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INTRODUCTION

I started blogging at ProfessorBainbridge.com in 2003. The blog started out with a focus on corporate law, but quickly evolved into a platform for talking about all of my interests: both vocational and avocational.

In the earlier years, the Food and Wine section of the blog consisted mostly of notes on wines Helen and I had tasted. But I had started cooking in my teens and it had eventually evolved into a hobby. Encouraged by Helen, I gradually started writing down some of the recipes I concocted and transcribing them to the blog.

Being bored during the pandemic, I decided to amuse myself by compiling all those recipes into a cookbook. Not to sell but just to share with friends and readers. Hence, the document you have presumably just downloaded.

The recipes are (unless otherwise indicated) designed for two healthy eaters. Many of them will result in leftovers. A few will result in a lot of leftovers. Sometimes that was intentional. Sometimes it was a more or less happy accident.

Many of the blog posts that went into this cookbook also included notes on the wine we drank with the meal. I included those notes, but bear in mind that some of those notes are many years old now. The wines in question likely will be over the hill. Use them as a guide to selecting an appropriate wine if you make the recipe but not as current drinking advice with respect to the specific vintage in question. To help in that regard, I included the date the recipe was posted to the blog.

I hope you make some of these recipes and enjoy them.

Steve Bainbridge

Los Angeles, California

January 30, 2021
BEEF
Bavette Steak & Sherry Shallot Sauce

Helen and I use Home Chef and Hello Fresh for dinners Monday through Thursday. At first, we stuck pretty faithfully to the provided recipes. Increasingly, however, we do tweaks. Last night’s “Bavette Steak” is a case in point.

“Sirloin bavette” is a fancy name Hello Fresh and other purveyors use for a cut that comes from the Bottom Sirloin Butt. It’s often compared to flank steak, but lacks flank steak’s flavor and texture.

Previous experiences with pan searing Hello Fresh’s sirloin bavette, as they usually recommend, had resulted in tough and chewy steaks. So I decided to toss out Hello Fresh’s recipe and try a different approach. I began by whacking the heck out of the steak with my Jaccard 48-blade meat tenderizer.

I then marinated the steaks for 4 hours in some balsamic vinegar salad dressing I had in the refrigerator.

After the steaks marinated, I transferred them to a plate and patted them dry with paper towels. Next I seasoned both sides of each with salt and pepper. I then bagged and vacuum sealed them using my Weston vacuum sealer. Then they went into a sous vide bath powered by my Joule set at 131° for two hours.

After the steaks came out of their bags I again dried them thoroughly with paper towels. I then seared them in a 10-inch skillet. I set the steaks aside to rest while I made a pan sauce per the recipe directions. Meanwhile, the recipe had called for roasted potato rounds, but I made mashed potatoes instead.

The steaks turned out great. They were so tender you didn’t even need a knife and they had a ton of flavor.

We drank a 2016 Jayson Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley). It was very young, but as I get older I’m liking my wines younger. Deep dark purple-ruby color. Good bouquet of blackberry and black cherry. Ditto the palate. Will improve. Consider double decanting to aerate it in the meanwhile. Grade: A-

June 12, 2020
Beef Hot Dish

- ½ pound ground beef (not ground sirloin, which is too low in fat)
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 shallot, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- ½ pound cremini mushrooms, rinsed, trimmed, and diced
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 tablespoon Wondra® flour
- 1 package Better than Gravy, Beef Gravy® mix
- 1 cup water
- ½ tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- ½ cup frozen peas
- ½ cup frozen carrots
- ½ package frozen Ore-Ida tater tots or frozen Ore-Ida diced hash brown potatoes
- ½ cup freshly grated cheddar cheese
- salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 375°.

Brown beef in a large, oven-proof sauté pan over medium-high heat. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain. Blot pan with paper towel without disturbing any fond that developed.

Reduce heat to medium. Add shallots to the pan and sauté for 1 minute. Add garlic and tomato paste. Sauté an additional 45 seconds.

Add mushrooms and thyme. Season with salt and pepper. Cook until the mushrooms have softened, given up their liquid, and begun to color. Sprinkle with flour.

Whisk together gravy mix, water, and Worcestershire sauce in a small bowl. Add to pan. Return beef to pan. Add frozen peas and carrots to pan. Mix well to combine.

Raise heat and bring to a boil. Remove pan from heat. Top mixture with cheddar cheese and potatoes.

Transfer to oven and bake until potatoes are golden brown and mixture reads at least 160°. Should take about 25-30 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

Choose a pleasant red wine but don't push the boat out too far.
Grilled Flank Steak with Chimichurri Sauce

Served with chimichurri sauce on the side. As accompaniments, I served baby heirloom tomatoes tossed with a jarred basil pesto sauce and Alexia onion rings (forgivable shortcuts I think).

The Steak

- 1 ½ pound flank steak
- 1 cup Italian salad dressing
- 1 tablespoon A-1 steak sauce, 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- a heavy pinch of kosher salt
- 4 grinds of black pepper using my Turkish coffee mill pepper grinder
- ½ cup of red wine

Combine all the ingredients other than the flank steak in a small bowl. Whisk thoroughly to combine. Put the flank steak in a 1-gallon plastic zip-top bag and add the marinade. Allow to marinate 1 - 4 hours in the refrigerator. Remove from the refrigerator and let warm up on the counter for 30 minutes. Grill for about 5 and ½ minutes per side on indirect high heat or until it reaches 131°.

The Sauce

- 1 cup fresh Italian parsley leaves
- 2/3 cup fresh cilantro leaves
- 1/3 cup red wine vinegar
- heavy pinch kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 4 grinds black pepper
- 6 cloves of garlic

Combine all ingredients in the work bowl of a mini-food processor. Turn machine on and gradually drizzle in ½ cup extra virgin olive oil. Adjust red pepper flakes and salt to taste. Optional (omitted this time): ¼ to ½ teaspoon cumin and/or coriander.

The Wine

I poured a Behrens & Hitchcock The Contender (Napa Valley) 2003, which is a blend of 73% Cabernet Sauvignon, 22% Cabernet Franc, 4% Merlot, and 1% Petit Verdot that came in at 14.6% alcohol. Last noted in February 2015, when I called it “a very good but not great wine.” With an additional year of aging, this bottle was much improved. There was no sign of the “odd hoppy/resinous aroma” that detracted from the last bottle. It had thrown a lot of sediment, which required decanting. When sampled after about 30 minutes in the decanter it had a big bouquet of rich dark fruits, leather, and spice. On the palate, it was medium- to full-bodied, suggesting blackcurrants, black cherries, prunes. leather, tobacco, and rich warm spices. Delicious and a perfect match for the meal. Grade: 94

April 2, 2016
Kansas City Steak Soup

- 1 teaspoon baking soda dissolved in one tablespoon cold water
- 1 pound ground beef
- ½ cup diced onions
- ½ cup diced celery
- ½ cup diced carrots
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- ½ cup white wine (something not very oaky like Pino Grigio)
- 2 ½ cups low sodium beef broth
- 1 cup undrained crushed tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons A-1 steak sauce
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon Better than Bouillon roast beef base
- 2 medium red potatoes, peeled and diced

I always grind my own meat when I make this soup, using my KitchenAid meat grinder attachment. When I do a grind, I usually grind several pounds of meat and freeze some for hamburger patties or meatballs. In this instance, I ground 1 pound of chuck, 1 pound of top sirloin, and 1 ½ pounds of various assorted cuts that included trimmings from tenderloin, skirt steak, and bottom round. I ran half through once using just the course grinder plate and the other half through twice using the coarse grinder plate followed by the fine grinder plate. I used half a pound of the coarse grind and half a pound of the finely ground beef for this recipe.

Sprinkle the baking soda mixture over the ground beef and toss lightly to combine. This is a great Cook’s Illustrated tip that helps keep the meat very tender and moist.

Warm a Dutch oven over medium heat. Add a pat of butter and a drizzle of olive oil. When the butter stops foaming, add the onions, celery, and carrots. Cook for 10 minutes (or until the veggies have softened and slightly browned on the edges). Add the garlic and tomato paste. Cook for 1 minute, stirring regularly.

Add the wine. Raise the heat to high and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-high and allow to reduce until the wine is a glaze. Add beef stock, tomatoes, A1 sauce, Worcestershire sauce, beef bouillon (this is a trick that amps up the beef flavor), and potatoes. Return heat to high. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and cover. Cook for 15 minutes.

While the soup base is cooking, brown the ground beef. I did it in two batches in my All-Clad 9-inch nonstick skillet, so as to prevent the meat from crowding in the pan and stewing rather than frying. To keep the meat from getting tough and gritty the way ground beef can do, I kept the meat in fairly big chunks and cooked it just to medium-rare. I drained the meat on a paper towel-lined plate.
I added the meat to the Dutch oven and cooked it uncovered for 5 minutes. 

As for what we drank, it was a 2018 Ridge Vineyards Lytton Springs. It doubtless would have aged, but it’s yummy now. Black cherry, raspberry, blueberry, blackberry. Juicy but not jammy. Well balanced. 

February 28, 2021
Multi-Cooker Beef and Sweet Potato Chili

The goal was to make a yummy chili—no beans—in about 30 minutes using only mega-mart ingredients.

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon and 1 teaspoon chili powder, separated
- 1 cup and 2 tablespoons low-sodium beef broth, separated
- 1 16-ounce jar medium salsa
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire Sauce
- 1 tablespoon low sodium soy sauce
- 1 cup frozen diced sweet potatoes (I like Stahlbush Island Farms)
- ¼ cup Doritos chips

The process began that morning by grinding one pound of assorted beef trimmings (chuck, sirloin, tenderloin, flank) using the coarse grind die of my KitchenAid Food Grinder Attachment. I ran about half the meat through the grinder a second time to improve the mix. The result was what butchers call chili grind.

I combined 2 tablespoons of the broth with the baking soda, kosher salt (I like Morton’s), and 1 teaspoon of chili powder (I like Morton & Basset) in a small bowl. I added the mixture to the beef and let it sit for 15 minutes at room temperature.

I preheated my 6 quart Fagor LUX Multi-Cooker using the browning cycle. When the function light stopped blinking I browned the meat in two batches. I drained the meat on paper towels and dabbed up any excess fat in the cooking insert.

I returned the meat to the insert and added the entire jar of salsa (among the supermarket options, I like Tostitos Chunky Salsa). This is a great shortcut I picked up from Alton Brown of Good Eats fame.

Next, I added the broth, Worcestershire Sauce, soy sauce, sweet potatoes, and 1 tablespoon of chili powder to the meat.

I set the Fagor to the pressure cooker function, selecting high pressure and setting the timer for 7 minutes. When the pressure cooker time expired, I allowed it to do a natural release for ten minutes and then opened the pressure valve to vent the remaining steam.

The sauce was a little runny. So, I finely crushed enough Doritos chips to make a ¼ cup, and stirred them into the pot. I brought the chili to a boil using the browning function and then switched the multi-cooker to simmer.

After about 10 minutes of simmering, the chili had thickened nicely. Given that I did basically no chopping or prep work, but instead just opened bags, cans, and jars, it nevertheless tasted great. In fact, it tasted better than the last chili I tried making from scratch.

November 6, 2017
New York Strip Steak (Sous Vide) and Port Sauce with Roasted Potatoes

This was the first recipe I made with a Joule Sous Vide machine, which has become one of my favorite kitchen tools. We drank a 2015 Frog’s Leap Merlot (Napa Valley), which was a pleasant match for the meal. It suggested plums, prunes, and oak.

The Steaks

After setting up the Joule’s smartphone app, which was quite easy, I added the sous vide machine to my All-Clad 12-quart stock pot, and let the water come up to the temperature recommended by the app.

- 2 12-ounce NY strip steaks
- Salt and pepper

I took two NY strip steaks and trimmed off the fat. I seasoned both sides with salt and pepper and popped them into heavy duty vacuum sealer bags with a squirt of Pam, a couple of sprigs of fresh thyme, and a clove of garlic. Next I broke out my other new toy, a Weston vacuum sealer, and sealed both bags using the pulse setting. I added the bags to the pot, attaching them with sous vide cooking clips. I told the app to start the cooking process and it took off. The app recommended a 90 minute cook time, but I actually ended up letting it cook for over two hours to no ill effect, which is one of the beauties of sous vide cooking.

Port Sauce

- ½ tablespoon diced shallot
- 1 garlic clove
- ¾ cup tawny port
- ¼ cup low sodium chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon freeze-dried green peppercorns
- 1 tablespoon butter

To make the sauce I sautéed about half a tablespoon of finely diced shallot and a minced garlic clove in a large pat of butter. When they were ready, I added ¾ cup of tawny port and ¼ cup low sodium chicken broth to the pot, along with a teaspoon of green peppercorns. After the sauce reduced to about a quarter of a cup, I added a tablespoon of Dijon mustard and kept it warm. Taste and season with salt and pepper as desired.

The Potatoes

- 4 rashers thick-cut bacon
- 10 ounces baby Yukon Gold potatoes
• Thyme
• Salt and pepper

I started off by cooking four rashers of thick-cut bacon in my All-Clad 12-inch pan. While they were cooking, I sliced 10 ounces of pee wee Yukon gold potatoes in half and put them in a medium mixing bowl. When the bacon was done, I transferred them to a paper towel-lined plate, and later chopped them into small pieces. I put about 3 tablespoons of bacon drippings in with the potatoes, along with salt, pepper, and chopped up leaves from about 5 sprigs of fresh thyme. The mixture went into a roasting pan and roasted at 400° for about 35 minutes. When they were done, I added the chopped-up bacon bits and about half a cup of creme fraiche.

**The Service**

I combined a half tablespoon of bacon drippings with a teaspoon of sherry vinegar and used it to dress some baby arugula.

When everything was ready, I took the steaks out of the water bath. I patted the steaks dry. I put my All-Clad 12-inch pan over high heat. When it was blazing hot, I added the steaks and seared them for one minute per side.

Check out how beautifully cooked the steaks turned out:

October 6, 2018
Oxtail Stew

This turned into an all-day project, but a fun one.

- 1-½ pounds meaty oxtails (bone-in)
- 1 medium onion, chopped roughly
- 1 medium carrot, scrubbed, cut lengthwise, and then cut into big chunks
- 1 rib celery, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 3 cloves garlic, whole
- 1 cup red wine
- 1-½ beef broth
- 1 cup chicken broth
- ½ tablespoon soy sauce
- ½ tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 ounces diced pancetta
- White and light green parts of one leek, cleaned and diced
- 2 cloves garlic minced
- 6 brown mushrooms

Season oxtails on all sides with salt and pepper. Brown on all sides in a large skillet over medium heat. Transfer to your trusty Cuisinart slow cooker. Add a couple of teaspoons of olive oil to the pan, return it to the heat, season with salt and pepper, and sauté until vegetables turn translucent and are just beginning to brown at the edges. Add vegetables to slow cooker. Deglaze the pan with wine and reduce by half. Add wine, broths, sauces, and bay leaf. Set to high. Cook for 4-5 hours.

Remove oxtails from slow cooker. Pour the broth through a fine mesh sieve into a clean container. Transfer broth to a fat separator, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate. (Discard vegetables)

Once oxtails have cooled, remove and shred the meat. Put the meat in a glass bowl with a cover and refrigerate. Discard bones.

Sauté pancetta in a non-stick skillet until it begins to brown and has rendered its fat. Add leeks. Sauté until they begin to wilt and take on some color. Add mushrooms and sauté for about 6-8 minutes or until they are soft and have given up all their liquid. Add garlic and season with salt, pepper, a pinch or two of Italian herbs. Sauté for about 45 seconds. Transfer to glass bowl with the meat.

Meanwhile, reconstitute 1 ounce porcini mushrooms in hot water. Drain, rinse, and chop into medium dice. Add to glass bowl.
Meanwhile, bring a pot of water seasoned with salt to the boil. Cook 10-12 or so baby potatoes and 1 carrot cut into quarter-inch coins for about 15 minutes. Drain and add to glass bowl. Add 1 tablespoon of Wondra to a small glass bowl and mix thoroughly.

About 30 minutes before dinner pour the stock off the fat into a large pot, discarding the latter. Bring to a boil. Add contents of glass bowl. Stir and reduce heat to a low simmer. Top with fresh chives and serve.

To drink I poured a Beringer Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley) 2002. On decanting off moderate sediment, it showed a lovely ruby with just the slightest hint of brick at the very edge. The bouquet suggested blackberry, black cherry, and blackcurrant, with a dash of leather and cedar. Ditto the palate. Soft smooth tannins. Drink now. Grade: 93

January 28, 2017
Skirt Steak with Hoisin Sauce

- ¼ cup soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 teaspoon Siracha sauce
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon minced ginger
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- ½ teaspoon 5 spice powder
- Salt and pepper
- 2 scallions sliced thinly
- 12 ounces skirt steak cut into two pieces and trimmed of any connective tissue

Combine all ingredients other than the skirt steak in a large bowl and whisk to combine. Add skirt steak and toss to coat. Allow to marinate for 30 minutes at room temperature.

Set broiler pan under broiler on top rack. Preheat broiler and pan for 10 minutes.

Remove steaks from marinade, scraping the marinade off into the bowl, and reserving the marinade. Transfer marinade to a small pan and bring to a simmer. Allow to simmer for a couple of minutes. Allow to cool.

Pat steaks dry with paper towels. Broil for about 3-4 minutes per side.

Allow steak to rest 5 minutes. Slice against the grain into small pieces. Toss steak with marinade.

Serve with a mature Russian River Valley Zinfandel and Asian slaw.

August 23, 2019
Stir-Fried Flank Steak and Vegetables

- 1 pound flank steak, sliced thinly
- Corn starch
- 1 large carrot, sliced into thin coins on the diagonal
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 5 green onions sliced into ½ inch pieces on the diagonal, white and green parts separated
- 1 tablespoon finely minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon grated ginger
- ¼ cup low sodium organic beef broth
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce
- ½ tablespoon Sriracha Hot Chili Sauce
- 1 tablespoon of Lee Kum Kee Oyster Sauce
- ½ tablespoon sesame oil

Dusted the steak pieces with corn starch and shake off the excess. Heat a 12-inch nonstick skillet (or wok) over fairly high heat (8 out of 10). Add a drizzle of peanut or vegetable oil to the skillet and let heat until it starts to shimmer. Add the steak and stir-fry for ~4 minutes. Remove to a plate.

