

ALEX'S MAC & CHEESE

In previous blog posts, I've mentioned how delighted I am that the next generation in our family is getting comfortable behind the stove. My young cousin Alex is a man of particular tastes, but when he finds something he loves, he likes to master it. He's always been a big fan of pasta and cheese and it was only a matter of time before he found his perfect Mac and cheese recipe. I loved watching him make this dish and hearing his preferences on texture, cheese types and what definitely should not be included.

This is the perfect type of dish that can be improvised based on your own preferences. If you're a blue cheese nut, then go for it. If you're more of a pulled pork kind of person, then throw that in too. This dish is so evil, you might as well go for broke.

INGREDIENTS (Serves 8)

1 head of garlic ($\frac{1}{2}$ to use with this dish, $\frac{1}{2}$ to reserve for other dishes)

3 tablespoons olive oil

4 tablespoons of butter

4 tablespoons of flour

2 cups of milk

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon black pepper

6 strips bacon or turkey bacon

1 cup grated parmesan cheese (large grate)

2 cups grated cheddar cheese

2 cups grated gruyere

1 lb Cavatappi pasta or elbow macaroni

2 tablespoons chopped chives for garnish

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Place the head of garlic on its side and cut it in half. Place both halves on aluminum foil and pour olive oil over the cloves. Seal the foil around the garlic and place on baking sheet. Roast in the oven for 30 minutes. Allow to cool and squeeze out garlic cloves. Chop the garlic and set half aside for other uses.

In a medium sized pot, melt the butter on medium heat. Add the flour and combine until it is a blond roux. Slowly add the milk, a bit at a time, and whisk together. Bring to a low boil until it thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon, (about 10 minutes). Add the salt, pepper and half the garlic. Taste to see if more spices are needed. Don't over salt because cheese has a lot of salt on its own.

Cook the pasta as per boxed instructions. When al dente, strain out the water and set pasta aside.

Turn down the heat under the milk mixture and keep on a simmer. Add the Gruyère and cheddar and stir until melted. Add the bacon and pasta and stir. Add Parmesan cheese right before serving. Garnish with chives.

If you are like my cousin Alex and enjoy a creamier, cheesier texture, then your Mac and cheese is ready to eat. But if you prefer a nice crust on top or if you think there might be leftovers, then place the mixture in a 9 x 12 buttered pyrex dish and place in the oven to bake for ten to twenty minutes, depending upon how crispy you like your Mac and cheese.

CHICKEN VINDALOO

For years I've been trying to make a good curry from scratch. I buy all of the spices to create flavored pastes, but there's always something missing. Although my dishes are tasty, they are nowhere near as flavorful as what I've eaten in Indian restaurants. But thanks to my favorite spice store—[Kalustyan's](#) on Lexington Avenue in NYC—they've done the hard work for me. I'm not a big proponent of semi-homemade dishes, but in this case, getting a little help is so worth it. They carry a line of different curry sauces that really add some zing to a dish. It also cuts the prep time down so much that you can make this dish in less than an hour.



INGREDIENTS

4 tablespoons olive oil or ghee

6 boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 1" cubes

1 onion, sliced

1 red pepper, chopped into $\frac{1}{2}$ " cubes

3 cloves of garlic, minced

1" knob of ginger, minced

2 teaspoons of salt

1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups basmati rice

1-13.5 oz can coconut milk

1-12 oz jar of [Kalustyan's Vindaloo Spicy Curry](#)

PREPARATION

Heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil or ghee in a large dutch oven. Add the chicken and brown for four minutes, flipping the chicken pieces over half way through. Remove from pot and set aside.

Add 1 tablespoon of olive, the onion and red pepper and sauté for 6-8 minutes or until onion is translucent and beginning to brown. Add the garlic and ginger and sauté until fragrant, about one minute. Season with salt and pepper.

Using a strainer, rinse the rice until the water runs clear. Shake the strainer to remove any excess water. Add the rice to the pot and stir until integrated.

Add the coconut milk and Vindaloo Spicy curry. Stir well. Add the chicken and stir. Bring up to a boil, then down to simmer. Cover the pot and cook for 20 minutes. Turn off the heat and let rest for 10 minutes.

Serve in bowls.

