

TOUR DE FORCE

TERRINES ARE ONE OF THE GLORIES OF FRENCH CUISINE, AND EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MAKING THEM IS RIGHT HERE. THERE'S TIME AND EFFORT INVOLVED, BUT THE RESULT IS BETTER THAN ANYTHING YOU COULD EVER BUY

BY JANE DANIELS LEAR RECIPES AND FOOD STYLING BY SHELLEY WISEMAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROMULO YANES



Opposite: Molds lined with lacy caul fat (left) or velvety fatback (right) keep this duck terrine with wine-glazed shallots beautifully moist.

A TERRINE CAN BE FANCY, it can be rustic. What it is *not* is a Frenchified exercise wrapped in nostalgia, nor do you need a degree from a cooking school to make one. Even though, in all honesty, the first instruction might be “Set aside three days,” the techniques used in making a terrine are within the skill set of every home cook, and the finished product is a boon to any host, particularly at this time of year. It must be made at least a day ahead to be at its peak, and, if it’s a meat terrine, it’s best served at room temperature, and so there’s no last-minute fuss or frenzy in the kitchen. It keeps beautifully, and it’s enormously versatile.

The terms *pâté* and *terrine* are used interchangeably these days, but, strictly defined, a *pâté* has a pastry crust and sometimes a little layer of aspic that fills the space created when the baked meat has shrunk away from the crust. A terrine is essentially a crustless *pâté* named (like a casserole) for the container or mold in which it is baked. Food editor Shelley Wiseman, who developed the recipes in these pages, decided to stick to terrines because they are simpler than *pâtés en croûte*. There is a reason you see terrines, quite often, on trendy restaurant menus: After scaling increasingly baroque culinary heights, many American chefs have embraced artisanal, handmade foods and are making their own charcuterie, or preserved meats. Culinarily speaking, the “waste not, want not” philosophy never goes out of style for very long.

FAT IS CRUCIAL to any terrine; there’s no way around it. In two of the three terrines here, the most obvious fat is used to line the molds. For Wiseman’s duck terrine with shallots, you can use either fatback (which is not salt pork but uncured bacon from the back of a hog, with no streaks of lean) or caul fat (the weblike lining of a hog’s gut cavity). Frankly, neither is particularly easy to get. Your best bet is to find a good butcher and call ahead, as he might have to special-order it. If you go the fatback route, put on your nicest wheedling voice and ask the butcher to slice it into thin sheets on his professional meat slicer. If you end up doing the cutting yourself, put the fatback in the freezer for about half an hour first to make it easier to slice, and then cut off the rind and slice the fat into long, thin sheets, as you would cut slab bacon. (If you choose caul fat, the butcher may have to order more than you need. That’s okay: It comes frozen, and after you pick out the two nicest pieces for your terrine, refreeze what you don’t use. That surplus will come in handy in all sorts of ways. Try wrapping lean game birds—quail, for instance, or squab—in little caul blankets. As the birds cook, they will baste themselves. Or wrap a lean pork roast in caul to give it some added fat and flavor. Before using caul fat, thaw it in a bowl of water and rinse it.) For Wiseman’s chunkier country terrine (see page 256), made of pork, veal, and chicken livers, she lined the mold with strips of bacon. It’s not a good idea to substi-

tute bacon for caul or fatback in the duck terrine, because it would be too overwhelming there; you want the duck flavor to come through.

The fat inside a terrine—more technically, the suspension of tiny particles of fat in protein—enriches and binds. It also acts as a preservative, keeping the terrine moist and delicious over a period of weeks. In order to make that suspension happen, you need just the right proportion of fat to protein, and everything should be *very cold*, from the moment you begin until you tuck the terrine into its water bath and slide it into the oven. Otherwise, the fat can soften or melt before baking. The more fat absorbed by the forcemeat (the ground or puréed meat or fish; from the French *farcir*, which means “to stuff”), the moister the finished terrine will be. Keeping things cold is just one of many good reasons to plan ahead: Read the recipe, assemble all the equipment and ingredients you will need, and chill them.