Turn the heat down to 7 and add another drizzle of oil. When it begins to shimmer, add the carrots and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add the white parts of the green onions, garlic, and ginger to the pan and stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the beef broth, soy sauce, Worcestershire Sauce, and Sriracha. Turn the heat up to high and cook 1 minute. Return the steak to the pan and cook 1 minute. Turn off the heat and add the oyster sauce and sesame oil. Combine and serve over rice.

We drank a Robert Mondavi Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley) 2002. It’s drinking really well right now. It still has a lot of youthful red and black fruit, but it is also showing some lovely maturity markers. Slight sediment justified decanting and an additional 30 minutes breathing opened it beautifully. Silky smooth. Cassis, cherry, blackberry, raspberry, cedar, vanilla, smoke. Grade: A-/A

April 23, 2015
Veal Marsala with Risotto al Funghi and Truffles

Risotto
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 shallot, finely diced
- 2-3 cloves garlic, minced
- 8 ounces cremini mushrooms, chopped into large dice
- 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms, reconstituted and chopped finely
- 1 tablespoon white truffle butter
- 1 ½ cups Arborio rice
- 1 cup white wine
- 2 ½ cups low-sodium chicken stock
- ½ tablespoon white truffle butter
- 1 white truffle

Heat your 4 quart Fagor LUX Multi-Cooker (you have gotten one, haven’t you?) using the browning function. When the light stops flashing, add oil and allow to heat until it begins to shimmer. Add shallots and sauté for about a minute or until they become translucent. (If they start to brown, switch the multi-cooker to the sauté function.) Add garlic and sauté about 30 seconds. Add mushrooms and, if you have not already done so, switch the multi-cooker to the sauté function. Cook mushrooms for about 8 minutes or until they are brown and have softened but are still meaty to the taste. Add the white truffle butter and rice. Stir and sauté for 2 minutes. Add wine and switch the multi-cooker back to browning. After wine comes to a boil, allow to reduce for about a minute. Add stock.

Seal the multi-cooker (making sure the valve is set to pressure). Select the risotto function. When cycle is complete, unplug the multi-cooker and do a 10-minute natural release. Release any remaining pressure and stir rice. Add cheese. Add second bit of butter. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Plate the risotto and grate white truffle over it.

Veal
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ tablespoon white truffle butter
- 4 veal scallops
- 1 shallot, finely diced
- 2-3 garlic cloves, minced
- 8 ounces cremini mushrooms, chopped into large dice
- 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms, reconstituted and chopped finely
- Big pinch dried thyme
- ½ tablespoon tomato paste
- ⅔ cup dry Marsala wine
- 1 tablespoon demi-glace and 1 tablespoon Wonder flour dissolved in 1 cup hot low-sodium chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon white truffle butter
Dust scallops with Wonder flour and season with salt and pepper on both sides. Pound both sides in both directions with your 48-blade tenderizer.

Preheat skillet over medium-high heat, which I define as 330°. (I check the temperature using my infrared thermometer, but I’m a kitchen geek.)

Add oil and butter. When butter stops foaming, add veal and cook for about a minute per side. Transfer veal to a plate and shallots and sauté for about a minute or until they become translucent. Add garlic and sauté about 30 seconds. Add mushrooms and thyme. Cook for about 8 minutes or until they are brown and have softened but are still meaty to the taste. Add tomato paste and sauté about a minute. Add Marsala, increase heat to full and reduce by half. Add stock and cook until it reaches sauce consistency. Add butter. Add veal and toss in sauce. Serve.

Chianti

We drank a 2012 Ruffino Chianti Classico Gran Selezione Ducale Oro. The wine was a brilliant match for the veal and risotto. Big bouquet of red and black berries with some warm spices. Well-balanced. Good acidity. Easy to drink and easy to like, albeit not terribly profound. Grade: 87

January 4, 2018
Lamb with Quinoa Pilaf

Serves 4.

- 1 lb ground lamb
- ½ red onion diced
- 6 ounces finely chopped cremini mushrooms
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 3-4 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ tablespoon grated ginger
- ½ tablespoon red curry paste
- 2 cups water
- 1 tablespoon Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce
- 1 cup Della Quinoa Rice Blend
- 1 ½ ounce dried currants
- 4 ounces dried apricots, diced
- 1 14.5 ounce can diced tomatoes, drained
- ½ cup slivered almonds, toasted

I started by browning the lamb over medium heat (6 on a 10 point scale) in a large Dutch Oven. While the lamb was cooking, I seasoned it with a pinch of kosher salt, a couple of grinds of black pepper, and ½ teaspoon of red curry powder. When it was done, I moved the lamb to a paper-towel lined plate to drain.

I mopped up the fat from the lamb, being sure not to disturb the fond, and added some olive oil to the Dutch oven (maybe half a tablespoon by eye). I then added the onion to the pan (with a small pinch of salt) and sautéed it over medium heat (4 on a 10-point scale) until it softened. I then added the mushrooms and sautéed them until they had given up their liquid and softened. I made an open spot in the center of the pan and added the tomato paste, garlic, ginger, and curry paste. I let them fry for about 30 seconds and then stirred them into the onion/mushroom mixture, and let them cook another 30 seconds or so.

Next I added the water and Worcestershire sauce to the pan, turned the heat up to high, and deglazed the pan, scraping up the fond. When the liquid came to a boil, I added the rice-quinoa blend, reduced the heat to 3, covered the pan, and let it simmer for a total of 15 minutes.

After the rice and quinoa had been cooking for about 8-minutes I added the currants, apricots, and tomatoes.

At the 15-minute mark, I removed the lid, stirred in the lamb, and reduced the heat to low (1). I let the lamb heat through and then gave it a taste. It needed a bit more of a punch, so I added 4 dashes of Tabasco, a ½ teaspoon more Worcestershire sauce, and ½ teaspoon Thai fish sauce to really punch up the umami element.

I stirred in the almonds and served it with an arugula-based side salad.
The Wine

To accompany the pilaf, I poured a Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien) 2004. Long time readers of my blog know that this is one of our house favorites. This is the first bottle we’ve tried from the 2004 vintage and it was delicious.

Deep ruby to purple, it has thrown some sediment but not a lot. I decanted it about 30 minutes before dinner. Huge bouquet of currants, cherries, prunes, and cedar. The last glass (with about 90 minutes breathing time) had a whiff of the humidor. Lovely. On the palate, the attack is youthful with lots of red and black fruit. The finish is fairly long and introduces more earthy, leathery, woody elements. Impeccably balanced. Grade: 93

April 30, 2016
Lamb Sirloin with Port and Currant Sauce, Mushroom Risotto, and Brussel Sprout Gratin

This was Helen’s 2020 birthday dinner.

**Lamb Sirloin**

- 2 10-ounce lamb sirloin steaks
- salt
- pepper
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled and lightly crushed
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary, divided

Season the steaks with salt, pepper, and rosemary on both sides. Put one lamb steak and 2 garlic cloves into a 6-by-10-Inch vacuum-sealer bag. Seal with your Weston 65-0501-W Vacuum Sealer.

Put both bags in a water bath with your Joule Sous Vide and set to 134°. Cook for two hours.

Heat a medium nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Remove bags from water bath, cut open, remove the steaks and pat dry with paper towels. Transfer steaks to skillet and sear on all sides. Transfer to a cutting board and let rest 10 minutes.

Slice thinly against the grain and top with sauce.

**Port and Currant Sauce**

- 1 cup beef stock
- 1 teaspoon Wondra flour
- 1 tablespoon dried currants
- 2 tablespoons port
- 1 tablespoon butter
- salt and pepper

Bring stock to a boil in a small saucepan. Add flour and which until smooth. Reduce heat to low and let simmer lightly. Add currants.

After cooking the steaks and transferring to the cutting board, add stock to the skillet and return to the boil. Add port and allow to thicken until it coats the back of a spoon. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper.

**Brussel Sprouts Gratin**

I HATE Brussel sprouts, but Helen loves them. So, I made a small gratin as follows.

I preheated the oven to 400°.
I sorted through a 10-ounce bag of sprouts to find the smallest ones. I filled a 7 x 5 baking dish with the selected sprouts to make sure they fit. Then I dumped the sprouts onto a cutting board. I trimmed the sprouts and cut them in half. I returned the sprouts to the baking pan. I tossed them with a large drizzle of olive oil, a heavy pinch of salt, and a few grinds of pepper. I baked them for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile I made a sauce by combining a half cup of cream and a half cup of whole milk in a small saucepan and heated over medium-high heat until it was just short of boiling (do not let it scorch). Add 2 teaspoons Wondra flour and which until smooth. Cook another minute. Allow to cool slightly. Add 1/3 cup of grated Gruyere and 3 tablespoons of grated Parmesan. Season with a pinch of freshly ground nutmeg, a pinch of salt, and a grind or two of pepper. Pour over sprouts and return to oven.

Combine 3 tablespoons of panko bread crumbs with one tablespoon of melted butter. Scatter over top of gratin and heat until browned.

I took a few just for show and left the rest to Helen.

**Mushroom Risotto**

I used my recipe for Souped-up Store Bought Risotto.

**The Wine**

I opened a Chateau Montrose (St. Estephe) 1982, which was the last of my 1982s. 😢 Phenomenal. Fill was still just into the neck. Cork stained to about the halfway point. It had thrown a ton of sediment. But it was still a surprisingly deep ruby, albeit with considerable bricking at the edges. Powerful bouquet of prunes, currants, leather, tobacco, and cedar. On the palate, it was fully mature with silky tannins. Yet, it was surprisingly fruity. Currants, prunes, and black cherry, but also a lot of pencil shavings. I bought this wine at auction over twenty years ago and have been waiting for a suitable occasion. What could be more suitable than a birthday dinner during lockdown? Grade: A+

May 17, 2020
Leg of Lamb with Short Cut Risotto

I started with a 2 pound boneless hunk of leg of lamb, which I marinated for 7 hours in a mixture of bottled Italian salad dressing (about 1 cup), red wine (ditto), chopped garlic (about 5 cloves), dried rosemary (about 1 tsp.), worcestershire sauce (about 1 tablespoon), soy sauce (ditto), salt (2 big pinches of kosher salt), and a dozen or so whole peppercorns. I preheated the oven to 500° and dropped the oven temperature to 350° when I put the lamb in the oven. I roasted the lamb at for about 45 minutes for rare (okay, very rare; some of us like our lamb still twitching, okay?). Add 10 minutes if you like it more done. Best of all, we’ve got leftovers for a lamb hash tomorrow night.

For the risotto I used my usual short cuts. I started with a package of Alessi Risotto, prepared as per package directions. Meanwhile I briefly steamed some baby broccoli in the microwave (3 minutes in a microwave safe container with a couple of tablespoons of water). When the risotto was almost done, I tossed in a tablespoon of sun-dried tomato pesto that I had in the refrigerator. I added the broccoli to the risotto to cook for a couple more minutes.

A simple cherry tomato and micro-greens salad with a splash of sherry vinegar, EVOO, salt, and pepper finished the meal.

I poured a Joseph Phelps Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley) 2003. I bought this bottle (and its 5 sisters) directly from the winery upon release and it has been sitting at 55° ever since. This bottle was in stellar condition. The wine was alive, fresh, and delicious. Its color was still a pretty deep ruby with a slight suggestion of brick at the rim. Modest bouquet suggesting black fruits and cedar. On the palate, it suggested blackberry, cassis, prunes, leather, and cedar. Grade: 92

February 27, 2016
Stuffed Rack of Lamb

- 1 rack of lamb, frenched
- ~ ⅓ cup sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained and minced (I like Bella Sun Luci)
- 1 tablespoon basil pesto (I like Seggiano)
- 1 clove garlic, minced

Hold a very sharp paring knife horizontally parallel to the lamb meat and insert it to the hilt. Spin the blade to make a tunnel through the meat. Turn the rack around, insert the knife into the other end, and repeat. Push a wooden spoon handle through one end until it comes out the other and spin to widen the tunnel. Combine the tomatoes, pesto, and garlic, and push into the cavity you’ve created in the lamb. Make sure that your stuffing fills the entire cavity and then sort of press the meat to even out lumps. Season the surface of the meat (top and bottom) with salt and pepper and let rest at room temperature while you make the crust.

- ¼ cup @ raw cashews and slivered almonds
- ~ ⅓ cup sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained and minced

Combine the nuts in a Cuisinart Mini-Prep and process until they are the size of bread crumbs. Add the tomatoes and process briefly. Smear the top side of the lamb with about a tablespoon of pesto and press the nut mixture into the meat to form a crust. (You may not need all of the nuts).

Preheat the oven to 425° and roast the rack of lamb for 23 minutes for medium-rare. Allow the lamb to rest while preparing the cauliflower, carve into double rib chops, and serve.

Curried Cauliflower “Rice”

I was on something of a Paleo kick back in those days, so in lieu of the risotto I would usually serve with rack of lamb, I made some cauliflower rice in my new KitchenAid Food Processor Attachment. Take 1 head of cauliflower, trim off any leaves, and cut the florets off the inner core. Discard the core or save it for stock. Chop the florets roughly and put half in the processor. Using pulses, process the cauliflower until it has broken down into rice-size pieces. Repeat with the other half. I reserved half the resulting product for use tomorrow night and used half for tonight’s side dish.

- 6 green onions
- ⅓ cup slivered almonds
- 1 teaspoon crushed garlic
- 1 teaspoon finely grated ginger
- 1 teaspoon chili paste
- ½ to 1 teaspoon garam masala (depending on taste)
- 1 teaspoon red curry paste
- ⅓ cup sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained and chopped
- 1 ounce raisins
- 1 teaspoon dry parsley
- 1-½ teaspoon fish sauce (I have become addicted to Red Boat)
- olive oil
- kosher or sea salt and fresh ground pepper

I did not want the side dish to be really spicy because I planned on serving it with a 30-year-old Bordeaux and didn’t want the spice to blow the wine out of the water. If you went with a younger, more assertive wine, you could ramp up the spice (a lot). But I wanted warm and mellow, which is what I got.

Chop the green onions, dividing the white parts from the green. Heat a 12-Inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat and then add enough olive oil to coat. Add the white part of the green onions and sauté for about a minute. Add the almonds and sauté for about 3 minutes. Add garlic, ginger, chili paste, garam masala, and curry paste and sauté for about 30 seconds. Reduce heat to medium and add the tomatoes, raisins, parsley, and processed cauliflower. Season with salt (just a pinch) and pepper. Cook over medium heat for about 4 minutes. Add fish sauce and cook another minute. Stir in green parts of green onions, taste to see if it needs more salt (it probably won’t) and serve immediately.

We drank a Château Sociando-Mallet (Haut-Médoc) 1986. I had two prior notes on this wine. One from 2007 and one from 2013. In 2007, I wrote in part that:

“This cru bourgeois from one of Bordeaux’s lesser regions could blow a lot of classed growths out of the water. It’s the same age as Lindsay Lohan and just about as immature, although not as blowsy, as Ms Lohan. Of course, immaturity at age 21 is a much more desirable characteristic in wine than people. ...

Given the Sociando-Mallet’s youthfulness, intense fruit, richness, and over-the-top intensity, in a blind tasting I likely would have said it was a 10-year old Napa cabernet. Fans of the austere style of claret likely would regard all that as a fault, but I find this wine to be very fine.

In 2013, I wrote in part that:

Ms. Lohan seemingly has not matured, but the 1986 Chateau Sociando-Mallet has. This bottle’s cork was stained almost to the top and the bottle was showing ullage down to the very bottom of the neck, which was quite worrisome. But all was well. Although it still had dark fruit in plenty (and remained a deep garnet color), this bottle offered many more maturity markers such as smoke, leather, dried fruits, and so on.

With two bottles left in my cellar, I will not be looking for more at auction. Instead, I’ll probably open the next in 2016 and see where we go from there with respect to the last bottle.

I made this meal in 2016, so I opened the penultimate bottle. It showed ullage down to very high shoulder. The deeply stained cork crumbled on opening, which necessitated showing the remanent through into the bottle and then decanting it through a funnel lined with unbleached
coffee filters (2 sufficed). Given the considerable sediment, decanting would have been required even if the cork had not disintegrated.

Sadly, this bottle had not rewarded additional aging. It was still healthy, with a surprising amount of tannin and good acidity. It had no faults, but it also had few merits. It was pretty one dimensional. Some dark fruit and a dash of cedar, but that was about it. Drinkable. Enjoyable. But not memorable.

May 27, 2016
Rack of Lamb with a Mushroom-Port Sauce and Israeli Couscous with Corn, Peas, Carrots

Lamb
- 1 rack of lamb
- Salt and pepper
- Dijon mustard
- Herbes de Provence
- ½ cup Panko bread crumbs

Season rack of lamb with salt and pepper. Preheat oven to 500. Preheat nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Sear Frenched rack of lamb on both sides. Smear meat side with Dijon. Sprinkle with Herbes de Provence. Press on Panko. Put skillet into oven. Reduce heat to 350. Roast 16 minutes. Remove skillet from oven (be very careful; remember the handle will be hot). Transfer rack of lamb to a cutting board to rest.

Sauce
- Olive oil
- 1 shallot, minced
- 4 ounces cremini mushrooms, sliced thinly
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon tomato paste
- ½ cup tawny port (I used Taylor-Fladgate 10 year old)
- ½ cup beef stock
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons heavy cream
- Salt and pepper

Put the same skillet as you cooked the lamb (assuming the fond didn’t burn) over medium heat. Add a large drizzle of olive oil. When the oil begins to shimmer, add shallot and cook for 2 minutes. Sauté mushrooms until browned and tender. Add garlic cloves and tomato paste. Cook 1 minute. Add Port and deglaze the pan, scraping up the fond. Add beef stock, Worcestershire, and Dijon mustard to pan. Raise heat to high, bring sauce to a boil, reduce heat to medium and reduce by half. Remove pan and whisk in cream. Taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Set aside and keep warm.
Couscous

- Olive oil
- 1 cup whole wheat Israeli couscous
- 2 cups chicken stock (boiling)
- ½ cup diced carrot
- ½ cup corn kernels
- ½ cup petite peas
- Salt and pepper
- Big pinch Herbes de Provence

Put a saucepan over medium heat. Add a big drizzle of olive oil. Add couscous and sauté for one minute. Add chicken stock, vegetables, salt and pepper, and herbs. Cover and cook for 8 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to rest for 5 minutes.

