

Bistro Brilliance

Baked Onion Soup with Croques-Monsieur Sandwiches

Chicken Braised in White Wine and Garlic

Steak Au Poivre with a Brandy Cream Sauce

Provençal Rice

Tart Tatin

Baked Onion Soup

6 large onions (about 5 pounds), thinly sliced
½ stick unsalted butter
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1-½ quarts beef stock

4 cups cubed crusty French bread, toasted
¾ pound coarsely grated Gruyère

In a large kettle cook the onions in the butter over medium-low heat, covered with parchment paper and stirring occasionally, for 40 minutes, or until they are golden brown. Sprinkle the onions with the flour and cook the mixture, stirring, for 3 minutes. Add the broth slowly, stir the soup constantly until it comes to a boil, and simmer it, covered, for 20 minutes. Season the soup with salt and pepper.

Preheat broiler. Ladle soup into 6 ovenproof crocks. Place cubed bread on top of soup and then layer with cheese. Place in oven and broil about 4 inches from heat until golden brown and bubbly.

Croques-Monsieur Sandwiches

1 cup Gruyère, finely grated
2 tablespoons sour cream
¾ teaspoon Dijon-style mustard
8 slices of homemade-type white bread
4 thin slices of cooked ham
½ stick unsalted butter, softened

In a bowl stir together Gruyère, sour cream, and mustard. Spread the mixture evenly over each bread slice. Arrange the ham on 4 of the bread slices and top it with the remaining bread slices, spread side down.

Remove the crusts with a sharp knife and spread the tops of the sandwiches lightly with 2 tablespoons of the butter. Invert the sandwiches into a large skillet, spread the tops with the remaining 2 tablespoons butter, and grill the sandwiches over moderately high heat, turning them once, for 6 to 8 minutes, or until they are golden brown on both sides. Transfer the sandwiches with a metal spatula to a baking sheet, sprinkling them with the remaining 2 tablespoons Gruyère, and broil them under a preheated broiler about 4 inches from the heat for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the Gruyère is just melted.

Chicken Braised in White Wine and Garlic

- 2 3 ½-pound whole chickens, each cut into 8 pieces
- 5 whole heads of garlic, cloves separated, unpeeled
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 cups dry white wine
- 6 very large fresh thyme sprigs

Trim excess fat off chicken. Sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper. Lightly smash garlic cloves just to flatten slightly, leaving peel attached and cloves as whole as possible.

Heat 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil in heavy large pot over medium-high heat. Working in 2 batches, add chicken and cook until brown on all sides. Transfer chicken to plate. Add remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil and garlic to pot. Stir until golden brown, about 4 minutes. Add wine and thyme; bring to boil. Return chicken to pot. Reduce heat to medium, cover, and simmer until chicken is cooked through, moving chicken pieces from top to bottom every 5 minutes (sauce will not cover chicken), about 20 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Transfer chicken to platter. Spoon garlic cloves around chicken and drizzle sauce over.

Eggplant and Rice Provencal

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 large eggplant or 2 Japanese eggplant, diced
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 vine-ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 3-¼ cups chicken broth
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup freshly grated parmesan
- 2 tablespoons butter

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Heat the oil in a large heavy skilled and add the eggplants. Cook over a high flame, stirring and turning occasionally (should be lightly browned). Add the onion, green pepper, garlic, thyme, and bay leaf; stir to mix together. Add the tomatoes; stir and reduce the heat. Simmer for five minutes or until most of the liquid is gone. Mix in the rice and broth. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer mixture to a greased baking dish and sprinkle with the parmesan and dot with the butter. Bake uncovered, thirty minutes.

Steak Au Poivre

- 4 beef strip steaks (10 to 12 ounces each)
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons whole black peppercorns
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1/3 cup finely chopped shallots
- 1/2 stick unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces
- 1/2 cup brandy
- 3/4 cup heavy cream

Preheat oven to 200°F. Pat steaks dry and season both sides with kosher salt. Coarsely crush peppercorns and press pepper evenly onto both sides of steaks.

Preheat a 12-inch heavy skillet over moderately high heat until hot, about 3 minutes, then add oil, swirling skillet, and sauté steaks in 2 batches, turning over once, about 7-8 minutes per batch for medium-rare. Transfer steaks as cooked to a heatproof platter and keep warm in oven while making sauce.

Pour off fat from skillet, then add shallots and half of butter (2 tablespoons) to skillet and cook over moderately low heat, stirring and scraping up brown bits, until shallots are well-browned all over, 3 to 5 minutes. Add brandy and boil, stirring, until liquid is reduced to a glaze, 2 to 3 minutes. Add cream and any meat juices accumulated on platter and boil sauce, stirring occasionally, until reduced by half, 3 to 5 minutes. Add remaining 2 tablespoons butter and cook over low heat, swirling skillet, until butter is incorporated. Serve sauce with steaks.

Apple Tarte Tatin

- 1 frozen puff pastry sheet, thawed
- ½ stick unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup sugar, plus 2 tablespoons
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 7 to 9 Gala apples (3 to 4 pounds), peeled, quartered lengthwise, and cored

Preheat oven to 425°F. Roll pastry sheet into a 10-1/2-inch square on a floured work surface with a floured rolling pin. Brush off excess flour and cut out a 10-inch round with a sharp knife, using a plate as a guide. Transfer round to a baking sheet and chill.

Preheat a 10 inch ovenproof nonstick pan to medium heat. Add butter and sugar evenly to the pan and cook until sugar is melted and butter foams, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and arrange as many apples as will fit vertically on sugar, packing them tightly in concentric circles. Cook apples over moderately high heat, undisturbed, until juices are deep golden and bubbling, 18 to 25 minutes.

Put skillet in middle of oven over a piece of foil to catch any drips. Bake 20 minutes (apples will settle slightly), then remove from oven and lay pastry round over apples. Bake tart until pastry is browned, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer skillet to a rack and cool at least 10 minutes.

Just before serving, invert a platter with lip over skillet and, using potholders to hold skillet and plate tightly together, invert tart onto platter. Replace any apples that stick to skillet. (Don't worry if there are black spots; they won't affect the flavor of the tart.) Brush any excess caramel from skillet over apples. Serve immediately.

Crème Anglaise

- 6 large egg yolks
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 2 cups half and half
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise

Whisk egg yolks and sugar in medium bowl to blend. Place 2 cups half and half in heavy medium saucepan. Scrape in seeds from vanilla bean; add bean. Bring mixture to simmer over medium heat. Remove from heat. Gradually whisk hot half and half mixture into egg yolk mixture. Return mixture to saucepan. Stir over medium-low heat until custard thickens slightly and leaves path on back of spoon when finger is drawn across, about 12 minutes (do not boil). Discard vanilla bean. Cover and refrigerate until cold.