SOUPE À L'OIGNON GRATINÉE

(French Onion Soup)

SERVES 8

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A TRADITIONAL early-morning restorative for workers at the old Les Halles market in Paris, this rich soup has found its way onto menus all over France (and the U.S.). Gruyère was probably first added in the Savoie region, where the cheese is often used in cooking.

6 tbsp. butter
1 tbsp. olive oil
3 lbs. medium yellow onions, peeled and thinly sliced
1 tsp. sugar
Salt
1 tbsp. flour
8 cups beef stock (see page 17)
2 cups dry white wine
Freshly ground black pepper
1 baguette
1 lb. gruyère, shredded

1. Melt 3 tbsp. of the butter and the oil in a large heavy pot over medium-low heat. Add onions, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and translucent, about 20 minutes. Increase heat to medium-high, uncover, add the sugar, and season to taste with salt. Sauté, stirring often, until onions are very soft and a deep golden brown.

2. Reduce heat to medium, sprinkle in flour, and cook, stirring constantly, for 2–3 minutes. Add about 2 cups of stock and stir to blend, then add remaining 6 cups of stock and the wine. Season to taste with salt and pepper and simmer for about 30 minutes. Adjust seasonings.

3. Preheat oven to 425°. Meanwhile, slice the bread into at least 8 thick slices. Butter both sides of the bread with the remaining 3 tbsp. of butter, then toast until golden brown on both sides in the oven.

4. Place a slice of toast in each of 8 ovenproof bowls, then fill bowls with the onion soup. Spread a thick layer of cheese on top of soup. Set bowls in 2 baking pans, place in the oven, and bake until cheese has browned.

SOLE MEUNIÈRE

(Sole Sautéed in Butter)

SERVES 4

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THE TERM *sole* is falsely applied to several species of flounder in the United States. True sole can be found only in Europe, where the best-known variety is dover sole. To filet the fish, trace backbone with a knife, cutting through to bone, then lift flesh off. Gently lift out bone.

4 14-oz. whole dover sole
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Flour
1 cup clarified butter (see page 19)
1 large russet potato, peeled and thickly sliced
16 tbsp. (2 sticks) butter
Juice of 2 lemons

1. Cut off head and fins of sole with sharp kitchen scissors. Scrape scales from the white-skinned side (bottom) of the fish with a large wide knife. On dark side of fish, score skin just above the tail with a sharp knife, then, holding the fish by the tail with one hand, use the other to peel off the dark skin all at once. If the skin catches, use a sharp knife to free it from the flesh. (There is no need to skin the other side.) Wipe fish with a damp kitchen towel, taking care to wipe away any blood. (To spare yourself these steps, ask your fishmonger to give the fish to you pan-ready.) Pat dry, season to taste with salt and pepper, and dredge in flour, shaking off any excess.

2. Pour ½ cup clarified butter into each of 2 large skillets set over medium-high heat. When butter is just smoking, after about 3 minutes, place 2 fish, white side down, in each pan. Immediately place a slice of raw potato under tail of each fish to raise thin end of sole up from the heat and help prevent overcooking. Brown fish, about 3–4 minutes on each side, pressing down on fish with a spatula and basting continually with butter. Add 2 tbsp. of the regular butter to each pan, season to taste with salt and pepper, and baste for 1 more minute. Transfer to serving platter and keep warm.

3. Melt remaining 12 tbsp. of the regular butter in a small skillet over high heat. Swirl pan over heat until butter foams and turns light golden. Whisk in lemon juice and pour over sole, coating them completely. Serve fish on a platter garnished with lemon and fresh herbs, if you like.

POUSSIN VALLÉE D'AUGE

(Baby Chicken with Calvados and Cream)

SERVES 6

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CALVADOS, the famed apple brandy from Normandy, is distilled from cider just as cognac is from wine. This classic Norman preparation is named for the best calvados-producing region. The recipe can be adapted for larger chickens, other fowl, and pork.

6 poussins or cornish game hens (see page 18)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
2 cups pearl onions
½ cup calvados
¾ cup heavy cream

1. Preheat oven to 400°. Rub poussins inside and out with a generous amount of salt and pepper.

2. To truss poussins, fold wing tips back beneath shoulders (drumsticks should fit snugly against the tip of breastbone) and hold in place by tying legs together with kitchen twine.

3. Rub birds with butter and arrange in a roasting pan so that they do not touch. Scatter unpeeled onions around birds, then place pan in lower third of oven and cook for at least 45 minutes, basting several times. Prick fat part of drumstick on 1 bird after 45 minutes; if juice runs clear, the birds are done.

4. Transfer poussins and onions to a serving platter. Place the roasting pan on top of the stove and bring the pan drippings to a boil over medium-high heat, scraping with a wooden spoon to loosen any browned bits stuck to the bottom of the pan. Warm calvados in a small pot, then add to pan juices and carefully ignite with a kitchen match, keeping a large pan lid nearby to extinguish flames if necessary. When flames die out, stir in cream and continue to reduce sauce until thickened, about 5 minutes. Adjust seasonings as needed. Untie twine and discard. Pour sauce over and around poussins.

GRATIN DAUPHINOIS

(Potatoes Baked in Milk and Cream)

SERVES 6

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A GRATIN IS SIMPLY A DISH whose top is browned in the oven. This one takes its name from the Dauphiné, a region that stretcheas from Savoie to Provence and is renowned for the quality of its milk and cream, as well as for its potatoes. Adaptations of this dish may include such other ingredients as garlic, butter, cheese, eggs, and even slices of black truffle.