We drank a 2014 Jayson. It provided very enjoyable impressions of cherry, currant, and blackberry on the nose and palate. Chunky tannins, but drinkable now. I guessed it has a high percentage of Cabernet Franc. It’s also very California despite the Bordeaux varieties. Well over 90 points.

February 4, 2018
Rack of Lamb with Short Cut Risotto and White Truffles

I made this for my 59th birthday dinner. The centerpiece was my birthday present to myself—an Italian white truffle.

Lamb

- One rack of lamb, frenched.
- Sale
- Pepper

Score the fat layer over the meat. Season the rack heavily with salt and pepper, rubbing them into the fat and meat.

Let the rack come up to room temperature while you preheat the oven to 450°. Put a cast iron pan in the oven to heat. When the oven is fully heated put the rack in the pan fat-side down. After 5 minutes, flip the rack so the fat side is facing up. At the 10 minute mark, reduce the oven temperature to 325°. After 10 more minutes (for a total of 20) take the lamb out of the oven and check the internal temperature with an instant read thermometer. If it’s below 125°, put the rack back in the oven for a couple of minutes. If it’s the right temperature, put it on a cutting board to rest.

Sauce

- 1 teaspoon unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon shallots
- ¼ tawny port
- ¼ white wine
- ¼ low sodium chicken stock
- Green peppercorns (I like a lot but suit your own taste)
- Pinch salt
- Teaspoon Dijon mustard

Put butter in a small sauce pan over medium heat. When it stops foaming, add shallots and cook for a couple of minutes until they are translucent. Add port, wine, chicken stock, peppercorns, and salt. Turn heat to high and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a low simmer. Reduce liquids to a couple of tablespoons. Take pan off the heat. Add mustard and stir to combine.

Cut the rack of lamb into 4 2-bone pieces and top each with a spoonful of sauce.

Short cut risotto with white truffles

I love risotto but I hate slaving over a pot stirring while adding dribs of stock. Hence, short cuts.

- 1 pkg. Alessi Funghi Risotto w/ Porcini Mushrooms
- 1 tablespoon white truffle butter or white truffle oil
- ¾ cup of white wine
- 1 ½ cup low sodium chicken stock

Combine all your ingredients in your 4-quart Fagor LUX Multi-Cooker (you have bought one haven’t you?). Using the browning feature bring mix to a boil. Install lid (making sure pressure valve is closed) and select the risotto function on the multi-cooker. When the risotto is done, unplug the multi-cooker and let rice rest for a few minutes before releasing pressure.

Using a mandolin or a truffle slicer (be sure to protect your hand with a Kevlar glove) slice your white truffle over the risotto immediately before serving.

Ridge Monte Bello (Santa Cruz Mts.) 1997

This is a gorgeous wine. Deep ruby despite having thrown a lot of sediment. Big bouquet of blackberries, blackcurrants, leather, tobacco, and cedar. Smooth tannins and good acidity make it very food friendly. Fully mature but may hold a while. Grade: 97

December 10, 2017
My neighborhood Bristol Farms had some steaks cut from the sirloin end of a leg of lamb, which they had marinated in rosemary, garlic, a little vinegar, and olive oil. When I got one home, I butterflied it and then pounded the meat until it was about half an inch thick (in spots). Seasoned both sides with salt, pepper, and a pinch of cayenne pepper.

Next I smeared it with a store bought sun dried tomato pesto:

The night before I had made Claire Robinson’s Fresh Pea Ravioli with Crispy Prosciutto and had left over filling, so I smeared that on next and topped it with chopped basil and mint:

Rolled it:

Seared it on all sides in a hot pan, transferred it to a 400° oven for 16 minutes, let it rest for 10 minutes, sliced it and served it on top of ragout of tomatoes, peas, carrots, onion, garlic, Buronshimeji mushrooms, and potatoes:
Lamb Stew

- 1 12 oz can of Guinness
- 1 14.5 oz can of Muir Glen Diced Organic Tomatoes
- 1 oz Mycological Dried Oregon Porcini Mushrooms, rinsed and cut into small pieces with scissors
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 lb boneless lamb shoulder trimmed of large fat pieces and cut into 1 inch pieces, sprinkled with a heavy pinch of salt
- ½ medium onion diced
- 1 carrot diced
- 3 cloves garlic minced
- 5 oz Stahlbush Farms frozen sweet potatoes
- 8 oz cremini mushrooms diced
- Italian herbs
- kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon Wondra flour

Combine the Guinness, tomatoes (with their juice), porcini mushrooms, bay leaf, soy sauce, and Worcestershire sauce in the slow cooker and set to high.

Heat a 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high and then add enough olive oil to lightly coat the pan. Add lamb in two batches, searing on all sides and then draining on a paper towel covered plate. Add to slow cooker.

Return skillet to stove, adding a dash of olive oil, reduce heat to medium-low and add onion and carrot to pan. Season with a pinch of salt. Sweat until the vegetables are tender and starting to color (about 20 minutes). Raise heat to medium and add garlic. Sauce 1 minute. Add vegetable mixture to slow cooker.

After 1 hour reduce slow cooker temperature setting to low. Let cook for 3 hours.

Add sweet potatoes to slow cooker.

Sauté cremini mushrooms in a pat of butter for about 6 minutes over medium heat, seasoning with salt, pepper, and Italian seasoning. At the end, add the Wondra flour and stir to combine. Add mushrooms to slow cooker, stirring to combine well.

About 1 hour after you added the sweet potatoes, taste the sauce and add salt and pepper as needed. Then serve with crusty bread to mop up the sauce.

We drank a Château Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lavande (Pauillac) 2004, which was a bit disappointing,
which was probably my fault for opening it at just age 12. Deep purple color with strong legs. Modest bouquet despite decanting 1 hour before dinner. On the palate, it comes across as quite young with lots of hard tannins and high acidity. Thin on the attack with a short finish. Some dark fruit: blackberry, currant, prune. Hopefully it is just in an awkward stage and will improve with age.
July 2, 2016
PORK
Grilled Pork Chops with Spicy Peach Glaze and Sauce

Grilled pork chops with spicy peach glaze, red potatoes, and spinach salad. A Ridge Vineyards Three Valleys Zinfandel (Sonoma County) 2015 was a lovely match.

**Pork Chops**

- 2 thick boneless pork chops
- 4 cups water (optional: replace 1 cup of water with beer or apple cider)
- ¼ cup pickling salt
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 teaspoon whole black pepper corns
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- Big pinch cayenne pepper

Many brine recipes call for boiling the water and cooling the brine at length. I prefer to use pickling salt, which dissolves in cold water, and to mix the brine with my Cuisinart stick blender, which speeds the dissolving process.

Brine the chops for 1-2 hours. Grill 5 minutes on one side. Flip and glaze new top side. Cook 5 more minutes or until the chop reaches an internal temperature of 145°. Glaze the chop again and put on a plate to rest. Top with sauce and serve.

**Glaze/Sauce**

- 1 cup peach preserves
- ½ cup sherry vinegar
- 1 tablespoon bourbon
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/8 teaspoon each cayenne pepper, salt, black pepper
- Combine and reduce by 1/3 over med heat

Set aside ¼ cup of the glaze to use on the pork chops.

Add 3 diced peaches to the sauce and simmer over medium-low heat for 10 minutes.

July 21, 2018
Grilled Pork Tenderloin

- 1 pork tenderloin trimmed of silver skin
- 1 cup Wild Turkey bourbon
- 2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- 2 tablespoons BBQ sauce
- 1 ½ tablespoons kosher salt
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon Lea & Perrins Worcestershire sauce
- ½ tablespoon smoked paprika
- ½ tablespoon Cajun spice
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Put the tenderloin in a 1-gallon zip-top plastic bag. Combine the other ingredients in a medium bowl and whisk thoroughly to combine. Pour the marinade into the bag and put it into the refrigerator to marinate for up to for 8 hours in a mixture of.

Preheat the oven to 425°.

Remove the tenderloin from the bag and pat dry with paper towels. Pour the marinade into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Roast the tenderloin at 425° for 25 minutes, turning and basting it with the boiled marinade every 5 minutes or until it hits an internal temperature of 140°. Remove it from the oven and baste one last time. Let it rest at least 5 to 10 minutes before slicing. In this case, I served it with Zatarain’s Dirty Rice to which I had added tomatoes, finely diced carrots, and green onions.

We drank a Ridge Geyserville (Sonoma County) 2010, which was a deep purple despite having thrown a substantial amount of light sediment (decanting required). Nice berry bouquet although not terribly complex. On the palate, lots of intense berry flavor associations--raspberry, blackberry, blueberry, as well as star anise and a dash of pepper. Well balanced with smooth tannins. Likely will improve for a few more years. Sadly, however, this was my last bottle. Grade: 88

November 7, 2015
Pork Chops Étouffée with Somewhat Dirty Rice

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 thick boneless pork loin chops
- ¼ cup each of diced onions, celery, and poblano pepper
- 2 green onions, diced, white and green parts separated
- 1 teaspoon Cajun spice mix
- 3 garlic cloves
- 14.5 ounce can diced tomatoes (drained; reserving the juice)
- ½ cup beer
- ½ cup chicken stock
- ½ cup reserved tomato juice
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire Sauce
- 4 dashes of Tabasco
- 1 link andouille sausage
- 2 links breakfast pork sausage
- 1 box Zatarain’s Dirty Rice mix

I started off with two thick boneless pork loin chops, which I cooked *sous vide* at 140° for 65 minutes using my beloved *Joule*.

To go with the pork, I made an étouffée sauce. Earlier in the day I had made a dry roux. I put 2 cups of flour in a pie plate and cooked it in my *Breville smart oven* at 425° on the roast setting. It took about 40 minutes to get to a peanut butter color, stirring every 10 minutes or so. Much easier and safer than making a traditional dark roux in a Dutch oven.

I melted a tablespoon of unsalted butter in a 2-quart saucier over medium heat and then sautéed a ¼ cup each of diced onions, celery, and poblano pepper, having seasoned them with a big pinch of salt. After about 8 minutes the vegetables had softened somewhat and very slightly colored. I added the white parts of 2 green onions, diced, a teaspoon of Cajun spice mix, and 1 ½ tablespoons of dry roux. I continued to sauté the vegetables for 2 more minutes. I then added 3 crushed garlic cloves and half of a 14.5 ounce can of diced tomatoes (drained; reserving the juice) and cooked the mixture for another minute. I then added ½ cup beer, ½ cup chicken stock, and ½ cup reserved tomato juice to the pan. I cranked the heat to high and added 1 tablespoon of Worcestershire Sauce and about 4 dashes of Tabasco. When the mixture came to a boil, I reduced the heat to low and let it simmer slowly.

Meanwhile, over in my also beloved 4 quart Fagor multicooker (now made by an outfit called Zavor), set on the sauté setting, I sautéed a ¼ cup each of diced onions, celery, and poblano pepper. After about 10 minutes, I added the white parts of 2 green onions, diced, and continued cooking them for another 2 minutes. I had ground half of an Aidell’s andouille sausage and 2 Jimmy Dean pork sausage links in a mini food processor to the consistency of ground beef and added it to the pot. Finally, I added half of a Zatarain’s Dirty Rice mix, the other half of the can of tomatoes, and 1 ½ cups of water, put on the lid, and set the multicooker to the risotto setting.
When the pork was done I removed the chops from their bags, patted them dry, seasoned them on both sides with salt and Cajun spice mix, and seared them in a nonstick skillet I had pre-heated over medium-high heat. To serve, I topped them with the sauce and rice on the side.

We drank a 2017 Turtle Rock Westberg Red, which has become one of our favorite wines and makes an especially good match for spicy food.

December 10, 2020
GAME
Quail Stuffed with Alligator Boudin and Cooked Sous Vide with Air-Fried Boudin Balls

Start with two jumbo quail from D'artagnan. Rinse the quail thoroughly, inside and out, and pat dry. Leave the legs tied.

Remove the casing from a link of alligator boudin from Louisiana Crawfish Co. Stuff the quails' cavities with the boudin. Do not overstuff the cavity; leave the boudin loosely packed.

Season the quails on the outside with salt.

Heat a large stock pot filled with water to 150° using your Joule sous vide. Place each quail in its own bag and seal it using your Weston vacuum sealer. I prefer to use the pulse setting and stop the vacuum process before the quail gets crushed by the collapsing bag. Add to the heated water. If the bags float, use clips to attach them to the sides and hold them below the water level.

Cook for 2 hours.

Remove the bags from the water and then remove the quail from the bags. Pat dry. Using a kitchen propane or butane torch, brown the quail all over.

Brush the quail with a bourbon glaze. Quickly flash it with the torch to slightly caramelize the glaze.

Combine the remaining boudin with some leftover jambalaya or some other rice. Mix in one beaten egg. Form into 6 balls using a 4-ounce disher. Pack the balls tightly. Place on a cookie sheet and refrigerate for at least 1 hour to set. Roll the balls in flour, dip in egg wash, and then into Panko breadcrumbs. Air fry in a preheated Breville Smart Oven for 13 minutes at 375 or until the balls reach an internal temperature of 160°. Do not allow crust to burn.

Serve with remoulade sauce.

We drank a 2017 Ornellaia Le Serre Nuove from Bolgheri. This is the second wine of Ornellaia. The 2017 is a charming, easy to drink, fruity wine that made a great match for the complex flavors of the meal. It's a blend of 54% Merlot, 26% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Cabernet Franc, and 6% Petit Verdot, which can compete with similar blends from Bordeaux or Napa. Plums, black cherries, blackberries, blueberries. Grade: A-

April 17, 2021
Venison Medallions Sous Vide in a Tawny Port Sauce

- 4 3-ounce venison medallions (I get mine from Dartagnan’s)
- 4 cloves of garlic, paper removed and lightly smashed
- 4 sprigs of fresh rosemary
- 4 sprigs of fresh thyme
- 1 1.5-ounce package More than Gourmet French Demi-Glace
- ½ cup white wine
- ½ cup tawny port (use the real stuff from Portugal not the domestic US imitation)
- ½ tablespoon soy sauce
- ½ tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- ¼ cup balsamic or sherry vinegar
- 1 sprig each of thyme and rosemary
- Butter
- Salt and pepper

Fill a large stock pot or other food safe container with warm water. Insert your Joule sous vide into the container and set to 138°. Pat the venison medallions very dry with paper towels. Season medallions on both sides with salt and pepper. Put each medallion with a sprig of rosemary, a sprig of thyme, and a clove of garlic in its own 6”x10” 3mil bag using your Weston vacuum sealer. Cook for 90 minutes.

In a small saucepan combine the demi glace, wine, port, soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, balsamic or sherry vinegar, and currants. Put 1 sprig each of thyme and rosemary in a spice bag and add to sauce. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to medium-low. Reduce by about half. (Here’s a trick I think I learned watching Alton Brown: sip a chopstick into the simmering liquid. Using a knife, scratch on the chop stick to mark the level of the liquid. Then use the chopstick like a dipstick to see how much of the liquid has evaporated.)

Reduce heat to low and keep sauce warm. Just before serving, remove spice bag, taste and adjust seasoning as needed, add a pat of butter and swirl to melt.

Remove venison from sous vide and bags, discarding garlic and herbs.

Heat a skillet over high heat. Add a drizzle of a high smoke point oil. When the oil is shimmering, add the venison medallions and sear for a minute or two per side.

Serve with some haricot verts and a puree of yams and parsnips. With this meal I’d typically opt for a pretty young Napa Cabernet-based blend with a lot of fruit that will match the sauce and compliment the gamy flavor of the meat.

We drank a Jayson (Napa Valley) 2017. It’s a blend of 44% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Merlot, 15% Petite Sirah, and 4% Cabernet Franc. It’s big but refined. Lots of dark fruit with cherries, blackberries, and currants. A little java and mocha on the long finish.

March 23, 2021
PASTA AND RISOTTO
Butternut Squash Ravioli in a Butternut Squash Cream Sauce

- 3 ounces diced pancetta
- 1 shallot, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- heavy pinch salt
- three or four grinds of black pepper
- 6 ounces diced butternut squash (I used Stahlbush Islands Farm frozen)
- 1 teaspoon dried sage
- 1 teaspoon dried Italian parsley
- 1 cup heavy cream
- pinch nutmeg
- Parmesan cheese to taste
- 1 10-ounce package Rana Butternut Squash Ravioli

Bring 8 quarts of heavily salted water (it should taste like sea water) to a boil in your Cuisinart 12-Quart Pasta/Steamer Pot.

Meanwhile, sauté the pancetta over medium heat in your All-Clad 10-inch D3 skillet. (You’ll notice that, as always, I am crediting you with great taste in your cookware selections.)

Add the squash to the boiling water and cook 3 minutes.

After the pancetta is cooked, transfer it to a paper towel lined plate to drain, and remove all but a tablespoon of the drippings from the pan.

Return the pan to the heat add the shallot and cook for 1 minute. Add the garlic and cook for another 30 seconds. Add the squash, salt, pepper, sage, and parsley, and cook for 1 minute. Add the cream and the nutmeg. Once the cream comes to a simmer, reduce the heat to low and mash the squash using a potato masher (I prefer that to a blender so as to retain some texture in the sauce). Grate in Parmesan cheese to taste.

Cook the ravioli in the pasta water for 3 and a half minutes. Transfer the ravioli to the sauce pan using a spider or slotted spoon, but do try to get some pasta water in the sauce.

Plate and top with more freshly grated Parmesan cheese.