For the fish terrine on pages 218 and 219, that suspension is what gives the terrine an ethereal, quenelle-like quality. The “keep it cold” mantra even extends, in this case, to cleaning the *tamis* (see page 219) used for sieving the puréed fish: Scrub it under cold water, because hot water will cook the fish right onto the mesh, turning a simple task into a royal pain. And for the silky-smooth duck terrine (see page 256), Wiseman even freezes the milk like a granita and grinds the icy chips along with the duck over a bowl of ice. Obsessive? Well, maybe, but top Belgian charcutiers Benito Plasschaert and Nadya Van Caseele, who blew through our test kitchens this summer, explained that it’s also one more way to get additional moisture into the terrine.

ONE HALF TEASPOON WHOLE ALLSPICE, one teaspoon black peppercorns, one tablespoon kosher salt: The range of seasonings may seem excessive and their amounts may seem persnickety. (Who really truly measures salt and pepper?) We get this comment all the time, but, you know, it does make a difference in the depth and complexity and overall balance of a dish. It’s especially important when you are serving something at room temperature. If the right seasonings aren’t there, or if they’re in the wrong amounts, a finished terrine will taste flat.

Concerning what type of mold to use, it almost doesn’t matter; there are all sorts of rectangular containers available in many different price categories and materials, including earthenware and metal. A Pyrex loaf pan works, although a heavier pan cooks more uniformly. Le Creuset makes a top-of-the-line enamel-coated cast-iron mold for around \$110.

You’ll see in the following pages that we’ve given you a variety of terrines—fowl, meat, and fish. The simplest of them is the country terrine (see page 256), but they are all worth the time and effort involved. Have fun.

SERVE A TERRINE AS A FIRST COURSE BEFORE A CHICKEN FRICASSEE OR AS A SIMPLE LUNCH WITH A HEARTY SALAD AND A NICE LOAF OF CRUSTY BREAD. SET IT OUT AT A BUFFET WITH TOASTS AND LITTLE PICKLES AND WATCH IT DISAPPEAR. OR SERVE IT AS A MAKE-AHEAD SUPPER WITH CELERY RÉMOULADE AND HARICOTS VERTS ON THE SIDE—AND PRETEND YOU’RE SITTING IN A COZY PARIS BISTRO.



TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Makings for the duck terrine include Moulard duck breasts. The skin and the fat layer can be easily removed from the breast meat by peeling it back with knife and fingers. We used a plastic Norpro meat grinder (see Shopping List, page 246), which attaches to a work surface by suction, to grind the duck, shards of frozen milk, and fat into a bowl set into a second bowl of ice. • Add the remaining ingredients and stir together well. Don’t be afraid to use your hands. Just get in there and mix it up. • Whole shallots in their herbaceous, winy glaze. **THIS ROW:** After lining the mold with fatback and packing the bottom and sides of it with some of the duck mixture, make a row of shallots right down the center. Pack the remaining duck mixture on top, and fold the fatback over to seal. • The terrine needs to be weighted and chilled after baking so that it will hold together and not crumble when sliced. **BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:** It’s worth the weight. This is the *terrine de campagne* (page 256). Just look at the liquid we pour off after it sits. • Note that this terrine is lined with bacon for a smoky flavor. • After the terrine stands at room temperature for half an hour, it is ready to serve. Just add cornichons, pickled onions, and Dijon mustard. >



PROFYLING: JULIA GARCIA-TOBAR

WHITE FISH TERRINE WITH SALMON ROE AND DILL

SERVES 8

Active time: 1¼ hr Start to finish: 2¼ hr

A first course with a serious wow factor. Even though this terrine is labor-intensive, it's not as fussy and last-minute as quenelles, and its ethereal texture rivals theirs. The salmon roe adds sparkle and zing both on the plate and on the palate, but if you want to take the terrine in a slightly different direction, use a small dice of blanched, peeled carrot in its place. You'll get a delicate crunch instead of a briny pop in the mouth.

- 1¼ lb skinless cod, scrod, or gray sole fillets, well chilled
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt or 1 teaspoon table salt
- ¼ teaspoon white pepper
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 large egg white
- 2 cups chilled heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh dill
- 3 tablespoons salmon roe

Special equipment: a 4-cup terrine mold or loaf pan; a *tamis* (drum sieve) with 30 to 40 holes per square centimeter (see Shopping List, page 246); a slightly flexible bowl scraper; a kitchen scale; an offset spatula; an instant-read thermometer

Accompaniment: beurre blanc (recipe follows)

- Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 325°F. Oil terrine mold and line bottom with a sheet of wax paper (cut to fit), then oil paper.
- Remove any visible silver skin or sinew from fish and cut on either side of pin bones until all pin bones have been removed, then cut fish into 1-inch pieces. Purée fish with salt, white pepper, and nutmeg in a food processor until very smooth. Add egg white and purée until incorporated, then

transfer mixture to a bowl set in a larger bowl of ice.

