

what we learned this month ... behind the scenes

KITCHEN NOTEBOOK

MANY AMERICANS TEND TO THINK OF A SOUFFLÉ AS FANCY (READ 'STUFFY') FRENCH FOOD, BUT NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. IN PROVENCE, IT'S THE IDEAL VEHICLE FOR THE RUSTIC, DECIDEDLY UNSTUFFY FLAVOR OF ROASTED GARLIC. TIME TO RISE TO THE OCCASION ...



SOUFFLÉ SECRETS

There's something about serving a soufflé as a side dish rather than as a showstopping main course or dessert that ratchets down the anxiety level. The beauty of the one on page 101, developed by food editor and stylist Paul Grimes, is twofold: Diluting the rich, earthy flavor of roasted garlic with beaten egg whites turns it into something lighter, more soigné—and you can roast the garlic and make the béchamel ahead of time. A soufflé, almost by definition, involves a measure of suspense: Is it going to rise? Is it going to rise *enough*? As a consequence, much has been written about beating the egg whites properly and then knowing when to stop: The whites must stay elastic so the air bubbles trapped inside them can expand without bursting. The technique of folding is also important, though, and it's one that many home cooks find difficult, since it's not a bit like stirring. A big, wide rubber spatula is key; it's far more efficient than a smaller one. A preliminary step to folding anything, by the way, is called lightening: stirring some beaten whites into the heavier base (in this case, primarily a mixture of egg yolks and parmesan), so that the densities of the two are a little more comparable; they will combine more easily that way. In the photo at top

left, Grimes, after lightening the mixture and folding in the Gruyère, is folding in the remaining whites. "Dig deep into the center," Grimes says, as he pulls the spatula toward him. He learned his technique from the queen of soufflés—Simone "Simca" Beck, who coauthored *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* with Julia Child. "Lift up the yolk mixture from the bottom of the bowl and sweep around the side, then drag the spatula across the surface," Grimes continues, as he rhythmically turns the bowl in the opposite direction with the other hand. "You'll immediately notice a change in density. It's like blending with a palette knife." With that one image, we're reminded that Grimes was once an artist—and still is. "Simca taught me that you don't need a tall soufflé dish with a chimney-shaped collar made out of parchment paper," he explains. "A gratin dish works well, too, especially if you're serving six or eight people." Coating the inside of the dish with butter and bread crumbs (see photo at top right) simply makes the soufflé easy to spoon out. (According to food scientist Harold McGee, the claim that the crumbs give a soufflé something to hold on to as it rises isn't true.) —Jane Daniels Lear

ROMULO YANES FOOD STYLING: LILLIAN CHOU

PROFITEROLES

You might think that profiteroles—those crisp, hollow pastry puffs filled with ice cream (page 117)—are a complicated dessert because they're mostly found in restaurants, but you'd be wrong. In fact, *pâte à choux*—the egg-rich dough profiteroles are made from—is the dirty little secret of the pastry world because it's so quick, easy, and versatile. (It's also used for *éclairs* and cheesy *gougères*.) Neither finicky nor delicate, it's a dough that requires a vigorous beating over heat; the mixture will look loose and lumpy, but it will coalesce into a smooth mass that pulls away from the side of the pan, which tells you that step is complete. A pastry bag is the most efficient way to ensure even mounds of dough. However, pointy peaks, which tend to burn, will form on top of each mound, so tap them down with a finger dipped in water (to prevent sticking) before baking. —J.D.L.



SAUCE PRIMER These French classics don't take days of preparation or years of experience. In fact, with a basic understanding of a few principles, you can turn a weekday meal into a special occasion in no time at all ...



BÉARNAISE SAUCE

All sauces are essentially a balancing act between acid, fat, and aromatics. Take the béarnaise shown here. Its eggy, buttery richness is tempered by lemon juice and white wine, and it's flavored with tarragon—added at the beginning of cooking to give resonance, as well as at the end, for a burst of freshness—and sweet shallots. Béarnaise, like its cousin hollandaise, is an **emulsion**: The yolks are whisked (to incorporate air) into the vinegar mixture over low heat, and butter is added bit by bit, making the resulting sauce light and satiny. It adds a sleek, chic elegance to steaks (page 112), lamb, or grilled vegetables.



DIJON PAN SAUCE

Once you get the hang of a quick pan sauce, you'll soon become adept at improvising, since the brown bits of sticky caramelized juices left behind when meat—any meat—is cooked are instant bullets of flavor. The technique used here is called **deglazing**. After removing the cooked meat from the pan, add liquid (we rely on a combination of white wine and broth for the chicken recipe on page 80) and boil for two or three minutes, scraping up the brown bits with a wooden spatula to help them dissolve. Finishing the sauce with cream smooths it out, and a dollop of Dijon mustard gives it brightness and body.



RED-WINE SAUCE

In Burgundy, *sauce meurette* is commonly served over poached eggs (page 112), but it's also delicious on meat and roasted fish. It's what's known as a **reduction**: Shallots and other aromatics are boiled in red wine until the mixture is reduced, often to the consistency of syrup. The key to success is the addition of ham, bacon, and/or demi-glace (concentrated meat stock). Those proteins counteract the assertive tannins in the wine; without them, the sauce will be sour. This one is thickened and made even more mellow by a *beurre manié*, a butter-flour mixture that's whisked into the sauce toward the end of cooking. —J.D.L.