

The art of food — and a clam chowder recipe

By DAVID CAMPICHE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

A friend and I sat on a beach approach eating an “Art” burger from the Corral Drive In, north of Long Beach, Wash., watching a storm churn up the surf like a bowl of whipped cream. We discussed the dilemma of defining art.

When asked what he felt about some patron paying the staggering sum of \$142 million for a Francis Bacon painting some years ago, Jim replied: I can go down to Sid’s Market and get bacon for a lot less than that. Besides, I thought Bacon wrote all the Shakespeare stuff.

Speaking further about what he defines as art, Jim proclaimed: Music is ink on paper, except when performed, and then it is quickly gone. A movement created for the moment. Ephemeral.

Is music art? I asked.

Of course, he replied.

Why, then, isn’t food? It’s ephemeral, too. It is eaten up quickly! Why can’t food reach, in your opinion, that lofty position known as art?

I’ll admit, some of the difference is simply presentation. Let us examine a bowl of chowder. Understand, there is chowder, and then there is chowder.

As in most good soup, the chief facilitator is homemade stock. A cook can simply pour canned clam juice into the base or roux, or one can steam open mussels with white wine and butter and herbs, reserving the clams and adding the mussel broth to the chowder. Stand back and be intoxicated!

Roux is butter and flour heated and creamed equally, then used as a thickener. Fresh razor clams make an enormous difference (little neck clams are superb). Garnish of chopped fennel or chives adds

texture and beauty and an added taste distinction. Naturally, there are sautéed onions and garlic. Cook them slowly until they caramelize. Add small diced potatoes. A dollop of crème fraiche highlights the flavor.

If you serve the chowder in a lovely porcelain bowl with a wide rim, a sprinkling of paprika or chopped parsley enhances the plate feel, makes it stand out like oil on canvas. That doesn’t change the taste — or does it? Pretty food encourages, or perhaps enhances, taste. Jim mentioned an art show in Rouen, France, that exhibited art frames — just the frames. Everything is beautiful in its own way, he proclaimed. And the framing of food can be an art.

Jim again: Taco Bell is as good a place as the Ritz-Carlton, if that’s your opinion. So much depends of what resonates with the shopper.

So, let’s leave it there — in kind of a twilight zone with that ephemeral art known as cuisine — with a surefire chowder recipe.

CLAM-MUSSEL CHOWDER

Ingredients:

- A limit (15) chopped razor clams diced, or two pounds of little necks steamed, liquid reserved
- Two pounds of fresh mussels in the shell, steamed with liquid reserved
- ½ pound of sliced bacon, cooked medium-done, strained and reserved
- 3 large potatoes diced into fine (quarter inch) pieces and par-boiled, strained and reserved
- 2 cups of diced celery
- 1 large onion, small diced
- 2 tablespoons of fine minced garlic
- ¼ cup of flour
- Finely chopped parsley, chives and



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Clam chowder, fancily prepared.

- fennel to taste
- The stock from the steamed mussels and little necks
- Butter and olive oil, three tablespoons each
- Salt to taste
- Cream, two cups
- Cup of white wine or sherry
- Whole milk or half-and-half to thin the roux. Up to four cups
- Sauté onion and garlic in butter and

olive oil. Add celery. Add cooked bacon. Stir until the veggies are translucent. Add the flour and stir gently and consistently for two to three minutes. Slowly pour in the juices and wine, then the milk and cream. Stir while the sauce thickens. Add clams and potatoes. Add half the herbs and reserve the rest as garnish. Salt. Serve in wide-rimmed bowls and garnish with remaining herbs and the paprika. Cornbread is a fine accompaniment. 