

Warm up with a Thai seafood stew

BY DAVID CAMPICHE

Our Columbia-Pacific region is a hotspot for procuring some of the best and freshest seafood in the country, if not the world. Many of these treasures are accessible from local markets or personal gathering. Crab is caught in the Columbia River. Squid and shrimp are harvested by neighborhood fishers. Trout of shimmering colors swim nearby in streams and lakes.

Salmon in season are a gift for fishermen and the recipients of a salmon dinner. When in season, razor clams can be dug on our lovely beaches. Little necks on a low tide. Need I mention oysters? Much of the country's harvest comes from Willapa Bay. Add white fish: sturgeon, halibut, tuna, rock fish and cod. The list plays out like a trout on a line.

And what can be better with this cornucopia of seafood than a seafood stew? I have prepared it as a fusion of sorts, with a bit of a French touch along with additional elements from an old family recipe. Strike the spices and the coconut milk and add fresh herbs (fennel is superb), orange peel and a splash of champagne (reserve the rest for dinner) and you have a bouillabaisse.

So, anticipating the promise of a mouth-watering repast, let us concoct the stew with squid, scallops, mussels and shrimp, but to be sure, there are dozens of combinations, including salmon and clams. I do not generally use oysters — save those for an oyster stew or eat them raw as an appetizer. But remember: fresh is best, particularly when it comes to seafood.

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup olive oil
- One tablespoon each, finely chopped fresh garlic and ginger
- A smattering of dried chili peppers or three whole Sichuan peppercorns
- ½ large sweet onion, diced
- Six stalks asparagus, cut diagonally into one inch pieces
- Two stalks of celery also diagonally cut in ½ inch lengths
- One teaspoon fish sauce
- Two cups homemade stock, vegetable or seafood
- Two cups tomato sauce
- Few dabs of hot sauce.
- ¼ cup of sweet chili sauce
- One tablespoon soy sauce,
- Juice from ½ lime
- ½ cup red or white wine
- 19 ounce can of coconut milk
- Teaspoon of curry paste, added to ¼ cup



The simmering stew.

- water
- 4 cups of precooked soba noodles
- ½ cup each of seafood assortment Seafood to your liking
- Four kaffir leaves
- Chopped cilantro (optional)

Preparation:

Sauté onion, garlic and ginger in ¼ cup of virgin olive oil. Add celery, then the asparagus. Sauté lightly for one minute. Add chilis and spices and ½ cup of red wine, and then the stock. Marry in tomato sauce and curry, a splash of fish sauce and seasonings, then soy and lime juice. Add coconut milk. Simmer away, thinning with more stock if necessary. Do not boil. Add the kaffir leaves. At the last minute, add the seafood and serve. Do not overcook, we want the seafood tender.

Prepare the soba noodles separately in boiling water. Do not overcook. Drain. Put separately into the serving bowls. Turn off the burner. Ladle the stew over the noodles.

A dollop of crème fraiche is a wonderful addition. So is Thai basil. Or garnish with a kaffir leaf or chopped cilantro. Serves six.



Photos by David Campiche

The finished dish.

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