We drank a 2013 Jayson Chardonnay (Jayson is Pahlmeyer’s second label). I was expecting a big, buttery, oaky Napa Chardonnay. What I got was a delicious, well balanced, lightly oaked wine with good acidity that made a stellar match for our meal. Stone fruits (peaches and nectarines), green apple, honey, and vanilla. Grade: 91

October 12, 2018
“Cajun” Pasta with Chicken, Sausage, and Shrimp

This recipe is an effort to replicate the Cajun pastas from California Pizza Kitchen's and Cheesecake Factory.

- 6 ounces cavatappi (I like De Cecco but I've tried Banza's gluten-free chickpea version and it's pretty good)
- 1 poblano pepper, seeds and ribs removed, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 1 large shallot, diced
- 4 green onions, sliced into ¼ inch circles, white and green parts separated
- 4 ounces cremini mushrooms, trimmed and diced
- 1 ½ tablespoon tomato paste (I use Cento)
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 boneless and skinless chicken thighs, each cut into 4 or 5 chunks, seasoned with salt, pepper, and ½ teaspoon seasoning mix
- 1 andouille sausage, cut in half lengthwise and cut into thin slices
- 8 peeled and deveined medium shrimp (or, if you can get them, 4 ounces of cooked crawfish tails; I get mine from Louisiana Crawfish), seasoned with salt, pepper, and ¼ teaspoon seasoning mix
- 1 14.5 ounce can whole San Marzano tomatoes, drained and chopped
- 1 teaspoon of Better Than Bouillon Roasted Chicken base dissolved in 1 cup of hot water
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce (I prefer Red Boat)
- Cajun or Creole seasoning mix
- Hot sauce (I'm a Tabasco man but Helen prefers Frank's)
- salt and pepper

Bring 3 quarts of water to a boil in a large pot. Add 1 tablespoon of salt. Add pasta and cook according to package directions, subtracting 2 minutes from the cooking time. Reserve 1 cup of the pasta cooking water. Drain pasta and set aside.

Heat a 12-inch skillet (I recommend the All-Clad D3 skillet) over medium heat. I prefer a stainless steel skillet here to either a nonstick or a cast iron skillet. Add a tablespoon of olive oil to the skillet.

When the oil begins to shimmer, add the poblano pepper and celery. Sauté for about 5 minutes or until the diced pieces start to soften. Add the shallot and white parts of the green onions. Sauté for a couple of minutes. Add mushrooms. Season with salt, pepper, and seasoning mix.

After the mushrooms release their liquid, begin to sizzle, and start to take on some color, add the tomato paste and sauté for 30 seconds. Add garlic and sauté for another 30 seconds.

Add the chicken. Cook for about 4 minutes, stirring often.

Add the sausage and the shrimp. Cook for two minutes.
Add the tomatoes, fish sauce, and chicken stock. Raise the heat to maximum, bring the sauce to a boil, reduce the heat to low and let simmer. Add the cooked pasta and allow to cook for a couple of minutes. Taste and add hot sauce, salt, pepper, and seasoning mix to taste.

Divide into large pasta bowls. Top with the reserved green parts of the green onions.

Note: The classic Cajun trinity consists of onions, celery, and green pepper. I really dislike the taste of green pepper, so I swap it out for a poblano. Alternatively, I sometimes use red or yellow bell pepper. A regular yellow onion is too big for two servings, which is why I use a shallot and the white parts of the green onions instead.

Option: I’ve made this with a bunch of different types of pasta and had success with all. One of my favorite ways is to use fideo. If you make it with fideo, cook the vegetables and meat—but not the shrimp—as per recipe. Remove meats to a plate. Add a tablespoon of olive oil to the skillet and warm over medium-high heat. Add 6 ounces of fideo and fry until the pasta begins to turn brown. That should take about 2 minutes. But be very careful not to let it burn or blacken. Instead of using whole tomatoes, use diced or crushed tomatoes and do not drain them. Instead, add the tomatoes with their juices, fish sauce, and stock. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cover. Let cook for about 5 minutes and then check the pasta. If the liquid had mostly been absorbed, add half a cup of water. Return cover and let cook 3 minutes. Remove the cover and add the vegetables, meats, and shrimp. If the pasta is too dry, add another half cup of water. Cook uncovered, stirring often, until the shrimp is pink and the pasta is al dente.

A rose wine makes a nice match.

February 6, 2021
Garlic Noodles

- 8 ounces spaghetti
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 4 garlic cloves, pressed
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder, dissolved (to the extent possible) in 1 tablespoon water
- 1 tablespoon oyster sauce
- ½ tablespoon fish sauce
- large pinch sugar (optional)
- ½ teaspoon Better Than Bouillon Roasted Chicken base
- ¼ cup very finely grated Parmesan (high quality); use a microplane

In your All-Clad 8-Inch non-stick skillet, warm the olive oil over medium heat. Add butter. When the butter stops foaming add the garlic. Cook for about a minute, but do not let it brown. Add garlic powder solution and stir. Allow to cook for 30 seconds. Pour garlic sauce into a large bowl. Add the oyster sauce, fish sauce, sugar (if used), and chicken base and stir well to combine.

Bring 3 quarts of water to a boil in a large pot. Add 1 tablespoon kosher salt. Add spaghetti and cook per package directions.

Reserve one cup of pasta cooking water. Drain pasta and add to bowl. Add cheese and toss. You want the noodles to be fairly dry, but add a tablespoon or two of pasta water if they are too dry for your taste.

February 17, 2021
Long Life Noodles

- 3 ounces shiitake mushrooms
- 6 green onions
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1 cup frozen chopped spinach
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce (I prefer Kikkoman)
- 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon smooth peanut butter (I prefer Jif Natural)
- 1/2 tablespoon honey (I prefer Nature Nate’s raw and unfiltered)
- Sriracha
- 1 tablespoon peanut oil
- 10 ounces lo mein noodles

Bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Add enough salt so the water tastes like dilute sea water (somebody once told me that Italians cook pasta in water that is as salty as the Bay of Naples).

Cut the stems off the mushrooms, give the caps a quick rinse, and pat dry with paper towels (or a clean tea towel, if you’re feeling environmental). Slice thinly.

Rinse green onions, peeling away any nasty parts, and pat dry as above. Cut off and discard the roots and the top inch of the green parts. Thinly slice crosswise. Separate white and light green parts from dark green parts.

Rinse spinach and squeeze dry.

Toast sesame seeds in a small nonstick pan over medium heat about 3 minutes. Do not let them burn. In a large bowl, combine honey, rice wine vinegar, sesame oil, sesame seeds, soy sauce, half of the dark green parts of the green onions, and 1 tablespoon hot water. Mix. Taste and add salt, if necessary, and sriracha to taste.

Place a large nonstick pan over medium heat. When heated (when tested with your infra-red non-contact thermometer, the pan should be about 300 degrees) add oil. (Remember the old aphorism: hot pan, cold oil, food won’t stick.)

Add white and light green parts of the green onions and sauté for 1 minute. Add garlic and sauté for 30 seconds. Add the mushrooms and a pinch of salt to the pan. Sauté until the mushrooms have given up all their liquid and softened, which will probably take about 6 to 7 minutes. Add spinach and cook 1 minute. Remove pan from heat.

Add noodles to the pot of boiling water and cook per package directions. Drain.

Add drained pasta and mushroom/spinach mix to the bowl holding the sauce and toss to combine. Top with remaining green onion and serve.

June 5, 2019
One Pot Cheeseburger Cavatappi

I made this version of cheeseburger macaroni for dinner Thursday night. I like cavatappi better than elbow macaroni for this dish (and most others). The ridges seem to help the pasta grip the cheese sauce. I particularly like the De Cecco brand, because the bronze extrusion plates create a rougher surface that also helps hold sauce.

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 medium shallot, diced
- 4 green onions, sliced thinly, whites and greens separated
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 187 ml white wine (I buy those little four packs of Robert Mondavi Woodbridge to cook with)
- 3 cups beef stock
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 8 ounces cavatappi pasta
- 4 ounces cheddar cheese, grated (5 ounces if you really like it cheese, as I do)
- 4 ounces Velveeta, diced (ditto)
- salt and pepper to taste

I cooked it in my Culina 12-inch electric skillet, which Amazon sadly no longer sells. It is an excellent tool for dishes like this.

Heat the pan to 350°. (The Culina thermostat is reasonably accurate, but I like to check it with an infrared thermometer gun.) Add just enough vegetable oil to very thinly coat the pan. Add the ground beef. Season the beef with salt and pepper. Cook until pieces begin browning. Remove the ground beef to a paper towel lined plate to drain. Wipe out the pan and reheat to 325°. Again, lightly coat the pan with oil. Sauté the shallot and white parts of the green onions until they begin to color (do NOT let them burn). Add garlic and tomato paste. Sauté for about 30 seconds. Return meat to pan. Add wine, raise temperature to 350° and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer. Allow wine to reduce towards a glaze. Add stock and cream, stirring briskly. Add paprika. Taste and add salt and/or pepper as needed. Add cavatappi and cover. Cook pasta about 9 minutes, stirring occasionally, checking so that you can turn the heat down to low just after the pasta becomes al dente. Add cheeses and stir until they melt. Mix a loosely packed ½ cup of the green parts of the green onions. Taste and adjust the seasoning as necessary. Serve.

Do NOT get all foodie and snobby about the Velveeta. It melts great and adds that American cheese flavor you need for a real cheeseburger-like result. Trust me.
Orecchiette with Mushrooms and Sausage in a Creamy Tomato Sauce

- 8 ounces orecchiette (I prefer De Cecco)
- 6 ounces mild Italian sausage (either bulk or links with their casings removed)
- 4 ounces cremini mushrooms, trimmed and roughly diced
- ½ ounce dried porcini mushrooms
- 1 medium shallot, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste (I used to be a Muir Glen guy, but lately I've been using Cento)
- ⅓ cup dry white wine
- ⅓ cup heavy cream
- 1 ounce burrata with black truffles, diced small
- 1 ounce cream cheese
- 1 ounce grated Parmesan cheese (I use a microplane, which also makes a nifty zester)
- 1 tablespoon truffle butter
- 1 tablespoon chives cut into small pieces
- salt and pepper

Put the porcini mushrooms in a small bowl and add ⅔ cup of boiling water. Let the mushrooms steep for 45 minutes. Drain, reserving the reconstituting liquid, rinse, and dice. Set the mushrooms aside. Put a coffee filter in a funnel set on top of a large glass. Pour the reconstituting liquid through and reserve.

Bring 3 quarts of water to boil in a large pot. Add 1 tablespoon salt. Cook orecchiette according to package directions, but subtract 2 minutes from the cooking time. Reserve 1 cup of pasta water. Drain the pasta and set aside.

Heat a large skillet (I recommend a 12-inch All-Clad D3 skillet) over medium heat. Add a tablespoon of olive oil to the skillet and cook the Italian sausage, breaking it up with a wooden spoon as it cooks. When the meat starts to turn brown, remove the sausage with a slotted spoon to a paper-towel lined plate to drain.

Lightly blot any excess fat remaining in the pan with a paper towel, so as to not disturb any fond that has developed. Add the truffle butter and as it melts add the shallot. Cook the shallot for a couple of minutes. When the shallots start to turn translucent, add the mushrooms. Season with salt and pepper. Cook about 6 minutes or until they soften and start to take on
color. Add tomato paste and sauté for about 30 seconds. Add garlic and sauté for another 30 seconds. Add the wine. Increase heat to high and bring to a boil. Scrape up the fond with a wooden spoon. Once the wine has reduced to a glaze consistency, return the sausage to the pan, reduce the heat to medium and add the cream and the reserved mushroom reconstituting liquid.

After the sauce has reduced slightly and begins to thicken, add the pasta, the mozzarella, and the cream cheese. Cook for about two or 3 minutes until the pasta is al dente. If the sauce gets too thick, thin it out by adding pasta water by the tablespoon until it is as runny as you like. (I like it pretty thick.)

Taste and add additional salt or pepper to your taste. Sometimes I add a dash of Tabasco or a big pinch of red pepper flakes. If you’d like the sauce a little bit pinker, add more tomato paste.

Serve in large pasta bowls. Top with Parmesan and chives. I like to also garnish with a couple of grinds of black pepper.

Option 1: Reduce sausage by two ounces. Finely chop 2 ounces of Salami al Tartufo in a mini-food processor and add it when you add the mushrooms.

Option 2: Steam some broccoli rabe or broccolini and add it to the pasta just before service.

We drank a Pahlmeyer Chardonnay (Napa Valley) 2018. Pahlmeyer makes big wines and, frankly, I was expecting an oak bomb that might not work with the meal. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the oak was restrained, balanced, and well integrated. It’s still a rich and hefty wine, of course. It suggested buttered toast, white peach, Meyer lemon, and vanilla. This ended up being one of the best Napa Chardonnays I’ve ever tasted. I predict this will age well. Got to find more. Grade: A

February 5, 2021
Pappardelle with Fresh Morel Mushrooms in Cream Sauce

- 2 tablespoons butter, divided
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 8 ounces dried pappardelle pasta
- 8 ounces fresh morel mushrooms (I got mine from Oregon Mushrooms, a very reliable source)
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- 1 tablespoon dry sherry
- 2 tablespoons crème fraîche
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon fresh chives, chopped into ¼ pieces
- freshly grated parmesan to taste (use a good imported Italian cheese)

Cook pappardelle according to package directions, stopping one minute before it reaches the al dente stage. Reserve 1 cup pasta water. Drain but do not rinse pasta.

Melt one tablespoon of butter in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat. When the butter stops foaming, add olive oil. Add the mushrooms and thyme leaves to the pan. Season with salt and pepper. Sauté for about 6 minutes. Push the mushrooms out to the outer edges of the pan and add the shallots and garlic to the center of pan. Cook 1-2 minutes (do not let garlic brown). Mix mushrooms and aromatics thoroughly.

Add sherry. Allow the sherry to reduce to a glaze. Add crème fraîche. Remove pan from heat and stir in the heavy cream. Mix well. Add pasta and cook 1 minute. Add other tablespoon of butter and mix well. If sauce is too thick, dilute it with small additions of the reserved pasta water.

Garnish with chives and parmesan.

Serve with a Chardonnay or, better yet, a Central Coast Viognier.

June 16, 2021
Pappardelle with Tomato-Cream Sauce

This recipe was an attempt to recreate Louise Trattoria’s Pappardelle with Spicy Sausage. I’ve made it with both spicy and mild Italian sausage, boneless and skinless chicken thighs, crawfish tails and andouille sausage, and meatballs. It’s always turned out great.

- 8 ounces pappardelle pasta (I prefer De Cecco)
- 8 ounces Italian sausage (buy in bulk or buy links and remove casings)
- 1 28-ounce can whole peeled San Marzano tomatoes, drained (optional: reserve juice), and roughly chopped (I usually opt for Cento)
- 6 basil leaves, cut chiffonade
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ tablespoon tomato paste
- ¾ cups heavy cream
- Red pepper flakes (optional)
- Olive oil
- Salt
- Black pepper freshly ground
- 6 ounces Pecorino Romano, grated

Bring large pot of well salted water to a boil and cook the pasta for 4 minutes, reserve ¾ cup of pasta water, drain.

Heat a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add a drizzle of olive oil, add the sausage and brown. Break up the sausage as it cooks. When the sausage is browned blot with paper towels to take off excess fat. Add tomatoes, 2/3 of the basil, pepper flakes, and salt and black pepper to taste. Sauté for 2 minutes. Add garlic and tomato paste; sauté for a minute. Add cream, bring to a boil, reduce heat to a low simmer and allow sauce to thicken slightly. Add pasta and cook for a minute or two to al dente. Add half the cheese and combine. If the sauce has thickened up too much, add pasta water by the tablespoon until it is as runny as you like it. Alternatively, if you like a redder sauce, use the reserved tomato juice.

Serve in pasta dishes. Garnish with the remaining cheese and basil.

You can control how spicy the dish turns out by varying whether you use spicy or mild sausage and controlling the amount of pepper flakes you add (if any). If you make it with crawfish and andouille sausage, swap out a Cajun seasoning mix for the red pepper flakes.

January 23, 2021
Quasi-East Asian Meat Sauce with Penne Pasta

Seasoning Sauce

- 2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon Red Boat fish sauce
- ± 1 tablespoon Sriracha (to taste)
- 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sake
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 teaspoon mirin
- pinch red pepper flakes (to taste)
- black pepper to taste

Meat Sauce

- ½ cup finely diced carrot
- ½ cup finely diced celery
- ½ cup finely diced onion
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon grated ginger
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 5 ounces ground beef
- 5 ounces ground pork
- ½ ounce dried shiitake mushrooms, reconstituted, and chopped very finely
- 1 teaspoon Better Than Bouillon Beef Base Bouillon

Other

- sliced green parts of 2 scallions
- 6 ounces penne pasta prepared as per package directions

Mix seasoning sauce in a measuring cup. Add enough water to bring total liquid to ¾ cup and set aside.

Heat a 4 quart sauté pan over medium heat. Add 1 teaspoon olive oil. Add beef and pork. Season with salt and pepper. Brown meat. Transfer to a paper towel lined plate to drain. Do not wipe out pan.

Add another teaspoon of olive oil to pan. When oil begins to shimmer, add carrot, celery, and onions. Cook until onions are translucent and carrots have softened (about 10-12 minutes).

Add garlic, ginger, and tomato paste. Sauté for 2 minutes (do not let garlic burn).
Return meat to pan and add mushrooms. Add seasoning sauce. Raise heat to high and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and allow to simmer until sauce thickens to your taste (probably around 20 minutes).

Serve over penne pasta topped with scallions.