- Set *tamis*, screen side up, over a plate and work fish mixture through sieve about 2 tablespoons at a time with scraper until all that remains is sinews. Continue to work fish through sieve, scraping strained fish from underside of *tamis* from time to time and transferring to a large bowl set in another bowl of ice.

- Weigh strained fish to determine equal amount of cream (1 cup cream weighs 8 ounces). Then, keeping fish mixture over ice, stir cream into fish mixture, about ¼ cup at a time, with a large rubber spatula until all cream is incorporated.

- Transfer one fourth of mixture to a small bowl and stir in dill. Gently fold salmon roe into remaining fish mixture.

- Spread about two thirds of roe mixture in terrine and create a wide trough lengthwise along the middle with back of a spoon. Fill trough with dill mixture, mounding it slightly and smoothing surface. Cover with remaining roe mixture and rap mold firmly on counter to compact terrine. Smooth top with offset spatula and cover surface with an oiled sheet of wax paper (oiled side down).
- Bake in a water bath (see Tips, page 246) until terrine is firm to the touch and separates easily from sides of mold and thermometer inserted diagonally through paper into center of terrine registers 110 to 120°F (a metal skewer or thin knife plunged to bottom of terrine for 5 seconds and removed will feel hot), 40 to 45 minutes.

- Transfer terrine in mold to a rack and let cool 10 to 15 minutes before unmolding.

- To unmold, remove wax paper and run a thin knife around inside edge of mold. Invert a cutting board or serving dish over terrine, then reinvert and remove mold and wax paper, blotting any excess liquid. Cut terrine into slices with a sharp knife, supporting each slice as cut with a flat metal spatula and transferring as cut to small plates.

Cooks' note:

Terrine may be assembled, but not baked, 1 day ahead and chilled, covered.

BEURRE BLANC

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

Active time: 15 min Start to finish: 20 min

One taste of this smooth, supple butter sauce, and you'll understand why it's a French classic.

- ¼ cup dry white wine
- ¼ cup white-wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped shallot
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon white pepper, or to taste
- 2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter, cut into tablespoon-size pieces and chilled

- Boil wine, vinegar, and shallot in a 2- to 3-quart heavy saucepan over moderate heat until liquid is syrupy and reduced to 2 to 3 tablespoons, about 5 minutes. Add cream, salt, and white pepper and boil 1 minute. Reduce heat to moderately low and add a few tablespoons butter, whisking constantly. Add remaining butter a few pieces at a time, whisking constantly and adding new pieces before previous ones have completely liquefied (the sauce should maintain consistency of hollandaise), lifting pan from heat occasionally to cool mixture.

- Remove from heat, then season to taste with salt and pepper and pour sauce through a medium-mesh sieve into a sauceboat, pressing on and then discarding shallot. Serve immediately.

Cooks' note:

Wine mixture can be reduced, and cream and seasoning added, up to 1 hour ahead. Boil cream 1 minute before adding butter.

For MORE RECIPES, see page 256.



TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Gray sole, cream, salt, egg, dill, nutmeg, salmon roe. There is something about the purity of the ingredients for white fish terrine that makes you want to dive right in. • Plus, you get to use more fun equipment, like the *tamis* ("ta-mee"), shown here. (See Shopping List, page 246; a sturdy spatter screen will do the job, too.) You'll also need a slightly flexible plastic bowl scraper. Choke up on the scraper (beveled side angled against the screen) and work the fish purée (which you've already ground up in a food processor), a little at a time, through the screen. • What is pushed through is the true essence of the fish, without a trace of sinew. • **THIS ROW:** The chill factor is even more crucial when you're dealing with fish. Always work over a bowl of ice, and make sure that the cream has been sitting in the fridge, not on your counter. The fish can't absorb the fat in the cream unless both are cold. • The suspension of fat in protein is the key to success. A rubber spatula is the tool to use. **BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:** The simple addition of dill and salmon roe lends color and flavor. • Spread some of the fish mixture in the mold, and spoon the dill mixture down the center. Then add the remaining fish mixture. • A sleek beurre blanc brings out the delicacy of this terrine.