2 lbs. large russet potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
1½ cups whole milk
1½ cups heavy cream
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Freshly grated nutmeg

1. Preheat oven to 275°. Arrange layers of slightly overlapping potato slices in an 8-cup gratin or baking dish. Mix together milk and cream in a bowl, then pour over potatoes to cover completely (use a little more cream or milk if necessary). Bake for 1½ hours.

2. Increase heat to 400°. Remove pan from oven and generously season top of potatoes with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Return pan to oven and cook until brown and bubbling, about 30 minutes more.

Beef Stock

Makes about 2 quarts

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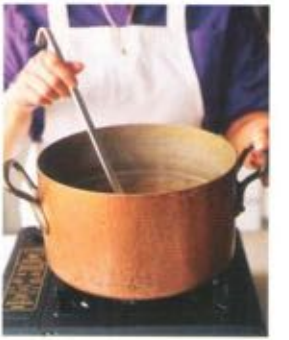
Stocks are the "fonds de cuisine" in a French kitchen—literally, the very foundations of cooking. Stocks give texture, richness, and real depth of flavor. If meat and bones are browned first with the vegetables, as in this recipe, the result will be a fond brun, or brown stock—darker in color and even richer in flavor than a fond blanc, or white stock, made without browning. This beef stock is a classic building block for many traditional French dishes, such as soupe à l'oignon gratinée (see page 7). The most important ingredient here is patience: long, slow cooking is essential.

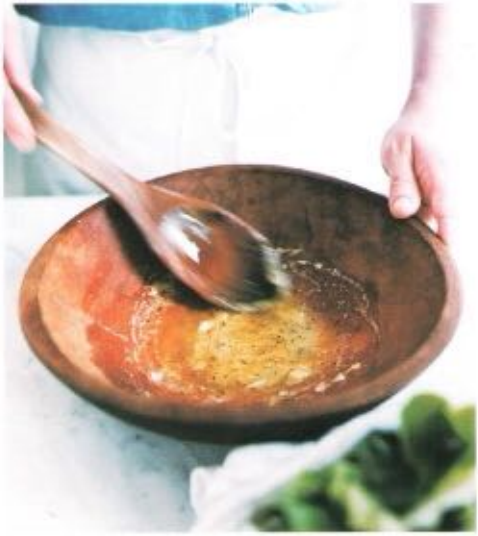
6 lbs. beef bones (shin, oxtail, and neck)
2 tbsp. vegetable oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tbsp. tomato paste
2 carrots, scrubbed and coarsely chopped
4 stalks celery, coarsely chopped
2 medium yellow onions, halved
2 leeks, trimmed, washed, and coarsely chopped
2 whole cloves
8 cloves garlic, peeled and lightly crushed
1 cup red wine
Bouquet garni (see box, facing page)

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Brush beef bones with 1 tbsp. oil, season generously with salt and pepper, put into a large roasting pan, and roast until just browned, about 30 minutes. Smear tomato paste over bones and roast for 20 minutes more. Toss carrots, celery, onions, leeks, cloves, and garlic with remaining oil and add to pan with bones. Roast for 20 minutes more.



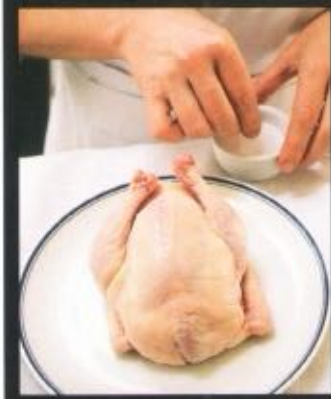
2. Transfer bones and vegetables to a large stockpot. Deglaze roasting pan on stovetop over medium heat with red wine, scraping browned bits from bottom of pan, then pour juices into stockpot. Add bouquet garni and cover with 5 quarts water. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce heat to low and simmer, uncovered, until stock is reduced by two-thirds, about 4 hours, occasionally skimming off any foam that rises to the surface.

3. Strain stock and discard solids. Transfer stock to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight. Remove and discard fat that has formed on surface. Stock may be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days or in the freezer for up to 6 months.



La Vraie Vinaigrette

WHAT IS IT about the French and their mastery of vinaigrette? It often begins in the salad bowl—a large wooden one, preferably. Burgundian cook Marielle Grivot (see page 4) whisks her dressing together in the bottom of the bowl, then puts her greens on top and tosses the salad at the table just before serving. The French mother of SAVEUR food editor Melissa Hamilton uses the back of her wooden spoon to mash garlic, salt, and pepper into a coarse paste in the bowl before mixing in dijon mustard, red wine vinegar, and good olive oil (above). She too adds her greens last and tosses the salad right at the table. Another tip—a "grandmother's trick", actually—for smooth and luscious dressing is to begin your dressing by dissolving a little potato starch in some boiling water, then add mustard, vinegar, and olive oil.

CHICKEN LITTLE

In France, where chickens are classified according to weight, method of rearing, and age at slaughter, a poussin is a chicken that is killed at the age of about four weeks and weighs about a pound. It has delicately flavored flesh and is ideal for broiling, grilling, or roasting. (Long-cooking methods, like stewing, tend to turn poussins dry and stringy.) Poussins are available in the U.S., but if you can't find them, the best substitute would be the small North American cornish game hen—bred from the plymouth rock hen and the white cornish game cock. This tasty little bird is slaughtered at a slightly later age than the poussin and is larger, both because of its age and because of its accelerated feeding program. It can weigh up to two pounds, and cooking time must be adjusted accordingly.