We drank a Saldo Zinfandel. Black cherries, blackberries, briars, pepper, anise. Yum.
Rigatoni with Beef Bolognese Sauce

- 2 pounds ground beef
- 4 rashers thick-cut bacon
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 medium yellow onion
- 3 stalks celery
- 1 large carrot
- ½ teaspoon smoked hot paprika
- 1 cup white wine
- 1 can evaporated milk
- 1 28-ounce Muir Glen whole plum tomatoes
- 1 28-ounce Muir Glen crushed tomatoes
- 1 14.5-ounce low sodium beef broth
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- a big pinch of red pepper flakes
- 2 teaspoons dried Italian herbs
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 14.5-ounce dried porcini mushrooms
- 1 pound rigatoni
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

This was something of an all day project. I started out grinding approximately 3 pounds of beef using the grinder attachment to my KitchenAid Stand Mixer. I had in the freezer 1 pound of chuck, a 12 ounce ribeye steak, a 12 ounce sirloin steak, and about 8 ounces of trimmings left over from butchering a tenderloin roast. I allowed them to partially defrost overnight. This morning I cut the meat into roughly 1-inch pieces and ran the whole batch (alternating cuts) through the coarse grinding plate. I then ran about half of the resulting ground meat through again, but this time using the medium grinding plate. I combined the two batches and then set aside 1 pound for future hamburger patties.

When I was ready to start cooking, I asked Siri to crank up some Puccini on my HomePod and we were off to the races. (Yes, I copied that move from Alton Brown.)

Four rashers of thick-cut American bacon went into my Le Creuset 7-1/4 Quart Dutch Oven. (I usually use pancetta, but I was in a mood for a slightly smoky bolognese, so I went domestic.) When the bacon was done, I removed the rashers to a paper towel lined plate to drain. When they had cooled, I snipped three rashers into small pieces using kitchen shears (I ate the other one). Meanwhile, I poured off the bacon fat and reserved it.

I dusted the 2 pounds ground beef with a ½ teaspoon of baking soda, a couple of big pinches of salt, and about six grinds of black pepper from my brass pepper mill and lightly mixed it. The baking soda raises the pH of the meat’s surface, which promotes browning and slightly tenderizes it.
I browned the meat in the Dutch oven over medium heat in three batches, adding a ½ tablespoon of the reserved bacon fat before each batch. I transferred the meat to a paper towel lined platter to drain.

I diced one medium yellow onion, three stalks of celery, and 1 large carrot. I added a big splash of olive oil to the Dutch oven, which was over medium heat, and then the veggies. I added a heavy pinch of salt (I apologize for having eyeballed a lot of the measurements), three grinds of pepper, and a ½ teaspoon of smoked hot paprika. I reduced the heat to medium-low, and sweated the veggies for about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until they were soft and beginning to show signs of caramelization. I then added a couple of grinds of pepper, 2 tablespoons of tomato paste, and 6 crushed cloves of garlic, turned the heat up to medium and stirred for 1 minute.

One cup of a cheap (but not undrinkable) Pinot Grigio went into the pot with the veggies. (A couple of glasses of the Pinot Grigio went into your chef as the cooking process continued.) I cranked the heat to high and allowed the wine to cook down to a glaze. One can of evaporated milk went into the Dutch oven and was allowed to reduce by half. I lowered the heat to medium.

Then one 28 ounce can of crushed tomatoes and one 28 ounce can of whole plum tomatoes, along with their juices in both cases, went into the pot. (I prefer the Muir Glen brand.) As I added the whole tomatoes, I grabbed the tomatoes and squeezed them to break them up before dropping them one by one into the pot. I then added to the pot a 14.5 ounce can of low sodium beef broth, the beef and bacon, 2 tablespoons ketchup, a tablespoon of Worcestershire sauce, a big pinch of red pepper flakes, 2 teaspoons of dried Italian herbs, a teaspoon of dried basil, and a teaspoon of dried oregano.

I then thoroughly rinsed 1 ounce of Mycological dried porcini mushrooms and, using kitchen shears, snipped them into small pieces that I let fall into the pot.

I reduced the heat to low, covered the Dutch oven, and let the sauce cook for three and a half hours, stirring every 30 minutes. At the end of the cooking time I tasted the sauce and thought it needed a pinch of salt, two grinds of pepper, two pinches of dried Italian herbs, a squirt of tomato paste, and small dashes of Tabasco and sherry vinegar to brighten it a bit.

I cooked a pound of rigatoni (I like the De Cecco brand) for 11 of the recommended 13 minutes, drained the pasta, reserving 1 cup of cooking water, returned the pasta to the cooking pot, added the reserved cooking water and about a third of the sauce, and let the sauced pasta cook over medium for 2 more minutes.

We had leftover sauced pasta, which will make a nice dinner after late Mass tomorrow, and leftover sauce to freeze for future dinners.

February 16, 2019
**Slow Cooker Bolognese Sauce**

- 14.5 ounce can diced tomatoed (I prefer Muir Glen)
- 28-ounce can whole peeled San Marzano tomatoes, drained and roughly crushed
- 2 cups white wine, divided
- ½ ounce dried porcini mushrooms
- 1 tsp dried Italian herb seasoning
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 tbsp low sodium soy sauce
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound ground pork
- 1 pound ground lamb
- 2 ounces finely diced pancetta
- 1 medium yellow onion diced
- 1 rib celery diced
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- 1 to 4 cloves garlic (depending on your taste)
- 4 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 quart low sodium beef broth
- 1 cup milk

I was in the mood for a sauce that was more meaty than tomato-ish, so I started with a couple of trusted Bolognese sauce recipes and modified like crazy.

Pour one cup of not very oaky white wine (e.g., Pinot Grigio) into a Pyrex measuring cup. (Put a chop stick in the cup to give bubbles something against which to form.) Microwave on high until boiling. Add 1/2-ounce dried porcini mushrooms. Steep 30 minutes. Drain, reserving liquid.

Meanwhile, add diced tomatoes with their juices to the ceramic insert of your slow cooker. Add whole tomatoes. Set cooker on high heat.

Finely chop mushrooms and add to cooker. Pass reserved liquid through a coffee filter (use a funnel). Add strained liquid to cooker.

Add dried herbs and soy sauce to cooker.

Put a large skillet over medium heat. Add a drizzle of olive oil. Add ground beef. Brown. Transfer beef to a plate lined with paper towels to drain. Add ground lamb to skillet. Brown. Transfer lamb to a plate lined with paper towels to drain. Add ground pork to skillet. Brown. Transfer pork to a plate lined with paper towels to drain. Add meats to cooker. (BTW, on all three meats, I had my butcher grind them very coarse. Large pieces do better in the slow cooker.

Slice the garlic very, very thin. (If you know the famous dinner scene in Goodfellas, that’s what you’re trying to emulate when you slice the garlic. And, of course, that scene has good advice when it comes to adding onions to the sauce.)
Blot skillet dry with paper towels. Pour 1 tsp olive oil into skillet and heat on medium setting. Sauté pancetta until it begins to crisp. Add onions, celery, and carrot. Sauté until softened and just starting to turn golden. Add garlic to skillet. Stir. Add tomato paste (again, I like Muir Glen or Cento). Sauté 1 minute. Add 1 cup white wine. Raise heat to high. Bring to boil, stirring constantly. Transfer all to cooker.

Add enough low sodium organic beef broth to cover solids in cooker. Stir to combine. Cover. Walk away and clean up kitchen.

After 2 hours, reduce heat to low. Add milk. After 2-4 hours more on the low setting, taste. Adjust seasonings with salt, freshly ground black pepper, crushed red pepper flakes, nutmeg, and/or allspice to your taste. How long you cook it really depends on how much integrity you want the tomato to retain.

Serve over fresh fettucine or pappardelle (I prefer the latter). I like to top it with freshly grated Parmesan and a dash of very good extra virgin olive oil. Pour something red from Tuscany.
Short Cut Lobster Mushroom and Tomato Risotto

Inspired by this recipe but feeling sort of lazy, I made a quasi-homemade version tonight. I brought 1 cup of an inexpensive Pinot Grigio to a boil and poured it over 1 package of Mycological Dried Lobster Mushrooms. I let them steep for 20 minutes, drained and rinsed them, and chopped them fine. Next I briefly sauteed the finely diced white parts of 4 green onions and three finely minced garlic cloves in a tablespoon of butter in a 12-Inch nonstick skillet. After about 40 seconds, I added the mushrooms and a teaspoon each of dried chives and dried parsley. I sauteed them for a couple of minutes and then added 2 and ½ cups of low-sodium organic vegetable stock. I had previously drained a 14.5 ounce can of organic diced tomatoes and added them to the pot. I brought everything to a boil and added 1 package of Alessi Pomodori Risotto mix. Put on the cover and let it cook for about 15 minutes, checking occasionally to make sure it had not gone dry. At 15 minutes it wasn’t quite ready, so I added a ¼ cup of water and let it cook 4 more minutes until the rice was al dente. I added the green parts of the onions, finely chopped, a few pinches of good grated parmesan cheese and served. Yum. And a lot less fuss than traditional risotto.

I poured a 2000 Behrens & Hitchcock Ode to Picasso, which is a blend based on Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. When I last blogged about this wine in April 2010, it was “still a huge wine.” Well, it’s still huge. It’s thrown a ton of sediment (I had to filter it through unbleached coffee filters as there was so much sediment floating in the wine that regular decanting was impossible), but even so it remains an incredibly deep purple all the way to the edges. This bottle offered remarkably youthful blackberry, plum, and blackcurrant fruit on the nose and palate. There is a suggestion of sweetness to the fruit, which is not the result of residual sugar but rather the intensity of its youthful vigor. As was the case in 2010, this is still “a big, rich, and hedonistic blast on the palate.” Given how maligned the 2000 vintage has been, this might just be the wine of the year. The $64 question is how much longer to let the last bottle in my cellar age. Grade: A-/A

November 17, 2012
Souped-up Store Bought Risotto

Real home-made risotto is a lot of work. Making the stock. Stirring. Adding the stock in small lots. Stirring. It's worth it, but not all the time. Sometimes you just want some comfort food without all the work. When that time comes, here's a recipe to try.

I start by reconstituting 1 oz. of dried porcini mushrooms as per the package directions (30 minutes in 1 cup of warm water). I then strain them, reserving the liquid. I then run the liquid through an unbleached coffee filter and set it aside. I rinse the porcinis and then chop them very fine.

Next I mix the mushroom liquid with 1/2 cup white wine and enough low sodium chicken stock to make a total of 2.5 cups of cooking liquid. I bring the liquid to a boil in a 2.5 quart pan.

When the liquid comes to a boil, I add 1 tablespoon unsalted butter and one package of Alessi Imported Risotto con Funghi Porcini. (I've tried a bunch of risotto brands and I like this one the best. Here in Los Angeles, I can even find it at Ralphs.) Stir well, bring back to the simmer, cover and reduce the heat to low. Simmer for 15 minutes. Add the reconstituted porcini mushrooms. If it looks likely to run dry, add 1/4 cup chicken stock. Stir well. Recover and cook 3 more minutes. Remove from heat and allow to sit covered for 5 minutes.

Stir in 1/2 teaspoon truffle paste, 1/4 teaspoon white truffle oil, and 1/2 tablespoon unsalted butter. Serve out (2 portions as a main course, 4 as an appetizer). Top with freshly shaved Italian Parmesan and freshly chopped Italian parsley.

The extra porcinis and the additions specified in the preceding paragraph provide a depth and complexity of flavor that effectively disguise the store bought basis. It'll taste like you slaved over it for the hours risotto from scratch requires.
Spaghetti with Asian Mushrooms

This recipe is an attempt to replicate a delicious pasta course I once had at Tetsuya’s in Sydney.

- 8 ounces thin spaghetti (I prefer De Cecco’s # 11 Spaghetti)
- 3.5 ounces bunapi mushrooms, trim off the fibrous base (Hokto Kinoko Company Organic is the brand most available in LA)
- 5 ounces shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and sliced thinly
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed (I like my Oxo garlic press)
- 3 tablespoons sake
- 2 ½ tablespoons mirin
- 1 ½ tablespoons low sodium soy sauce
- 1 ½ tablespoons fish sauce (as always, I prefer Red Boat)
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- ½ cup water from cooking the pasta
- ¼ teaspoon Better than Bouillon chicken flavor base
- ¼ teaspoon Better than Bouillon beef flavor base
- 1 tablespoon chives cut to ~¼ inch length
- ½ tablespoon chives, cut to 1 inch length
- olive oil
- salt and pepper

In a large pot, bring 4 quarts of water to a rolling boil. Add a couple of large pinches of salt. Cook spaghetti for 6 minutes, reserve ½ cup of the pasta water in a small bowl, and drain pasta and set aside.

While the reserved pasta water is still hot, add the Better than Bouillon and stir to dissolve. Combine the other liquid ingredients in a small bowl and whisk briefly to combine.

Place a 3 quart sauté pan (I love my All-Clad pan) over medium-high heat. After a couple of minutes, add a large drizzle of olive oil. As soon as it starts to shimmer, add the mushrooms. The mushrooms will exude a considerable amount of water. Allow the water to boil off, stirring frequently. Once the water has evaporated and the mushrooms begin to sizzle, reduce the heat to medium, season with salt and pepper (go light with the salt) and sauté until they have softened and begun to take on some color. Add garlic and sauté for 1 minute.

Add the sake mixture and deglaze the pan, scraping up any brown bits. Add the bouillon mix and the short chives. Raise the heat to high, bring the sauce, and allow it to reduce for a minute or two.
Add the pasta and let it finish cooking in the sauce for a minute or two (at most) depending on how al dente you like it.

Serve in large pasta bowls, garnish with the long pieces of chives.

Tastes earthy and warming.

We drank a 2018 Tablas Creek Esprit de Tablas (Paso Robles), which is a blend of 40% Mourvèdre, 27% Syrah, 23% Grenache, and 10% Counoise. (Counties is a blending grape best known as part of the Chateauneuf-du-Pape blend.) Deep purple. Big nose of blue and black berries. On the palate, the flavor associations included blackberries, raspberries, pepper, and warm spices. Juicy and a bit jammy. Impression of sweet fruit on the finish.

January 24, 2021
Whole Wheat Fettuccine al Tonno (with Zucchini Noodles)

Using a recipe from Making Artisan Pasta, I made a batch of whole wheat fettuccine using the Pasta Roller and Cutter Attachments to my KitchenAid Stand Mixer. I also turned two small zucchini into noodles using the medium size cutter on the Spiralizer Attachment. I brought a large pot of generously salted water to a boil and then cooked the pasta for 5 minutes. After the pasta had cooked for 2 minutes, I added the zucchini. When they were done, I drained the pasta in a colander and returned it to the pan.

Meanwhile I had drained a jar of Tonnino Ventresca Tuna in Olive Oil in a strainer set over a bowl. In a small pan I heated half a jar of Mario Batali Alfredo Sauce to which I added 1 tablespoon shredded Parmesan cheese, 1 teaspoon dried parsley flakes, 1 teaspoon freeze-dried chives, and a tablespoon of the reserved olive oil drained off the tuna. Once the sauce had warmed, I added the tuna, mixed it well, and turned off the heat.

I added the sauce to the pasta and served. We drank a Qúpé Bien Nacido Cuvée (Santa Maria Valley) 2013, which is a 50/50 blend of Viognier and Chardonnay. 13% alcohol. Pale yellow. Bright fresh apricot, peach, and pear notes. Refreshing. Grade: 88

July 2, 2016
POULTRY
Barbecued Chicken for the Fourth

I started with a 3 ½ pound free ranger fryer chicken and cut it up. I reserved the wings and drumsticks for future use.

The Brine

- ½ cup white wine
- 1 ½ cups beer
- Enough water to make a total of 2 quarts
- 6 tablespoons pickling salt
- 4 tablespoons honey
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- a bay leaf
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Put the chicken breasts and thighs in a 1-gallon zip top plastic bag. Combine the remaining ingredients in a large bowl and which thoroughly to combine and dissolve the salt. As always, this process goes a lot faster if you use a stick blender. Add the brine to the bag, seal, and store in the refrigerator.

Let the chicken brine for 1 to 1 ½ hours.

I cooked the chicken for 40 minutes on a gas grill, using indirect heat and turning every 5 minutes or so. For the last 10 minutes I basted both sides with a store-bought BBQ sauce.

We had grilled corn on the cob and watermelon on the side.

To drink, I poured a Behrens & Hitchcock Ode to Picasso (Napa Valley) 2006, which is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, as well as being one of my favorite Behrens wines. After decanting, I let it breathe for 45 minutes before dinner. Soft tannins make it easy to drink now (and I suspect it won’t get much better). There’s enough acid to stand up to barbecue sauce, as well as plenty of rich, dark fruit. Blueberries, black cherry, mocha java, pepper on the nose and palate. Grade: A-

July 4, 2015
Brined Turkey

Should you brine your Thanksgiving turkey? Should you stuff it? How should you roast it?

It depends. Do not brine a ButterBall or similar brand turkey, because it has already been injected with a salt and spice treated fluid. People will tell you not to brine a frozen bird or one that’s been water cooled. But Alton Brown actually defrosts his frozen turkeys by submerging them in a brine, which is good enough for me.

Make six ice packs by filling quart zip-lock bags with water and freezing overnight.

Put 8 pounds of ice and three ice packs in a cooler.

Start brine with 3 quarts filtered water, 2 12-oz. beers, and 1 cup bourbon in a large pan or Dutch oven.

Bring to a boil.

Add 1 cup pickling salt (it dissolves better), 1/2 cup brown sugar, 1 tablespoon garlic powder, and 1 tablespoon onion powder. Stir until dissolved. Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly.

Put the following into a cheesecloth bag: 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns, 1 bayleaf, 1 sprig rosemary, 1 sprig sage, 3-4 garlic cloves. Add bag and 2 halved lemons to brine. Pour brine into cooler and stir until temperature drops to icy.

Put thoroughly rinsed bird into brine. Make sure it is fully submerged. if not, add additional water into which you have dissolved 4 tablespoons of pickling salt per quart.

Allow to sit overnight. First thing in the morning you need to check temperature of the water. If it’s above 40 degrees, add more ice packs. (Don’t add ice, which would dilute brine.)

Remove bird from cooler and very thoroughly rinse it. Rinse out cooler and fill with 2 gallons icy water. Return bird to cooler for 30 minutes. Remove, rinse again, drain, and pat thoroughly dry. Do not stuff with stuffing. (Ditto re Alton Brown.) Instead add 1 sliced onion, 1 sliced apple, 1 sliced lemon, a bay leaf, and a few garlic cloves to the cavity.