TERRINES ARE OFTEN ENHANCED BY WHAT'S KNOWN AS GARNITURE, WHOLE OR CHOPPED INGREDIENTS THAT ARE MIXED INTO THE FORCEMEAT, ESSENTIALLY MAKING AN INSIDE GARNISH THAT ADDS VISUAL CONTRAST AS WELL AS FLAVOR. IN THE DUCK RECIPE, WE USE PISTACHIOS AND WINE-GLAZED SHALLOTS; FOR THE FISH, WE CREATE A SIMPLE MOSAIC EFFECT WITH GLEAMING SALMON ROE.

TOUR DE FORCE

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TERRINE DE CAMPAGNE

Country Terrine

SERVES 12 TO 14

Active time: 1 hr Start to finish: 3 days
(includes marinating and chilling)

The straightforward character of this terrine reminds us of the words of Richard Olney, an influential American cookbook writer and editor who rusticated in the French countryside for almost 50 years. “A simple terrine,” he wrote in his Simple French Food, “is never so good as when prepared in the easiest possible way, all of the ingredients of the composition mixed, pell-mell but intimately, together.”

- 1 cup finely chopped onion (1 large)
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme or 1 teaspoon dried, crumbled
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt or 1½ teaspoons table salt
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- ½ teaspoon whole allspice or ¼ teaspoon ground allspice
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 Turkish or ½ California bay leaf
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 2 large eggs
- 3 tablespoons Cognac or other brandy
- ½ lb chicken livers, trimmed
- 1 lb ground fatty pork shoulder or half lean pork and half fresh pork fatback (without rind)
- ½ lb ground fatty veal (preferably veal breast)
- ½ lb baked ham (½-inch slice), cut into ½-inch cubes
- 12 bacon slices (about ¾ lb)

Special equipment: an electric coffee/spice grinder; a 6-cup terrine mold or loaf pan; an instant-read thermometer
Accompaniments: cornichons; mustard; bread or crackers

Assemble and marinate terrine:

- ▶ Cook onion in butter in a 10-inch heavy skillet, covered, over moderately low heat, stirring frequently, until soft, about 10 minutes. Add garlic and thyme and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Transfer to a large bowl set in a bowl of ice.
- ▶ While onion cools, pulse salt, peppercorns, allspice, nutmeg, and bay leaf in grinder until finely ground. Add to onion mixture and whisk in cream, eggs, and brandy until combined well.
- ▶ Pulse chicken livers in a food processor until finely chopped, then add to onion

mixture along with ground pork and veal and mix together well with your hands or a wooden spoon. Stir in ham cubes.

▶ Line bottom and long sides of terrine mold crosswise with about 6 to 9 strips of bacon, arranging them close together (but not overlapping) and leaving a ½- to 2-inch overhang. Fill terrine evenly with ground-meat mixture, rapping terrine on counter to compact it (it will mound slightly above edge). Cover top of terrine lengthwise with 2 or 3 more bacon slices if necessary to cover completely, and fold overhanging ends of bacon back over these. Cover terrine with plastic wrap and chill at least 8 hours to marinate meats.

Bake terrine:

- ▶ Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 325°F.
- ▶ Discard plastic wrap and cover terrine tightly with a double layer of foil.
- ▶ Bake terrine in a water bath (see Tips, page 246) until thermometer inserted diagonally through foil at least 2 inches into center of terrine registers 155 to 160°F, 1¾ to 2 hours. Remove foil and let terrine stand in mold on a rack, 30 minutes.

Weight terrine:

▶ Put terrine in mold in a cleaned baking pan. Put a piece of parchment or wax paper over top of terrine, then place on top of parchment another same-size terrine mold or a piece of wood or heavy cardboard cut to fit inside mold and wrapped in foil. Put 2 to 3 (1-pound) cans on terrine or on wood or cardboard to weight cooked terrine. Chill terrine in pan with weights until completely cold, at least 4 hours. Continue to chill terrine, with or without weights, at least 24 hours to allow flavors to develop.

