

Cioppino with Saffron Rouille

Serves 6:

Ingredients

2 medium onions
4 garlic cloves
1 small fennel, tops removed
1 green bell pepper
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 bay leaf
2 tablespoons harissa, or tomato paste with a pinch of cayenne pepper
1 1/2 cups dry white wine
1 28 ounce can crushed tomatoes
1 large sprig basil
2 cups clam juice, or fish stock
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
24 littleneck clams
1 pound large shrimp (16-20 count)
1 pound sea scallops
1 pound red snapper or halibut fillet
1 pound king crab legs (optional)
1/2 pound squid (optional)
3 tablespoons flat-leaf parsley
3 tablespoons basil

Saffron Rouille:

2 red bell peppers
1 jalapeño
6 garlic cloves
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 cup fresh bread or bread crumbs
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
freshly ground black pepper
pinch of saffron
3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

Sourdough Croutes:

sourdough bread
extra virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove, halved lengthwise

Preparation

Chop onion, garlic, fennel and green bell pepper.

In a large, heavy duty soup pot or dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium heat.

Add onion, garlic, oregano, and bay leaf and season with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Sauté for 3 to 4 minutes, until onion is fragrant.

Add chopped fennel and green pepper to pot.

Cook for 3 to 5 more minutes, until vegetables are soft and translucent.

Stir the harissa, or tomato paste mixed with cayenne pepper, into the stew base.

Pour in white wine, bring to a boil, and cook until wine is reduced by half.

Add crushed tomatoes and a large sprig of fresh basil.

Stir in clam juice or fish stock and bring to a simmer.

Cover pot and cook for 30 minutes, until sauce has cooked down a bit and the flavors have melded.

Taste the sauce and adjust seasoning.

At this point, you can turn the off the heat and reserve until a few minutes before serving.

Bring back to the simmer before continuing.

Prepare Saffron Rouille: place red bell pepper to char over a flame, turning until black on all sides.

Place the pepper in a small bowl; repeat with second pepper.

Alternatively, place peppers on a baking sheet under a broiler and char them, turning as they blacken.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the peppers steam for about 20 minutes.

When cool enough to handle, scrape charred skins from peppers.

Core and seed them, then roughly chop.

Seed and chop a jalapeño pepper.

Chop garlic cloves.

Mash the garlic, with a teaspoon of kosher salt, in a mortar and pestle until it forms a paste.

You can also smash garlic with salt using the side of a chef's knife.

Place peppers and garlic paste in a small food processor or blender.

Add the pulp of fresh bread or bread crumbs to the processor.

Pulse until combined.

Mix in lemon juice and freshly ground black pepper.

In a small bowl, bloom a pinch of saffron in some of the olive oil; add to the rouille.

Slowly add rest of olive oil to the rouille, pulsing until combined into a thick sauce or mayonnaise.

Refrigerate until ready to serve; this can be made a day ahead.

Prepare the fish for the stew: rinse and scrub the clams.

Place them in a bowl and cover with fresh, cool water.

Sprinkle with a pinch of flour--this will help clams "cough up" any grit they may be holding on to.

Shell and devein shrimp, leaving the tail joint intact.

Remove tough muscle from the side of the sea scallops (if there are any) using a paring knife.

Slice the scallops in half crosswise.

Cut the fish fillet into 1 1/2 inch strips.

If using crab legs, cut them into 3 inch pieces.

If using squid, be sure to remove the cartilage from the center and cut into rings.

Add clams to the simmering sauce and cook for 5 minutes, until their shells begin to pop open.

Add rest of seafood and fish and cook 5 minutes more, stirring occasionally, until fish is cooked through.

Remove any clams that haven't opened.

Make Sourdough Croutes: thinly slice sourdough bread and toast until golden brown.

Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and rub with a half clove of garlic.

Serve cioppino in large shallow bowls, making sure to evenly distribute the fish and seafood.

Sprinkle with finely chopped parsley and basil.

Serve the sourdough croutes and a bowl of the Saffron Rouille alongside.

The rouille can be spread on croutes or stirred into stew for an extra kick of flavor.

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