Preheat the oven to 500 degrees. I start with the bird breast side down in a roasting pan with a rack. After 30 minutes, I flip the bird over and reduce the heat to 350 degrees. After about 90 minutes, I use an instant read meat thermometer to take the bird’s temperature. Make sure the probe does not touch the bones. I want the thigh meat to hit 170 degrees. Carryover heat will bump it up 5-10 degrees.

Let turkey rest at least 30 minutes before carving. Do not skip this step.

If you make a pan gravy with the drippings, note that they will be saltier than those from an unbridled bird. Use a low sodium stock and taste carefully before adding any additional salt to the gravy. Note that using Wonder flour to thicken the gravy rather than making a roux is a useful shortcut.

November 23, 2016
Chicken Cacciatore with Farro

Brine two each organic free-range air-chilled skin-on and bone-in chicken thighs and drumsticks for 90 minutes to 2 hours.

**Brine**
- 4 cups filtered water
- 3 tablespoons pickling salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 2 teaspoons dried Italian herbs

I find it’s helpful to mix the brine using my stick blender, as it ensures that the salt and sugar dissolves. I put the chicken in a zip-lock gallon bag and pour the brine over. I then put the bag in a large dish, making sure all of the chicken pieces are submerged, and put it in the refrigerator.

After brining the chicken pieces, remove them from the brine, rinse them very thoroughly, dry them with paper towels, and allow them to rest and come up to room temperature on a paper towel-lined plate. Dust the pieces with Wondra flour, coating thoroughly but shaking off any excess.

**Sauce**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (I’m a big fan of the California Olive Ranch brand)
- ½ onion, diced fine
- ½ cup finely diced carrot
- 6 ounces cremini mushrooms, stemmed and chopped roughly (freeze and save the stems for future stock making)
- 3 ounces shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and chopped roughly (ditto)
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste (I only buy tomato paste in tubes, which is much less wasteful than cans; I like the Cento brand)
- 1 14.5 ounce can of diced tomatoes, drained (as always, I strongly prefer the Muir Glen brand)
- pinch red pepper flakes (or two or three to your taste)
- 1 teaspoon dried Italian herbs
- ½ cup white wine (I buy packs of 187 ml bottles of Woodbridge Pinot Grigio to minimize waste)
- 1 cup chicken bone broth
- 1 tablespoon fresh basil chiffonade
- salt and pepper

I cooked the chicken and sauce in my Culina electric skillet. Set the skillet to 350° and, after allowing it to come to temperature, add the olive oil to the skillet. Brown the chicken pieces on
all sides, achieving a deep brown but not allowing the skin to burn. Transfer the chicken pieces to a plate. Reduce the heat to 275° and add the onions and carrots. Add a pinch of salt. Sweat the veggies until they are translucent and just starting to brown at the edges, stirring often. Add the mushrooms and crank the heat back up to 350°. Add a pinch of salt and a couple of grinds of pepper. Sauté the mushrooms for about 6 minutes, or until they have softened and are beginning to brown, add the garlic and tomato paste and sauté for another minute. Add the tomatoes, pepper flakes, herbs, and wine. Allow the wine to reduce by half. Add the broth. Reduce heat to a low simmer. Taste and add salt and pepper if needed. Return chicken pieces to the pan and nestle into the sauce, pour any accumulated juices from the chicken pieces resting plate into the sauce, cover the pan, and cook 25-30 minutes, stirring and flipping the chicken pieces occasionally. Adjust heat if necessary to maintain a simmer without either boiling the sauce or letting it just sit in the pan.

Check chicken thighs with a meat thermometer to make sure they hit 175°. If so, transfer all pieces to service plates. Add basil to sauce. If sauce has gotten too dry, add some broth to loosen it to your taste. Taste and add salt or pepper if needed. Top chicken pieces with sauce.

I wanted something rustic and easy to serve with the chicken. Alessi Farro Al Funghi was a great choice. It basically cooked itself while I kept an eye on the chicken.

We drank a 2015 Foxen Vineyards Volpino, which is one of our favorite Cal-Ital wines. It’s a blend of predominately Sangiovese (>80%) and a dollop of Merlot, sourced from Central Coast vineyards in the Santa Ynez valley. On the nose and palate, it suggests rose petals, raspberries, strawberries, and plums, with undertones of earth and sage. Yum. Grade: A-

February 22, 2019
Duck Breasts Sous Vide with Green Peppercorn Sauce and Smashed New Potatoes with Duck Fat

Duck Breasts

- 2 duck breasts
- salt and pepper

Fill a large stock pot or other food safe container with warm water. Insert your Joule sous vide into the container and set to 135°.

Score the skin of the breasts in a diamond pattern. Season with salt and pepper. Seal each breast in its own 6”x10” 3mil bag using your Weston vacuum sealer. Cook for 90 minutes. Remove and pat dry.

Heat your All-Clad 10-inch nonstick skillet on the medium high to high setting (I used 9 out of 10). Add duck breasts skin side down and turn heat down to 7. Cook several minutes so that the skin gets brown but NOT black. Flip and cook 1 more minute.

Smashed New Potatoes

- 1 pound baby red potatoes, quartered
- 2 garlic cloves chopped roughly
- big pinch salt
- 1 tablespoon butter
- ¼ cup dairy*
- salt and pepper

Put the potatoes and garlic in a large pot and cover with water. Add salt. Bring to a boil, reduce heat slightly and cook at a fast simmer for about 18 minutes. Drain and return to pan. Add butter and dairy. Using a potato masher, smash and mix the potatoes. You’re doing this roughly simultaneously with searing the duck breasts. Add a few spoonfuls of rendered duck fat to the potatoes (to taste). Season with salt and pepper.

*: For dairy you could use heavy cream, sour cream, or crème fraîche. As it happened, however, I had some crema on hand and used that.

Green Peppercorn Sauce

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 small shallot minced finely
- 1 garlic clove minced finely
- 1 ½ tablespoons brandy
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1 ½ tablespoons dried green peppercorns
• 1 teaspoon dried chives
• 1 teaspoon dried Italian parsley flakes
• 2 tablespoons dairy (see above)
• 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
• salt and pepper

Melt butter in a small saucepan over medium heat. (I used my All-Clad 1 quart.) Add shallot. Cook 1 minute. Add garlic. Cook 30 seconds. Add brandy and crank heat to high. Bring to boil and allow to reduce to a glaze. Add chicken stock, return to the boil, and reduce heat to medium-high. Add peppercorns, chives, and parsley. Cook over a fast simmer 5 minutes.

Remove from heat. Add dairy and mustard. Whisk to combine. Return to burner set over lowest setting and keep warm.

We drank a Merlot from the same folks who make Silver Oak: Twomey (Napa Valley) 2014. Blackberry and blackcurrant. Medium body. A bit of a lightweight for Napa. Grade: B

July 5, 2020
Duck Breasts with Hoisin Sauce

- 2 x duck breasts
- 4 tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 2 tablespoon soy sauce
- 2 tablespoon rice wine
- 1-1/2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1-1/2 teaspoon crushed ginger
- 1 teaspoon 5-spice powder
- Salt and pepper

Season duck breasts with salt and pepper. Put on a plate and put in the refrigerator uncovered for at least 8 hours or, preferably, overnight.

In a medium bowl, combine hoisin sauce, soy sauce, rice wine, garlic, ginger, 5-spice powder.

Add duck breasts to the bowl with sauce to marinate for at least 30 minutes at room temperature.

Heat a medium nonstick pan over medium-high heat for a couple of minutes.

Remove breasts from bowl, scraping off and reserving the marinade, pat dry with paper towels.

Add duck breasts to pan skin down. Reduce heat to medium. Cook 15 minutes (20 for large breasts), removing fat as it renders. Flip to meat side and cook another 5 minutes. Remove breasts to a plate.

Add reserved marinade to pan and bring to a simmer. Let it cook for a minute or two. Return duck to pan and turn it over several times to glaze the breasts.

Allow to rest 5 minutes before serving.

Serve with a good Central Coast Pinot Noir and Asian Pear slaw.

August 22, 2019
Duck Breasts Sous Vide with Hoisin Sauce

This is essentially the same recipe as the preceding one, but adapted for sous vide, with touches of the following recipe.

- 2 x duck breasts
- 4 tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon rice wine
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon crushed ginger
- 1 teaspoon 5-spice powder
- 1 teaspoon Siracha
- Salt and pepper

Score the skin of the duck breasts with a very sharp paring knife in a crosshatch pattern. Do not cut through the skin to the meat.

Combine all ingredients other than the duck breasts in a small bowl and whisk to combine. Put the duck breasts in a heavy-duty zip-top plastic bag and add the marinade. Rub thoroughly and put in refrigerator for at least two hours.

Put your ChefSteps Joule Sous Vide in your spaghetti pot and fill with warm water to within an inch of the top. Set the Joule temperature to 135° and the time to 90 minutes. Remove duck breasts from the marinade and pat very dry with paper towels. Reserve the marinade.

Put each breast into its own Weston vacuum seal bag and remove the air and seal the bag using your trusty Weston Vacuum Sealer. Add bags to water bath (preventing them from touching as much as possible.)

Open the bags with scissors being VERY careful. The breasts will have rendered a lot of fat and some juice, which will be very hot. Remove the breasts to a plate and pat them very dry with paper towels.

Warm a non-stick skillet over medium high heat. Add the duck breasts skin side down. Reduce heat to medium. Cook the breasts for about 5 minutes or until the skin is brown and crispy. Flip and cook about 1 minute. Remove and transfer to a clean plate.

Add the reserved marinade to the skillet and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and allow the sauce to simmer for a couple of minutes. If the sauce is too thick, add a little more hoisin and soy sauce. Slice the duck breasts on the bias. Plate. Add any accumulated juices to the sauce and nap the breasts with it.

I served the duck breasts with vegetable pot stickers, using the remaining marinade as a dipping sauce.

February 10, 2021
Duck Legs Sous Vide with Hoisin Sauce

- 2 x duck legs
- 4 tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon rice wine
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon crushed ginger
- 1 teaspoon 5-spice powder
- Salt and pepper

Combine all ingredients other than the duck legs in a small bowl and whisk to combine. Put the duck legs in a heavy-duty zip-top plastic bag and add the marinade. Rub thoroughly and put in refrigerator overnight.

Put your ChefSteps Joule Sous Vide in your spaghetti pot and fill with warm water to within an inch of the top. Set the Joule temperature to 167° and the time to 8 hours. Remove duck from marinade and pat dry with paper towels. Reserve marinade.

Put each leg into its own Weston vacuum seal bag and remove the air and seal the bag using your trusty Weston Vacuum Sealer. Add bags to water bath (preventing them from touching as much as possible.)

When the 8-hour cooking time is up, remove bags from water bath and allow them to cool slightly. Preheat your broiler and broiler pan.

Add reserved marinade to a small pan (I like to use my All-Clad 8-Inch non-stick skillet) and bring to a simmer. Allow to simmer for a couple of minutes. If the sauce is too thick, add a little more hoisin and soy sauce.

Open the bags with scissors being VERY careful. The legs will have rendered a lot of fat and some juice, which will be very hot. Blot legs dry with paper towels and allow to rest for 10 minutes or so at room temperature. Place legs on broiler pan, skin side up. Broil legs for five minutes.

Allow legs to rest at room temperature for 5 minutes. Then shred the meat using two forks, being sure to get as much of the crispy skin as possible.

Serve with soft flour tortillas (taco size), the reserved marinade/sauce, and the Asian pear slaw. We drank a four-year old Central Coast Rhône Ranger red wine.

August 24, 2019
Fried “Rice” with Duck

I put “rice” in scare quotes in the title because I made this dish mainly with riced cauliflower left over from an earlier dinner. I started with two Muscovy duck breasts. I scored the fat and then marinated for a couple of hours in a mixture of:

- 2 tablespoons Hoisin sauce
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce (I prefer a wheat free tamari sauce)
- 1 tablespoon dark sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon Mirin
- 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sherry vinegar
- a couple of dashes of Tabasco®

For the last half hour I transferred the duck from the refrigerator to the counter top to let it warm up some. I removed the duck from the marinade, wiped the breasts dry with paper towels, and put them skin side down in a preheated 12-Inch nonstick skillet over medium high heat until the fat had rendered and the skin was a deep brown. This makes it a lot easier to remove the skin, which I did after allowing the breasts to rest for 10 minutes. I discarded the duck fat because it had picked up a lot of black bits, which was unfortunate. Duck fat is liquid gold in the kitchen. I wiped the pan clean with paper towels and set it aside. After the breasts had rested, I peeled off the skin and diced the meat.

The Rice

- The diced duck meat
- 1 ounce dried shiitake mushrooms (reconstituted by pouring 1-½ cups boiling water over the mushrooms and letting them steep for 30 minutes), drained and then chopped into bite-sized pieces (discard the woody stem centers or save them for stock; if you’re making stock, be sure to also strain the soaking liquid through an unbleached coffee filter and save it)
- 1 tablespoon onion flakes rehydrated in 1/2 cup warm water and then drained (I was out of onions and didn’t feel like running out for one, but I always have dried onion flakes in the pantry for such occasions)
- 1 teaspoon crushed garlic
- 1 teaspoon finely grated ginger
- ½ head of cauliflower, riced
- 1 cup cooked white rice leftover from a meal earlier in the week
- 1 tablespoon freeze-dried chives (in lieu of green onions, which I also didn’t feel like running out for, and which I always keep in the pantry for such occasions)
- 1-½ teaspoons chile paste
- ½ cup frozen petite peas
- 1 tablespoon dark sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
• 2 eggs beaten with 1 tablespoon water, a dash of Tabasco®, and a few grinds of black pepper

I preheated the same skillet over medium-high heat and then added just enough olive oil to coat the bottom. In went the duck meat—which was still very rare—to sauté for 2 and ½ minutes. Next in went the mushrooms to sauté for another minute. Next the onion, garlic, and ginger to sauté for 30 seconds. Next into the pan were all of the remaining ingredients except for the eggs. They sautéed for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. At the 5-minute mark, I moved the mixture to the outer edges of the skillet to create about a five-inch diameter opening in the center of the skillet into which I poured the eggs. I scrambled them briefly and then mixed the eggs into the fried “rice.” Serve immediately.

The Wine

I was in the mood for fried “rice” and also in the mood for a Napa Cab, which admittedly is not a pairing I would normally approve (or even admit to making). But it worked.

I decanted an Etude Cabernet Sauvignon (Oakville) 2004 about an hour before dinner. It had thrown a lot of light sediment, which made decanting a real pain and ultimately required filtering the last quarter of the bottle through an unbleached coffee filter because it was so mixed with the wine (despite having stood the bottle up for 3 days to settle and very careful handling). Bright ruby color. Good bouquet of blackberry, cassis, tobacco, and mocha java. Ditto the palate with a dash of cedar on the finish. Soft silky tannins and just the right level of acidity. Well balanced. Grade: 90

May 28, 2016
Simplified Coq au Vin

- 1 ounce porcini mushrooms reconstituted in 1 cup hot water
- ¾ cup diced carrot
- 2 chicken legs (preferably free range, organic, and air chilled)
- 1 quart sweet brine
  - 4 tablespoons pickling salt
  - 2 tablespoons brown sugar
  - 1 quart water
- 2 ounces diced pancetta
- 4 ounces cremini mushrooms, sliced thickly
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried Italian parsley
- 1 large shallot, minced
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced thinly
- ½ tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon Wondra® flour
- 1 tablespoon brandy
- ¼ cup red wine (I keep some 187 ml bottles of Woodbridge® Merlot around to cook with)
- 1 teaspoon Better Than Bouillon Organic Reduced Sodium Roasted Chicken Base

Put chicken in a large zip-top plastic bag with the brine. Put in refrigerator for 2 hours. Remove chicken from brine. Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Season well with salt and pepper.

Drain porcini mushrooms in a sieve over a bowl. Rinse the mushrooms, dice them, and set aside. Strain the reconstituting liquid through a coffee filter into a measuring cup. If necessary, add water to bring liquid up to 1 cup.

Put carrots in a microwavable bowl, add 1 tablespoon of water, cover and microwave on high for 3 minutes. Set aside.

Heat a 4 quart sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil. When the olive oil begins to shimmer, add chicken skin side down. Cook 6 minutes. Turn and cook an additional 2 minutes. Remove to a plate.

Reduce heat to medium and add pancetta. Cook until browned and crispy (abut 6 minutes). Using a slotted spoon, remove the pancetta to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.

Pour all the fat into a small dish. Return 2 tablespoons fat to pan and heat using the medium heat setting. Add cremini mushrooms and season with thyme, parsley, and salt and pepper. Sauté until well browned (about 7 minutes). Add shallots and garlic. Sauté for two minutes. Add tomato paste and sauté for 1 minute. Sprinkle with flour and stir well to combine. Increase heat to high and add brandy. Reduce to a glaze. Add wine, the strained liquid from the mushrooms, the reserved carrots and porcini mushrooms, and chicken base. Bring to a boil. Nestle chicken legs into liquid, cover, reduce heat to low and allow to simmer until the thighs reach an internal temperature of about 170° (about 15 minutes).
Check the thickness of the sauce. If it is too runny for your taste, remove the chicken to a plate and boil until reduced to your preference. (You may also want to add a teaspoon of flour, well whisked in.) Otherwise, allow chicken to rest uncovered in the sauce for 5 minutes before serving.

I served the coq au vin with Alessi mushroom risotto prepared as per package directions, except that I used 1 tablespoon of the reserved fat from sautéing the chicken and pancetta instead of olive oil.

We drank a The Prisoner Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast) 2019. I liked it despite the fact that it is an unusual Pinot Noir. If I had tasted it blind, I might have thought it was a Zinfandel. Robust. Black cherry and blackberry. Plums. Well integrated oak notes.

May 20, 2022
Smoked Turkey Hash

On Thanksgiving Day, I grill-roasted a heritage breed, free range, organic 9-pound turkey from D’Artagnan using apple and hickory wood chips for smoke (one of the best things I ever did was to install a gas line on my back porch so I can run a natural gas grill and patio heater without ever having to worry about running out of propane on a long cook like this one, and hard wood charcoal purists can bite me).