To serve:

▶ Run a knife around inside edge of terrine and let stand in mold in a pan with 1 inch of hot water (to loosen bottom) 2 minutes. Tip terrine mold (holding terrine) to drain excess liquid, then invert a cutting board over terrine, reinvert terrine onto cutting board, and gently wipe outside of terrine (bacon strips) with a paper towel. Let terrine stand at room temperature for 30 minutes before serving, then transfer to a platter if desired and cut, as needed, into ½-inch-thick slices.

Cooks' notes:

- **Terrine can be marinated (before baking) up to 24 hours.**
- **Terrine keeps, wrapped in plastic wrap and chilled, 2 weeks.**

DUCK TERRINE WITH WINE-GLAZED SHALLOTS

SERVES 10 TO 12

Active time: 1¾ hr Start to finish: 3 days

Rich, creamy, suave flavor is the hallmark of this terrine. The shallots create their own sauce, so this is best served on a plate rather than on a slice of bread.

For duck terrine

- ⅓ cup milk
- 2 Moulard duck breasts (1¾ to 2 lb total; see Shopping List, page 246)
- 4 teaspoons kosher salt or 2 teaspoons table salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme or ¼ teaspoon dried, crumbled
- ½ teaspoon chopped fresh marjoram or ⅛ teaspoon dried, crumbled
- ¼ teaspoon ground allspice
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 tablespoons Tawny Port
- 1 tablespoon Cognac or other brandy
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ½ cup shelled pistachios (2½ oz)

For glazed shallots

- 1½ cups dry red wine
- ¼ cup red-wine vinegar
- ⅓ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt or ¼ teaspoon table salt
- 1 fresh thyme sprig
- 1 Turkish or ½ California bay leaf
- ½ lb small shallots, peeled and trimmed

For lining terrine

- ½ lb thin sheets pork fatback (without rind), cut from about a 5- by 8-inch slab (6 oz) by butcher, or caul fat

Special equipment: a meat grinder with medium holes; a 5- to 6-cup terrine mold or loaf pan; an instant-read thermometer

Prepare duck terrine:

- ▶ Freeze milk in a shallow dish, scraping once or twice with a fork to break up crystals, until frozen, about 1 hour.
- ▶ Pull skin with fat off duck breast with your fingers, using a knife when necessary, then cut both skin with fat and breast meat lengthwise into 1-inch pieces that will fit in grinder. Chill meat and skin with fat, wrapped separately in plastic wrap, in freezer until firm but not frozen, about 1 hour.
- ▶ Set a medium bowl in a larger bowl of ice and cold water under grinder to catch

ground meat, then feed meat (only) through grinder. Replace medium bowl in ice with a large metal bowl and feed meat through grinder a second time, adding spoonfuls of frozen milk as you go. Chill, covered with plastic wrap, in refrigerator.

▶ Feed duck skin with fat through grinder twice into a bowl set in a larger bowl of ice and cold water, then add to ground duck meat and set bowl in larger bowl of ice.

▶ Add remaining duck terrine ingredients to ground-duck mixture and mix with your hands or a wooden spoon until combined well. Chill, covered with plastic wrap, in refrigerator at least 8 hours to marinate meats.

Glaze shallots:

▶ Bring wine, vinegar, sugar, salt, thyme, and bay leaf to a boil in a 1- to 1½-quart heavy saucepan, stirring until sugar is dissolved, then add whole shallots and cover surface of liquid with a round of parchment or wax paper. Simmer shallots vigorously until tender, about 40 minutes, then transfer from cooking liquid to a bowl with a slotted spoon and discard thyme sprig and bay leaf. If liquid isn't syrupy, boil until reduced to about ⅓ cup. Pour over shallots and cool.

Line and bake terrine:

- ▶ Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 325°F.
 - ▶ Line bottom and all sides of terrine with fatback (or caul fat), overlapping edges slightly and leaving a 2-inch overhang on long sides. Rub some of duck mixture onto fatback lining to help the rest adhere, then pack in about two thirds of remaining duck. Create a wide trough lengthwise along the middle with back of a spoon. Embed drained shallots, reserving Port syrup, pointed ends down in trough. Pack remaining duck mixture on top. Fold overhang (adding more fatback if necessary) to cover top completely, then cover terrine with a double layer of foil. Rap mold firmly on counter to compact terrine.
 - ▶ Bake terrine in a water bath (see Tips, page 246) until thermometer inserted diagonally through foil at least 2 inches into center of meat registers 155 to 160°F, 1¾ to 2 hours. Remove foil and cool terrine in mold on a rack, 30 minutes.
- Weight terrine:**
- ▶ Put terrine in mold in a cleaned baking pan. Put a piece of parchment or wax paper over top of terrine, then place on top of parchment another same-size terrine mold or a piece of wood or heavy cardboard cut to fit inside mold and

