



THE CHEAT: PUTTIN' ON THE BISQUE

A ritzy evening of supper and song, inspired by the Café Carlyle.

BY SAM SIFTON

“Which is the right life?” asks the Cole Porter song. “The simple or the night life? When, pray, should one rise, at sunset or at sunrise? Which should be upper, my breakfast or my supper? Which is the right life, which?”

If you’ve spent any time in the low light of the **Café Carlyle** on the Upper East Side — listening to a Pizzarelli play, say, or a Tyrell sing, or a Cook do her thing — the questions are easily answered. You should rise at sunset, eat dinner, live the night life.

Here are recipes for just such an evening, a night in for a couple or a small group of friends in search of a particular kind of homemade urban night out, the sort that generally takes place over white linen in the company of the American songbook, alongside a glass of Champagne. From soup to bop, they are modeled on menu favorites from **the Carlyle**, where the cabaret is best preceded by a small meal, a large drink and a slow build of anticipation before the music starts. (Steve Tyrell is playing the room through Dec. 31.)

Lobster bisque may be your appetizer or your meal in its entirety; you might follow it with (or substitute for it) a rich chicken hash that recalls a girl who did well at finishing school. You could eat either dish in a tuxedo, a gown from Lanvin or an old sweater and slacks. They’ll feel like velvet and cashmere regardless. They go best with a soundtrack: some Sondheim, for instance, and some Rodgers and Hart, a few Sinatras, some Bacharach, Mr. Porter, Nat King Cole. Joni Mitchell? Jessica Molaskey sings “Raised on Robbery” beautifully. You can have that for dessert.

The hash is simple. It takes a nursery-food staple of the sort that both high American WASPs and low British aristocrats popularized in the middle of the last century and outfits it with culinary pearls and diamonds: foie gras and truffles. (We’ll cheat and use foie gras mousse and a dash of fake truffle oil.) It must have pleased the man whose name sits above it on the menu at the Café: Bobby Short, the elegant saloon singer and pianist who did more than 35 years in the room. You can imagine him eating a

plate of it, wiping his lips carefully with a starched and heavy napkin, then heading off into the dark night to work. As the lyric tells us, it's a make-believe ballroom, let's dance.

It is the bisque that holds the deeper pleasures, though, and the best chance for a home cook to shine. Adapted from the recipe of the Carlyle's executive chef, James Sakatos, it contains one of the great kitchen cheats of all time: a method for imparting rich creaminess that in a lesser establishment would come from a roux of butter and flour or a handful of cornstarch. You may end up using it all the time, and we'll get to it soon enough. (It ain't cream-of-mushroom soup.)

First, cook some lobsters. Two of them will do, of medium size, placed into a pot filled with a knuckle's depth of lightly salted, lightly boiling water and covered until they are red and finished. Remove them from the pot, reserving the now-briny water; this is a primitive and remarkably flavorful stock. When the shells have cooled to the point at which you can handle them, start cracking them open and removing the meat, again reserving whatever liquid or viscera emerges alongside it. All this nastiness is flavor in its purest essence. It is of great value to your soup. You discard it at your peril. Cut the meat into small pieces and store it in the refrigerator.

Now heat your vegetables, your herbs, and eventually add to them the mess you have made: cracked-up shells, lobster fat, roe or tomalley, all that you have harvested. Tomato sauce adds color, sherry the flavors of Boston and wealth. That stock adds heft. Let this thing cook and cook and cook.

Then strain it. See! All that fearsome shell is out of your life forever. What's left is a liquid of uncommon flavor, as salty as an estuary leading off Cape Cod Bay, deep with lobster flavor, red as roe. Now for the magic. Add a good handful of long-grain Carolina rice to the broth and let it cook over medium heat into mush, stirring often. After a half-hour or so, you'll whiz the bisque thick in a food processor; it will coat the back of a spoon as if it were liquid silk.

Add cream to this concoction, which will smooth out the saltiness, take the color into something autumnal, put you close to show time. Remove the reserved lobster meat from the fridge, place it in the bisque and heat it all through. Pour portions into warmed bowls, dust with cayenne and — cue Champagne.

Pop! Here's Mr. Porter again:

*You're a Bendel bonnet,
A Shakespeare sonnet,
You're Mickey Mouse.*

You're the Nile,

You're the Tower of Pisa.

You're the smile

On the "Mona Lisa."

I'm a worthless check, a total wreck, a flop.

But if, baby, I'm the bottom,

You're the top!

LOBSTER BISQUE

Kosher salt	2 sprigs fresh tarragon
2 live lobsters, weighing around 3 pounds total	2 tablespoons tomato paste
2 tablespoons olive oil	1 cup medium sherry
1 carrot, chopped	2 cups fish stock or clam broth
2 ribs celery, chopped	½ cup long-grain white rice
1 medium onion, chopped	1 cup heavy cream
2 cloves garlic, crushed	Cayenne pepper, to taste.
2 sprigs fresh thyme	

1. Fill a large pot with ½ inch of water. Stir in 2 teaspoons kosher salt and bring the water to a boil. Add the lobsters, cover with a tight-fitting lid and return the water to a boil. Once boiling, lower the heat to a gentle boil and cook the lobsters until they are bright red, about 12 minutes. Remove the lobsters, reserving the liquid. When the lobsters have cooled slightly, place them in a bowl and remove the meat from the claws and tail, again reserving any liquid that comes out of the shells. Chop the meat and refrigerate. Roughly chop the shells into small pieces and reserve, along with all the lobster remains.
2. Swirl the olive oil in a large pot over medium heat, then add the vegetables and herbs. Sweat until the onions are translucent, about 5 minutes, then increase the heat to medium-high and add the lobster shells and remains. Sauté for 5 to 6 minutes, then add the tomato paste and cook for an additional 3 to 4 minutes.
3. Add the sherry, then ignite or cook until the alcohol has evaporated. Add fish stock and 1 cup of the lobster-cooking liquid. Bring to a simmer and cook, covered, for 1 hour.
4. Strain the broth through a colander, pressing down hard on the solids to extrude as much liquid as possible. Wipe out the pot and pour in the broth. Add the rice and cook for at least 30 minutes, or until the grains are cooked to extreme softness.
5. Blend the bisque in a food processor or blender, then pass through a fine sieve, again pressing down hard on what solids remain. Add the cream and bring to a low simmer. Add the chopped lobster meat, let it heat through, then season to taste with salt and cayenne. Serves 4.



BOBBY SHORT'S CARLYLE CHICKEN HASH

One 3-to-4-pound kosher chicken	½ teaspoon truffle oil (optional)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper	4 ounces duck-liver mousse (optional)
¾ cup medium-dry sherry	Slices of white bread, toasted, for serving.
1 cup heavy cream	
½ cup low-sodium chicken broth	

1. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Season the chicken with salt and pepper and roast until its juices run clear, 60 to 70 minutes. Let cool. Remove the skin and meat from the bones. Cut the breast meat into cubes. Shred the thigh and leg meat and, if feeling very uptown, reserve for another use. Otherwise, use along with breast meat.
2. In a large saucepan, reduce the sherry by half over high heat. Add the cream, chicken broth and truffle oil, if using, and boil over high heat, stirring constantly, to reduce by half again, about 10 minutes.
3. Add the chicken meat and blobs of the duck-liver mousse, if using, to the reduction and bring to a light simmer. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve hot with toast points. Serves 4. Recipes adapted from James Sakatos of the Café Carlyle. ♦