Since it was just Helen and I, we had two drumsticks, one thigh, and one breast left over. A mid-morning snack today revealed that the leftovers had intensified in smokiness. I also had some leftover boiled new potatoes, green beans, and carrots. (The leftover cornbread dressing didn’t make it past that midmorning snack). As I pondered tonight’s dinner, I immediately thought: hash. So here’s how I (mostly) cleaned out my refrigerator.

You definitely want to have your mise en place ready to go before you start cooking, as the process goes pretty quick.

- ½ medium yellow onion, diced
- white parts of 3 green onions, diced finely
- 1 Serrano chile, seeded, minced finely
- 3 garlic cloves, minced finely
- 2 cups shredded turkey meat
- 8 golf ball sized boiled new potatoes cut into small dice
- ¾ cup cooked carrots, diced fine
- dried parsley flakes
- ¾ cup cooked haricot verts, diced fine
- green parts of 3 green onions, sliced finely
- olive oil
- unsalted butter
- salt
- pepper
- Worcestershire sauce
- 2 eggs
- Tabasco sauce

I heated a nonstick 12-inch fry pan over medium-high heat and added a tablespoon of olive oil and a tablespoon of butter. When the oil-butter mix stopped foaming, I added the onions and chili. I hit them with a small pinch of salt. I sautéed them until they had softened and were just beginning to color at the edges. I then added the garlic and cooked it another 30 seconds. Next, I added the turkey and stirred it through. Next, I added the potatoes, carrots, and a big pinch of the dried parsley. A big pinch of salt and 10 grinds of black pepper (using my Turkish pepper mill) followed. I tossed the hash around in the pan for a while, smoothed it out to an even level, and then pressed it down to let it brown. I spread the green beans and green onions on top of the mix.
While the hash browned, I heated a pat of butter in a nonstick 8-inch frying pan. When the butter stopped foaming, I fried two eggs over easy. I seasoned them with salt, pepper, and a few dashes of Tabasco. As the eggs fried, I stirred the hash to mix in the beans and green onions. I then dished up the hash and topped each plate with one egg. Because I like heat much more than Helen does, I refrained from hitting her serving with the several more dashes of Tabasco to which I subjected mine.

What wine to serve with this hash? Granted, you could make a case for beer, cola, or iced tea being better matches. But I like wine. Specifically, red wine. I wanted something young, fruity, not super tannic, with some smoke being a plus. A Foxen Tinaquaic Vineyard Syrah (Santa Maria Valley) 2010 worked surprisingly well. The bouquet suggests black cherry, raspberry, and cola. The palate picks up those elements, but adds smoky bacon, tar, and plums. Grade: B+

November 23, 2013
Whole Duck with Blood Orange Glaze

We had this for Thanksgiving 2018 with an amazing Ridge Monte Bello 1996.

The Duck

- 5½ pound Rohan duck
- ½ onion, roughly chopped
- 1 stalk celery, roughly chopped
- 2 oranges, quartered
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon 5 spice powder

Preheat oven to 475°.

Trim excess skin from front and tail of duck. Remove and discard giblets etc. from the interior of the duck. Cut off and remove duck neck (which comes tucked into the cavity), reserve for future stock making. Rub duck inside and out with half of spice mix. Combine onion, celery, and orange pieces in a bowl and toss with the remaining spice mix. Stuff into duck and tie legs.

Put a rack into a roasting pan that has a lid. Set duck breast side up on rack.

Bring 2 cups of water to a boil (I like to use my electric kettle). Pour boiling water into pan until it almost touches the duck. Cover. Put roasting pan into oven and drop oven temperature to 325°. Roast for 40 minutes. Remove from oven and transfer duck to a cutting board or platter. Pour water and duck fat from pan into a fat separator. Be sure to save the fat to use for roasting potatoes or some similarly yummy purpose.

Return duck to pan breast side down, cover, and return to oven. Roast 40 minutes.

Raise oven temperature to 375°. Remove lid. Flip duck breast side up. Roast 15 minutes. Smear glaze all over duck. Roast 15 more minutes. Check temperature by inserting an instant read thermometer into the inner thigh near the breast. I like my duck at 160°.

Let duck rest 15 minutes, carve, and serve with orange sauce on the side.

Orange glaze and sauce

- ½ teaspoon 5 spice powder
- 3 tablespoons Grand Mariner
- 8 tablespoons Sarabeth’s Blood Orange Marmalade

Combine spice, liquor, and marmalade in your All-Clad 1-Quart sauce pan and bring to a simmer over medium heat. When mixture has thickened set half aside to use as a glaze.
Add the following to the remaining mixture in the saucepan:

- 1 tablespoon Grand Mariner
- 1 tablespoon Sarabeth’s Blood Orange Marmalade
- 1 8 ounce can mandarin oranges with their juice
- 2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- salt to taste

Bring to a simmer and let thicken slightly.

The Wine


Grade: 99

November 23, 2018
SEAFOOD
Halibut with Tomato Bearnaise Sauce and a Stuffed Tomato

This dinner has a shortcut built into it, which will probably cause me to lose whatever foodie cred I have. But here it is anyway.

Butter Basted Pan Roasted Halibut

- 2 4-ounce halibut filets
- 1 garlic clove, smashed
- 1 teaspoon canola oil
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- salt and pepper

Season halibut with salt and pepper. In your trusty All-Clad 10-inch nonstick skillet heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add filets to the pan and turn heat down to medium. Cook for 2-3 minutes or until bottom side is light brown. Flip and add the butter and garlic. When the butter melts, tilt the pan towards you and use a large plastic or silicon spoon to scoop up the butter and pour over the fish. Repeat for several minutes. Check the fish’s temperature. When it hits 140°, it’s done.

Tomato Bearnaise

Here’s the short cut. I made a packet of Knorr Bearnaise Sauce following the package directions. As the sauce came together, I added a tablespoon of tomato paste and 1 ½ tablespoons of finely diced sun-dried tomatoes (that were packed in oil and drained).

Stuffed Tomato

Preheat the oven to 375°. This is an ideal opportunity, by the way, to use your Breville Smart Oven. It’s going to use a lot less energy than your big oven.

- 2 large beefsteak tomatoes
- salt and pepper
- sugar
- 2 tablespoons Panko bread crumbs
- 1 ½ ounce crumbled soft cotija cheese (feta will work too)
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 small shallot diced finely
- 1 garlic clove minced
- pinch red pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- water
- ½ cup couscous
- 1 tablespoon dried currants
• 1 tablespoon pine nuts

Cut off the top of the tomatoes. Using a grapefruit spoon, scoop out all the pulp from the tomatoes. Put the pulp and any juices into a strainer set over a bowl. Season the interior of the tomatoes with several pinches of salt and sugar. Put the tomatoes onto a wire rack over a cookie sheet and let drain for half an hour or so.

Combine the panic with one-third of the cheese. Mix thoroughly.

Heat your second All-Clad 10-inch nonstick skillet on the medium setting. Melt the butter. Add shallots and cook for 1 minute. Add garlic and pepper flakes. Cook another 30 seconds. Add tomato paste and cook another 30 seconds. Add enough water to any liquid that came from the pulp to make a total of ¾ cup of liquid. Bring to a boil. Add couscous, currants, and pine nuts. Season with salt and pepper. Mix well. Remove from heat. Cover. Let sit for 5 minutes. Add remaining cheese and mix well. Stuff the tomatoes. Put into a small roasting pan. Cook for about 22 minutes.

**Turtle Rock Willow White (Paso Robles) 2017**

A blend of 62% Grenache Blanc, 20% Roussanne, 11% Viognier, 7% Picpoul. It’s a nice change of pace from Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Grigio. Lovely bouquet of pear, honey, apple, and buttered toast. The palate suggests it has seen some new oak, but not a lot. Balanced and refreshing, but has some depth on the finish. Grade: B++

July 3, 2020
Spicy Fish and Shrimp Stew

This recipe started out life as a Moqueca—the spicy Brazilian fish and shrimp stew—but it swerved into a Thai lane somewhere along the way.

- 1 6-ounce filet of mahi-mahi, cut into roughly 1 inch cubes
- 8 ounces medium shrimp, peeled and deveined (reserve shells)
- 1 cup milk
- pinch kosher salt
- 1 cup white wine
- 1 14.5-ounce can diced tomatoes (I prefer Muir), strained (reserve juice)
- canola oil as needed
- ½ poblano Chile, minced
- white parts of 6 green onions, sliced thin
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- ½ tablespoon grated ginger
- 1 14.5-ounce can unsweetened coconut milk (not low fat)
- ½ tablespoon Gourmet Garden Thai seasoning mix
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce (I strongly recommend Red Boat, it’s so good you can drink it straight if you want, but why would you?)
- hot sauce to taste (I had a packet of Nando’s peri-peri sauce in the fridge, which I used)
- ¼ cup cilantro, chopped fine, loosely packed
- ⅓ cup green parts of the green onions, sliced thin, loosely packed

Place the shrimp and fish in a small bowl. Add the salt and the milk. Add water, if necessary, to cover. (This gets rid of any off odors.)

I heated a 1-quart sauce pan over medium-high heat for a couple of minutes. Next I added the reserved shrimp shells and cooked them, stirring constantly, for a minute or two. I added the wine, raised the heat to high, and brought the liquid to a boil. I let it boil for a minute or two and then added the reserved tomato juice. When the liquid returned to a boil, I reduced the heat to low and let it simmer to reduce slightly.

I heated my All-Clad 3-quart sauté pan for a couple of minutes over medium heat (6 out of 10) and then added enough canola oil to just lightly coat the bottom of the pan. In went the poblano chiles. They cooked for about 5 minutes. Then the onion whites went into the pan and the onions and chiles cooked for a couple of minutes. Then the garlic and ginger joined the party and sautéed for about 45 seconds. Finally, I added the strained tomatoes and cooked the mixture for an outer couple of minutes.

I strained the wine/tomato juice mixture into the sauté pan. I added the coconut milk, the fish sauce, the hot sauce, and the Thai seasoning to the pan. I raised the heat to high and brought the sauce to a boil. I then added the seafood, covered the pan, and moved it off the heat to poach for about 10 minutes. I checked it every few minutes to make sure the shrimp were not overcooking. On the second check, I added the cilantro and green onions.
As it turned out, 8 minutes poaching time probably would have been enough, but the shrimp were still okay.

I served it with some saffron rice, which further confused the origins of the dish, but tasted great.

Put some Sriracha and fish sauce on the table to allow your guests to add as they see fit. (I like more spice and more fish sauce than Helen.)

A 2019 Tablas Creek Vermentino (Paso Robles) made a truly inspired match for the dish. Bright, fresh, tangy. Lots of citrus flavors: grapefruit, lemon, lime. A flinty note on the finish. Grade: B++

August 29, 2020
Tower of Tilapia

This was a fun and easy recipe that used my Adjustable Food Presentation Rings:

Gently combine in a mixing bowl:

- Flesh of one avocado diced
- Juice of 1 lime
- ½ cup cooked corn kernels
- ½ cup canned black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 5-ounce package of pico de Gallo, drained
- Salt and pepper to taste

Heat a skillet over medium-high heat. Dust both sides of a large tilapia filet with your favorite Cajun spice mix and spray both sides with a bit of your favorite non-stick cooking spray. Add to skillet and cook for about 3 minutes per side. Allow to cool slightly, flake into small pieces, add to the mixing bowl, and toss.

Spray the interior of the rings with nonstick cooking spray.

Spoon the mix into your rings, pressing down on the top periodically to pack the mixture in and force out any air pockets. Top with a dab of salsa. Unmold and serve with a green salad.

Serve with a white wine. I chose the 2014 Conundrum, which is one of our favorite inexpensive white wines. It’s an undisclosed mix of white varieties that almost certainly includes some muscat variety and Sauvignon Blanc. Lots of peach and apricot, with some herbs and grass on the finish. Suggestion of some residual sugar. Not profound, but tasty even with pretty spicy food.

April 28, 2017
Zarzuela de Mariscos a la New Orleans

Scrub 6 littleneck clams and set aside. Put ½ pound sea scallops (“tendon” removed) in a bowl and cover with milk (really, it helps eliminate any fishiness). Put ½ pound peeled and deveined medium shrimp in a bowl and cover with milk. Let sit at least 20 minutes.

Heat your All-Clad 3-quart Saucier over medium heat. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil, swirl, and then add ½ cup minced onions and a pinch of salt. Sauté about 10 minutes or until translucent and softened but not browned.

Meanwhile, slice two green onions and set aside. Dice 1 and ½ links andouille sausage (on the basis of a Cook’s Illustrated taste test recommendation, I have recently switched allegiances from Aidells to Wellshire, which in my area is readily available from Whole Foods). Open a 14.5-Ounce Can of Muir Glen Diced Organic Tomatoes and add a heavy pinch of saffron threads to the tomatoes to steep.

Drain shrimp and scallops and pat dry with paper towels.

When onion is ready, add green onions and sausage to pan. Sauté for about 30 seconds. Add two (or 3 or 4) crushed cloves of garlic and sauté for another 30 seconds. Add 187 ml white wine to pan and raise heat to high until liquid comes to a boil. (I confess I keep 4 packs of 187 ml bottles of Sutter Home chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon in the pantry at all times for cooking purposes.) Add 1 teaspoon dried parsley flakes, 1 teaspoon freeze-dried chives, ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes, ¼ teaspoon Old Bay, ¼ teaspoon black pepper, and ½ teaspoon smoked paprika to the broth. After it boils for about 2 minutes add the canned tomatoes with their juices (and, of course, the steeped saffron threads). Reduce heat to medium-high and cook for 2 minutes. Taste broth to see if it needs salt. Add clams and cover pan. Cook until clams start to open (tonight it took about 6 minutes). Add scallops, cover, and cook 1 minute. Add shrimp, cover, and cook 2 minutes. Immediately serve in warmed bowls, discarding any clams that refused to open. Top with a dollop of basil pesto and accompany with crusty french bread to sop up the broth.

We drank a 2015 Behrens Family Winery Sauvignon Blanc La Danza con Neustras Familias, which is a blend of 50% Sauvignon Blanc and 50% Sauvignon Musqué. It’s on the fruity end of the Sauvignon spectrum rather than the grassy/herbal end. Honeydew melon, white peach, and tropical citrus. I wouldn’t mind a touch more bright acidity, but it’s a really nice wine. Grade: 86

June 29, 2016
SIDES AND MISCELLANY
Asian Slaw

- ⅛ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 ½ tablespoons rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 tablespoon honey
- ⅛ tablespoon Red Boat fish sauce
- Pinch salt
- Grind of black pepper
- 1 red jalapeno chile (remove seeds and ribs then diced fine)
- 4 ounces grated carrots
- 4 ounces packaged cole slaw mix
- 4 scallions, green parts only, sliced thinly

Combine olive oil, vinegar, lime juice, honey, fish sauce, salt, and pepper in a large bowl. Whisk to combine. Add vegetables and toss to coat.

August 23, 2019
Asian Pear Slaw

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 ½ tablespoons rice vinegar
- ½ tablespoon sesame oil
- Pinch salt
- Grind of black pepper
- 1 ripe Asian pear, peeled, cored, julienned
- 5 ounces grated carrots
- 7 ounces packaged cole slaw mix
- 4 scallions, green parts only, sliced thinly

Combine olive oil, vinegar, sesame oil, salt, and pepper in a large bowl. Whisk to combine. Add vegetables and toss to coat.

August 22, 2019
Basic Brine and Variations

There are several recipes in my cookbook for brined pork or poultry, each with a specific brine. But here’s a recipe for a basic brine and then some variants.

Many brine recipes call for boiling the water and cooling the brine at length. I prefer to use pickling salt, which dissolves in cold water, and to mix the brine with my Cuisinart stick blender, which speeds the dissolving process. I usually put the meat to be brined and the brine in a freezer weight zip-lock plastic storage bag.

You can substitute table salt for pickling salt on a 1:1 basis. You can substitute coarse kosher salt on a 1 tablespoon pickling salt to 1 and ¾ tablespoons Morton kosher salt or 1 tablespoon pickling salt to 2 tablespoons Diamond Crystal kosher salt.

Some people don’t rinse the meat after taking it out of the brine. I always do. And, of course, pat it dry with paper towels.

**Basic Brine**

4 tablespoons of salt per quart of water.

**Sweet Brine**

4 tablespoons of salt and two tablespoons brown sugar (or 1 tablespoon and 1 teaspoon honey) per quart of water.

**Apple Brine**

Substitute 1 cup cider for 1 cup of water. Add 1 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar.

**BBQ Chicken Brine**

Per quart of water:

- 4 tablespoons pickling salt
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- ½ tablespoon black peppercorns (whole)
- ½ to 1 tablespoon Tabasco
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons onion powder
Buttermilk Chicken Brine

Per quart of water:

- 1 cup dried buttermilk powder (or substitute 1 quart buttermilk for the water)
- 4 tablespoons pickling salt
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- ½ tablespoon black peppercorns (whole)
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons onion powder

Brining Times

- Boneless skinless chicken pieces or pork chops: 30 to 45 minutes
- Bone-in skin-on chicken parts or pork chops: 2 hours
- Whole chicken: 3 hours
- Pork roast: 3-4 hours
Cheesy Spoonbread

I made this as a side dish with some BBQ pork ribs.

- **10 ounces of Bob’s Red Mill corn bread mix**
- **¾ cup whole milk**
- **1 egg**
- **¼ cup melted butter**
- **thinly sliced green parts of 2 green onions**
- **1 14.5 ounce can creamed corn**
- **1 cup grated Cheddar**

Preheat oven to 350°.

Mix batter briskly for about 30 seconds. Pour batter into a buttered Le Creuset stoneware casserole dish (1.8 qt.).

Bake for about 25 minutes or until the top is light brown. Serve warm with maple syrup or honey and butter.

November 8, 2020
Green Peppercorns in a Creamy Mustard Sauce

I’ve served this successfully with lamb and beef. The goal is to mainly use pantry staples.