wrapped in foil. Put 2 to 3 (1-pound) cans on terrine or on wood or cardboard to weight terrine. Chill terrine in pan with weights until completely cold, at least 4 hours. Continue to chill terrine, with or without weights, at least 24 hours to allow flavors to develop.

To serve:

▶ Run a knife around inside edge of terrine and let stand in mold in a pan with 1 inch of hot water (to loosen bottom) 2 minutes. Tip terrine mold (holding terrine) to drain off excess liquid, then invert a cutting board over terrine, reinvert terrine onto cutting board, and gently wipe outside of terrine (fatback) with a paper towel. Let terrine stand at room temperature for 30 minutes before serving, then cut into ½-inch-thick slices and serve on plates drizzled with reserved wine syrup.

Cooks' notes:

- **Terrine can be marinated (before baking) up to 24 hours.**
- **Shallots can be glazed 1 day ahead and cooled, uncovered, then chilled in cooking liquid, covered.**
- **Terrine keeps, wrapped in plastic wrap and chilled, 1 week.**👉

SEA CHANGE

Continued from page 36

urchins from offshore waters taste like a different critter altogether from the tired ones in city restaurants. The finest fish are invariably yellowfin tuna, albacore, and sea bass. They're fresh, local, and, for now, still from a sustainable fishery.

FISH

350 Harbor Drive, Sausalito, CA
415-331-FISH; 331fish.com

HIGGINS RESTAURANT & BAR
1239 S.W. Broadway, Portland, OR
503-222-9070

LE BERNARDIN

155 West 51st Street, New York
212-554-1515

PROVIDENCE

5955 Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles
323-460-4170

THE RATTLESNAKE CLUB

300 River Place Drive, Detroit
313-567-4400

RM SEAFOOD AND R BAR CAFÉ

3930 Las Vegas Boulevard South,
at Mandalay Place, Las Vegas
702-632-9300👉

HOME IS WHERE THE FALAFEL IS

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By then I'd discovered Albert's secret: He fills the holes in his heart and lessens the pain of his chosen exile by making other people happy with food (and an occasional slug of arak). At first I thought it was just me he was tending to. Then I looked around. Everyone from the BLT-and-Coke fan to the falafel-gyro-kibbeh devotee gets Albert's loving attention. Those who like his gritty, thick Lebanese coffee will have a little cup bestowed on them if they are patient and the diner isn't overflowing.

Those who prefer his thin, hand-rolled grill bread to pita—their numbers are legion—won't even have to ask for it, whether they've ordered his delicious Lebanese lamb and bean stew or a grilled cheese sandwich.

Anyone who selects a gyro will be advised that the “special gyro,” which costs no more, is better because it has Albert's parsley-laden tabbouleh on it as well as hummus. People who come in feeling crummy with a cold will be soothed by the warmth of cinnamon-whispered lentil soup or the best chicken-and-rice brew a non-grandmother ever made.

And what about deep-fried breaded pork tenderloin, that Indiana staple? Albert's is as light, crunchy, and greaseless as his falafel, which is better than any I ever tasted in San Francisco. (“Everybody uses egg. Not me.”) Not long ago, one of his regulars asked him to prepare 20 pounds of his souped-up spicy olives for a post-funeral buffet she was hosting. Albert's response: No problem.

Sometimes Albert sneaks a little plate of fried cauliflower onto the table as a complimentary appetizer. Other times, it's a piece of honey-soaked baklava that So-and-so's Lebanese mother-in-law in Illinois made over the weekend. One day he plopped down on my table a small jar of Al Wadi fig and sesame jam (from Beirut) along with a spoon and a thin round of his grill bread. Before I could say a word, he whirled around, rushed past the map of Lebanon that hangs on a wall, and disappeared behind the short-order counter of his kitchen. When he returned a few minutes later, he stood over me and asked the question whose answer, I now know, makes his distance from home and from his loved ones a little more bearable:

“You like?”👉