcher's knife with wooden handle from Bridge Kitchenware Corporation, 212 East 52nd Street, New York City. *Photographed at* GOURMET's *studios.*

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mixture into 4 parts, shape each part into a round the same size as a steak, and chill the rounds, covered, for 30 minutes, or until they are firm. Have ready in 2 separate shallow bowls 1 egg, lightly beaten, and 1 cup stale bread crumbs. Dredge the rounds in flour, dip them in the beaten egg, and coat them with the bread crumbs. In a deep fryer fry the rounds, 2 at a time, in hot deep oil (375° F.), turning them once, for 1 to 2 minutes, or until they are golden brown. Transfer the croquettes as they are done with a slotted spoon to paper towels to drain, arrange them on an ovenproof platter, and keep them warm in a preheated slow oven (200° F.).

In a large heavy skillet sear the steaks in 2 tablespoons clarified butter (January, 1978) over high heat for 4 minutes on each side for rare meat. Remove and discard the barding fat or bacon and string, transfer the steaks with a slotted spatula to the platter, arranging each steak on a croquette, and keep them warm in the oven. Add ½ cup Sercial Madeira to the skillet and deglaze the skillet over moderately high heat, scraping up the brown bits clinging to the bottom and sides. Add ¼ cup minced truffle, 1 tablespoon *glace de viande* (March, 1978), and salt and pepper to taste, cook the sauce for 2 minutes, and pour it over the steaks. Serves 4.

Tournedos with Mushrooms and Béarnaise Sauce

Remove the stems from 6 large mushrooms and 6 small mushrooms, reserving them for another use, flute the small mushroom caps, and rub all the caps with the cut side of a lemon. In a stainless steel or enameled skillet sauté the mushrooms in 3 tablespoons butter over moderately high heat, turning them, for 3 minutes, or until they are golden. Remove the skillet from the heat and keep the mushrooms warm.

Pat dry with paper towels six 1¼-inch-thick tournedos, each barded or wrapped with bacon and tied with kitchen string, and season them generously with freshly ground pepper, pressing the pepper into both sides of the meat. Cut 6 rounds, each the same size as a steak, from thin slices of day-old bread and in a large heavy skillet sauté them in 6 tablespoons clarified butter (January, 1978) over moderately high heat, turning them, until they are golden. Transfer the *croûtes* with a slotted spatula to paper towels to drain, arrange them on a platter, and keep them warm.

Add 2 tablespoons clarified butter to the skillet and in it sear the steaks over high heat for 3½ minutes on each side for rare meat. Remove and discard the barding fat or bacon and string, transfer the steaks with a slotted spatula to the platter, arranging each steak on a *croûte*, and top each steak with 1 of the large mushroom caps rounded side down. Fill the caps with béarnaise sauce (March, 1978), letting the sauce spill onto the meat, and top each cap with 1 of the small mushrooms fluted side up. Serves 6.

Filets Mignons aux Quatre Poivres (Steak with Four Kinds of Pepper)

Make deep-fried onion rings.

Pat dry with paper towels four 1½-inch-thick filets mignons, each barded or wrapped with bacon and tied with kitchen string. With the flat side of a cleaver or with a meat pounder crush coarsely between sheets of wax paper 2 tablespoons black peppercorns, 1½ tablespoons each of Szechwan peppercorns (available at specialty foods shops or Oriental markets) and white peppercorns, and 1 tablespoon dried crushed red hot pepper, press the pepper into both sides of the meat, and pound the steaks gently between sheets of wax paper until they are 1¼ inches thick. In a large heavy skillet sear the steaks in 1 tablespoon clarified butter (January, 1978) over high heat for 3½ minutes on each side for rare meat. Remove and discard the barding fat or bacon and string, transfer the steaks to a heated platter, and arrange the onion rings on the platter. Serves 4.

Deep-Fried Onion Rings

Cut 1 large sweet yellow onion into ¼-inch slices, separate the slices into rings, and in a bowl cover the rings with milk. Chill the rings, covered, for 2 hours. Drain the rings, dredge them in flour seasoned with salt and pepper, shaking off any excess, and in a deep fryer fry them, a few at a time, in hot deep oil (375° F.) for 1½ to 2 minutes, or until they are golden brown. Transfer the rings as they are done with tongs to paper towels to drain, sprinkle them with salt, and keep them warm on a baking sheet in a preheated slow oven (200° F.). Serves 4.

Tournedos with Bercy Sauce

Pat dry with paper towels six 1¼-inch-thick tournedos, each barded or wrapped with bacon and tied with kitchen string, and season them gener-