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon minced shallot
- 2 teaspoons flour
- 1 tablespoon brandy
- ¾ cup hot water
- 1 teaspoon Better Than Bouillon Roasted Beef Base
- 1 ½ tablespoons green peppercorns
- ½ tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- ½ tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley flakes
- 1 teaspoon freeze-dried chives
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon whole grain mustard (I like Maille)
- ½ cup heavy cream
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

Warm a small sauce pan (I used my 1 quart All-Clad saucier) over medium heat. Add butter. When it starts to foam, add shallots and sauté for a couple of minutes. Add flour and stir thoroughly to mix. Allow to cook for a couple of minutes, stirring constantly.

Add brandy, water, beef base, peppercorns, Worcestershire and soy sauces, and dried herbs. Whisk thoroughly to combine. Raise heat to high. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium low and allow to simmer until it begins to thicken, whisking regularly.

Remove pan from heat and add mustards and cream. Whisk thoroughly.

Return to heat and allow to cook, whisking occasionally, for a couple of minutes until it reaches a consistency in which it coats the back of a spoon.

Taste and add salt and pepper as needed. If you have any accumulated juices from allowing the meat to rest and/or carving it, whisk them into the sauce. Serve immediately.

February 12, 2021
Pot Sticker Dipping Sauce

The goal here was to come up with a sauce using only pantry ingredients.

- 3 tablespoons low sodium soy sauce
- 1 ½ tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons mirin
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- ½ teaspoon honey
- ½ teaspoon jarred minced garlic or 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon jarred grated ginger or 1/8 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon freeze-dried chives
- Freshly ground black pepper (optional)
- Pinch red pepper flakes (optional)

Combine all ingredients in a small bowl, whisk thoroughly to combine. To take the dipping sauce in a more Thai direction, use two tablespoons of fish sauce and just 1 tablespoon of soy sauce, add Siracha to taste, and add one or two tablespoons of lime juice.
Taco Seasoning Mix

- 1 ½ tablespoons paprika
- 1 ½ teaspoons chili powder
- 1 ½ teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 ½ teaspoons corn starch
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ¼ to ¾ teaspoons cayenne pepper

Mix well.

I prefer Morton & Basset spices.

Depending on how much cayenne pepper you add this recipe makes about 3 to 3 ½ tablespoons of seasoning mix. In turn, how much cayenne pepper you add depends on how much heat you want. It also depends on whether you used sweet or hot paprika.

Speaking of paprika, I do not recommend using smoked paprika. Smoke is not a flavor I want in my tacos.

I will usually use around two tablespoons for a pound of ground meat. I typically add 1 tablespoon to the meat as it fries and stir it in to bloom the spices. After botting up excess fat with paper towels, I’ll add a half of a cup of water to the meat, bring it to a boil, and then reduce the heat to a simmer. Let the water reduce to a glaze. While the water is reducing, I’ll taste both the liquid and the meat, and then add additional seasoning as needed.
SOUPS AND STEWS
Cassoulet (Simplified)

Stew

- 2 French garlic sausages
- 2 rashers applewood smoked thick cut bacon, cut into thirds
- 1 duck breast, seasoned with salt and pepper, with skin scored in a criss-cross hatch
- ½ cup diced onion
- 1 carrot, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste (you do buy it in tubes instead of those incredibly wasteful little cans, don’t you?)
- ½ cup white wine
- 1 tablespoon demi-glace dissolved in 1 cup hot low-sodium chicken stock
- 1 14.5 ounce can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 14.5 ounce can diced tomatoes with their juice
- 1 bay leaf
- big pinch dried Herbes de Provence

Put sausage and 1 pint water in the non-stick insert of your 4 quart Fagor LUX Multi-Cooker (you have gotten one, haven’t you?) and set to the browning function. After water comes to a boil, blanch the sausages for 5 minutes. Transfer sausages to a plate. Toss out water and clean insert.

Heat multi-cooker using the browning function. When the light stops flashing, add bacon. (If bacon starts to cook too fast, switch the multi-cooker to the sauté function.) When bacon is cooked through transfer to a paper towel-lined plate, leaving fat in cooker. Put duck breast in cooker, skin side down. When is skin is golden brown, flip over and cook for 2 minutes. Remove breast from cooker, leaving fat behind. Cut sausage into 1-inch pieces. Add to cooker and sauté until browned on all sides. Transfer sausage to a paper towel-lined plate.

Remove all but 1 tablespoon of accumulated fat from cooker. Sauté onion and carrots (season with a heavy pinch salt) until they have softened and the onions become translucent. Add garlic and tomato paste. Sauté for 30 seconds. Add wine and reduce by about a third. Add stock, beans, tomatoes, bay leaf, herbs, and sausages. Dice bacon and add half to the cooker, reserving the other half. Remove skin from duck breast and dice. Add meat to cooker (discard skin or make into cracklings.)

Seal cooker (make sure valve is set to pressure). Using pressure function and set to cook 5 minutes. Unplug cooker and do a natural release for 10 minutes. Open valve to release any remaining pressure. Skim off any fat on surface of stew. Season to taste with salt and pressure.

Serve in large bowls topped with toasted panko garlic bread crumbs.

January 5, 2018
Bread crumbs

- 3 garlic cloves, finely minced
- ⅛ teaspoon garlic powder
- ⅓ cup olive oil
- ⅔ cup panko bread crumbs

Heat a small non-stick skillet over medium high heat. Add oil. When oil begins to shimmer add both minced garlic and garlic powder. Cook 30 seconds. Add bread crumbs and mix well. When crumbs are golden brown remove to a plate and allow to cool.
Quasi-Homemade Tuscan Bean Soup

- 8 ounces of mild Italian sausage, with casings removed and broken up into small chunks
- 6 ounces cremini mushrooms, chopped roughly
- 3 green onions sliced, greens and whites separated
- 1 package Alessi Tuscan White Bean Soup Mix
- 4 cups water
- Shaved Parmesan cheese
- California Olive Ranch Arbequina Extra Virgin Olive Oil

I set my trusty 6-quart Fagor multicooker (which is now made by Zavor) to sauté. When it had heated, I added the sausage and cooked it until it was browned on all sides (about 8 minutes). I removed the sausage to a paper towel-lined plate to let it drain. There was about a tablespoon of fat left in the cooker, which was just right. If there had been more, I would have drained the excess off. If there had been less, I would have added a little olive oil or butter.

I added the white parts of the green onions to the cooker and sautéed them for about 2 minutes. I then added the mushrooms and cooked them for about 8 minutes. I then returned the sausage to the cooker and added the water. I set the cooker to “brown,” which is its highest cooking setting and waited for the water to come to a boil.

I added the soup mix to the boiling water and stirred it for 1 minute. I then set the cooker to simmer and set the timer for 12 minutes. I put on the cover, with the valve set to “steam.”

I served the soup in bowls topped with Parmesan, the green parts of the onions, and a drizzle of a really good EVOO. Yum.

As for the wine, I have very little experience with Sicilian wines, but I saw a Gulfi Nero Sanlore Nero d’Avola (Sicilia) 2015 on K&L Wine’s website and it sounded very interesting. Deep purple color. I had opened it about 75 minutes before dinner and the huge bouquet perfumed our dining room. The Wine Spectator review is correct about the tannins being soft enough to make current drinking enjoyable. The main flavor association Helen and I spotted was Bing cherry. But the reviews’ suggestion of violet notes seems correct. Very pleasant match for the soup.

Grade: B++

August 7, 2020
(Mostly) Vegetable Entrees
Baked Spaghetti Squash

I started with a 3 ½ pound spaghetti squash. Using a sharp paring knife, I pierced it three times in a line running lengthwise, after which I rotated the squash 180° and repeated the piercing process. The squash went into a glass dish and then into the microwave for 12 minutes on high. I let it cool for 7 minutes before cutting it in half, removing the seeds, and shredding the flesh (leaving about a ¼ to a ½ inch thickness of flesh attached to the rind so that each half formed a bowl).

Meanwhile, I had removed the casings from 3 Italian sausages, broke the sausages into small pieces, and sautéed them until just done. I drained the sausage pieces on paper towels and then combined the spaghetti squash fibers, sausage pieces, a ½ cup of diced sun-dried tomatoes, about half a jar of marinara sauce, about 4 ounces of shredded mozzarella and a good handful of shredded Parmesan cheese in a metal mixing bowl. I spooned the mix into the squash “bowls,” topped them with more mozzarella and Parmesan, and then baked them at 350° for 25 minutes (until the cheese on top started to brown).

Yum, if I do say so myself. To be sure, we had a LOT of leftovers. One bowl probably would be enough for two (albeit hard to make). But we have tomorrow’s lunch ready to go.

I poured the 2012 Foxen 7200 Guillermo Grosso, which is a blend of 50% Sangiovese and 50% Cabernet Sauvignon. This is one of my favorite Cal-Ital wines. At age 3 ½, it is still a deep purple with very little sediment. I did not decant it but did let it breathe for about 30 minutes before pouring, On the nose, it suggests plums, black cherry, and blackberry. On the palate, things get a bit funkier, as the fruit is supplemented with earthy, leathery, peppery, and tobacco-ish notes. Granted, it is not a to be treasured for decades. But good acidity and relatively soft tannins make it an excellent near-term food wine, ideal to pair with Cal-Ital cuisine such as tonight’s dinner. Grade: 89

April 15, 2014
“Cajun” Jambalaya Zoodles

The Pasta

- 2 boneless and skinless chicken thighs, diced and dusted with Cajun seasoning
- 2 Italian hot sausages, removed from the casings and broken into small pieces
- ½ medium yellow onion, diced
- 8 ounces cremini mushrooms, cleaned and diced
- at least 6 garlic cloves sliced crosswise as thin as possible (you know the Goodfellas scene?)
- ¼ cup white wine
- About a half jar of Mia’s Kitchen Vodka Pasta Sauce
- 1 14 ounce can peeled tomatoes, drained and broken up
- 2 zucchini

Using your KitchenAid Spiralizer Attachment (you do have one, don’t you?), process the zucchini into zoodles, toss them with a pinch of kosher salt and a heavy pinch or two of McCormick Gourmet Collection Cajun Seasoning, and wrap in paper towels to drain off as much liquid as possible.

Heat your trusty All-Clad Tri-Ply Stainless 3 Qt Saute Pan (you do have one, don’t you?) over medium-high heat for a few minutes. Add a couple of dashes of (non-EVOO) olive oil and when the oil just starts to shimmer add the chicken and sausage. Cook the meats (stirring occasionally) until they just start to brown. Using a slotted spoon remove the meat to a paper towel-lined plate to drain. Eyeball the fat remaining in the pan. If it’s about a tablespoon you’re good to go. If it’s more, blot some up with a paper towel. If it’s less, add some (non-EVOO) olive oil.

Add the onions to the pan, lightly season with a small pinch of kosher salt and Cajun seasoning, reduce heat to medium, and sauté until they are translucent. Add the mushrooms and sauté until they are tender. Add the garlic slices and sauté for another 30 seconds. By now you should have built up a substantial fond on the bottom of the pan. Add the white wine, crank the heat to full blast, and deglaze the pan, stirring constantly. Reduce heat to medium. Add the pasta sauce and tomatoes. Cook for a couple of minutes and then taste. Adjust seasoning with sea salt, freshly ground black pepper, and Cajun seasoning to taste. (I like mine very spicy. I cook with basic Morton Kosher Salt but I finish recipes with Maldon Sea Salt.)

Add the zoodles to the pan, return the sauce to a simmer, and cook for 4-6 minutes or until the zoodles are al dente. Zoodles exude a lot of liquid, so you may want to hit the sauce with some Wondra flour to thicken it at the end.
Most true Cajuns would blanch at the idea of jambalaya without bell peppers. I omitted them, but you may want to add diced green and red bell peppers with the onions.

The Wine

Jambalaya is not really a wine dish. If one must have wine (and I must), an off-dry white would be a good choice, especially if you cranked up the spice. If you can find one, an “extra dry” domestic sparkling wine would be a great choice. Slight sweetness to counter the heat of the spices with refreshing bubbles to scrub the palate.

But I wanted red wine, so I popped a Ridge Ponzo Zinfandel (Russian River Valley) 2013. When drunk with spicy food most red wines just taste like tannin and alcohol. For some reason, however, Zinfandel does okay with spicy food.

The 2013 Ridge Ponzo is 93% Zinfandel and 7% Petite Sirah. Deep purple with no sediment at this point. Medium strong bouquet suggesting raspberry, blueberry, and warm spices. On the palate, it suggests ripe berry fruit, prunes, and a dash of pepper. This is not a complex wine nor a wine for the cellar, but for short-term drinking with this sort of meal it’s very enjoyable. Grade: 88

April 16, 2016
“Cajun” Stuffed Pumpkin

I started with an Emeril recipe, Roasted Pumpkins Stuffed with Roast Duck and Wild Mushroom Risotto, and then modified it. Instead of roasting a whole duck, I shredded the meat from 2 duck leg confit I had ordered from D’artagnan, leaving fairly big pieces. Instead of pie pumpkins, I used baked mini pumpkins as serving dishes. Instead of making risotto from scratch, I used Alessi Funghi Risotto with Porcini Mushrooms. I soaked 1 package of Mycological Dried Oregon Porcini Mushrooms in hot water until softened, strained the mushrooms, reserving the soaking liquor, and chopped the mushrooms very fine. Ran the soaking liquor through an unbleached coffee filter. Used 1 cup red wine and 1-¼ cup of the mushroom soaking liquid to cook the risotto. I added the duck meat and chopped mushrooms when the risotto had about 5 minutes left to cook. I also tossed in the green parts of 3 green onions, some baby basil leaves, and some baby arugula leaves; all being chopped fine before adding them. Despite (because of?) my shortcuts, it turned out great.

We drank an Antinori Pian Delle Vigne Brunello Di Montalcino 1997, which was an exceptional match for this meal. At ~15 years of age, it was smooth and fully mature. Rich berry and cherry fruit mingled with tobacco, leather, and fall leaves. I have just one bottle left in my cellar. Given how evolved this bottle was, I’m planning to drink that last bottle by the end of 2013. Grade: A-

October 12, 2012
I had picked up a lovely locally grown organic sweet pumpkin (about 3 pounds) at Bristol Farms and was debating what to do with it. I adore pumpkin in savory applications and, of course, dote on Italian cuisine. So, I decided to make an “Italian” stuffing for a roasted pumpkin.

I cut off the top and cleaned the pumpkin of all its seeds and strings. Rubbed the interior well with a cut piece of garlic. Seasoned the interior with salt and pepper. Gave the interior a light spray of Pam, put the top back, and baked it for about 75 minutes in a 350 oven.

Using a 12-inch nonstick frying pan, I fried off the pancetta over medium heat until the pieces were crispy and the fat had rendered. I transferred the pancetta pieces to a paper towel covered plate to drain and poured off all but a tablespoon of the fat. I then sweated the carrot, celery, and onion (which I lightly salted) over medium low heat under they were tender. I cranked the heat back up to medium and added the tomato paste, Italian herbs, pepper flakes, garlic, and mushrooms. I cooked them until the mushrooms had softened. I then transferred the whole thing to an All-Clad 3-Quart saucier, to which I then added the pancetta, tomatoes, tomato sauce, soy sauce, and Worcestershire sauce. I let it simmer slowly over medium-low heat. After it had simmered for a while I tasted it and adjusted the seasoning with salt, pepper, and a dash of Tabasco.

Meanwhile, I fried up the ground veal and pork. When they were brown, I drained the meat briefly on a paper towel covered plate, and then added it to the saucier.
Finally, I added the cooked rice to the saucier. Removed it from heat. Eyeballed a healthy dose of Parmesan and mixed it all.

I then pulled the pumpkin from the oven, mopped up some liquid that had seeped out of the flesh, and filled it with stuffing. (I had a lot of stuffing left over, which will go into a casserole tomorrow night). I topped the stuffing with bread crumbs and more Parmesan, which I lightly oiled with a spray of Pam. I then put the stuffed pumpkin back into the oven until the topping was golden brown and delicious.

Although this recipe sprang from my imagination rather than classic Italian cuisine and, if it had come from Italy, it would have been closer to Southern Italian than Tuscan cuisine, I nevertheless paired it with a Tuscan red wine. The Tenuta Guada al Tasso Il Bruciato (Bolgheri, Tuscany) 2010 is 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, and 20% Syrah sourced from grapes grown in the emerging Bolgheri region. Deep purple-ruby color. Has not thrown much sediment. Smooth, well-integrated tannins. Pretty acidic, which made it a great match with the meal. On the nose and palate, it suggests cherries, raspberries, currants, and earthy vegetation. Plus, it’s a great value. I picked up a half case at K&L Wines at $23/bottle. Not a wine for the cellar, but a great value for drinking in the near term (say through 2015 or ’16). With a bump for value, its grade is B++, shading towards A—

October 18, 2013
Salade Niçoise

This is a slightly untraditional Salade Niçoise. I started with butter lettuce and added heirloom cherry tomatoes, baby yukon gold potatoes (cooked 18 minutes in heavily salted boiling water and then chilled in an ice water bath), haricot verts (cooked 4 minutes in modestly salted boiling water and then ditto), hard boiled eggs, finely sliced green onions (mostly the green parts), Nettuno anchovy filets and Tonnino Tuna Ventresca. All of which was topped with a light Briannas Lemon Tarragon Dressing.

Lots of wine options with Salade Niçoise. The classic is a Provençale rose, of course, but I had none on hand. I often like a rose sparkling wine, but ditto. A light Pinot Noir might work, but I’d be more likely to go that direction if I had grilled fresh tuna steaks for the topping. Skimming through the white wines in my cellar (about 5%), the Tatomer Meeresboden Grüner Veltliner jumped out as a wine I wanted to try and a potentially interesting match.

We drank a Tatomer Meeresboden Grüner Veltliner (Santa Barbara County) 2014. Grüner Veltliner is a major Austrian variety, of course, but this rare Central Coast example could go toe to toe with any from Austria. At this stage, the bouquet is modest but suggests white nectarines and canned pineapple. On the palate, I tasted pineapple, Meyer lemon, peaches, and honeydew melon. It’s a lively wine with high acidity, which made it refreshing against the salt and oil in the salad. Highly recommended. Grade: 90

October 23, 2015