TEQUILA SURPRISE

In honor of Cinco de Mayo, it's time to break out the tequila—my go-to liquor of choice for this and most other occasions. But rather than making an ordinary margarita—which I find way too sweet—I've come up with a variation that has a nice balance and a nice kick. I use pepper infused simple syrup to zip things up. Put on your brightest colors, grab a to-go cup and enjoy!

INGREDIENTS

2 oz Tequila

1/2 oz Cointreau

1/2 oz hot pepper syrup

1/4 english cucumber, very thinly sliced

1/2 lime, juiced

Ice

PREPARATION

Pour the tequila and half of the cucumbers into a shaker. Muddle the cucumber. Add the Cointreau, hot pepper syrup, lime juice and ice. Shake vigorously.

Wet a martini glass and shake out the excess water. Arrange six of the cucumber slices against the glass like polka dots. Pour in the contents of the shaker trying not to dislodge the cucumbers, but don't worry if they slip into the drink. Add four cubes of ice to the glass. Garnish with one slice of cucumber.

WHAT'S UP DUCK?

Okay, so I wanted to have a nice recipe ready to post for this week's "Feed Me Fridays." I had high hopes for this one considering I bought a beautiful duck breast from my local Greenmarket. I wanted to do an Asian spin on Duck a l'orange, so I worked out a nice marinade. Now all I had to do was cook it. Well—things didn't go quite as expected.

I couldn't remember the best technique so I scoured the "interweb" and came upon one that sounded sensible to me. It required scoring the fat, then searing both sides in a pan first and cooking the rest to temperature in the oven. 135 is supposedly medium rare, so I aimed for that.

I did everything as suggested, but after ten minutes in the oven as required, the internal temperature was nowhere near 135. So back inside the duck went. Eventually, doubling the time in the oven, the breast finally came to temperature.

I rested it and then began to slice it. My heart sank. I wasn't slicing into a duck breast, I was slicing into a leather shoe. I had way overcooked it. Not only was the technique flawed, but I had made things worse by not believing the timing. It was an epic fail and I don't think I deserve points for trying on this one. I attempted to make it look pretty on the plate, but as soon as we took a bite, there was a lot of heavy chewing going on.

The next day, I did a better job of scouring the internet and cross-referenced a few recipes for how to cook a duck breast. It seems there are a few varied options, none of which I actually accomplished. But I'll give it a go again someday.

One note – the next day I sliced the leftover meat paper thin,

put small pieces on crackers and topped them with some Brie. Into the microwave for 15 seconds and I had a very nice hors d'oeuvre. By slicing the meat so thin, I was able to distract people from having to chew so vigorously. As I always say, why waste?

BRIAN'S DUTCH BABY PANCAKE

For years on our annual family ski trips, all the adults have shared the cooking chores as the next generation did their part to devour everything in sight. But as time has marched on, the day has finally come when that generation has stepped up to the stove.

My young cousin Brian—who has always been an enthusiastic eater—has perfected this no fuss Dutch Baby Pancake recipe. I admire his practicality of messing up only one pan by just placing all the ingredients directly into the baking dish and mixing it all together. His philosophy—why dirty an extra bowl if you don't have to?

He's also adaptive. We were staying at a rental house and the closest thing to a baking dish was an old style roasting pan. Now, I don't know if it was the oval shape or what, but the pancake did rise in a most unusual pattern. We all agreed it resembled the Rocky Mountains that surrounded us and it was meant to be. It certainly didn't affect the flavor—the dish was delicious and gone within minutes.



INGREDIENTS (serves 4)

4 tablespoons butter, melted

6 eggs

1 cup milk

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 cup flour

1 dash salt

zest of one lemon

Confectioners sugar (for garnish)

Lemon juice (for garnish)

Maple syrup (for garnish)

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Using a 9 x 12" baking dish, place the butter in the pan and melt it in the oven. This is not only a critical ingredient, but it will also serve as a way to grease your pan too. Once melted, remove from oven and allow to cool for a few minutes. Add a small amount of milk and stir to make sure butter has cooled down. Add the remaining milk, eggs and vanilla and combine.

Add flour, salt and lemon zest. Mix until all ingredients are combined and there are no lumps.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes until it's fluffy and edges are golden brown and curling over.

To serve, cut into pieces and sprinkle with confectioners sugar, a few drops of lemon juice, and as much maple syrup as desired.