

THAI MUSSEL CHOWDER

Recipe makes for a soul-warming meal

BY DAVID CAMPICHE

I've been preparing chowders for over 50 years. No two are quite the same.

I collect recipes but generally don't follow them to the tee. One can adjust the recipe or substitute ingredients anytime.

Recently, I stumbled across a sack of Penn Cove mussels at Costco. I could hardly wait to get home to cook them.

Years ago, my wife Laurie Anderson and I cooked mussels for James Beard. He was quite a fan of these clams. I collected the bivalves on the fishing rocks below North Head Lighthouse. We steamed them open with white wine, butter and herbs.

We baked them in their shells after grinding the meat into a kind of forcemeat. We added grated Manchego cheese, herbs and breadcrumbs. We later tossed some of the mussels with pasta and crème fraîche. This was an extended mussel dinner. The results were sublime.

I used the Penn Cove mussels to create chowder. We have a family member who must steer clear of lactose. I substituted coconut milk for cream and olive oil for butter.

The nectar that sweats from the clams and wine is the base of this delicious chowder.

Ingredients:

- 3 to 4 pounds of fresh mussels, steamed open
 - ½ large onion, diced into ¼-inch portions
 - Four stalks of celery, diced into ⅛-inch portions
 - One large red or yellow pepper, diced into ¼-inch portions
 - 2 cups white wine
 - 3 kefir leaves (discard before serving)
 - 1 tablespoon of curry paste (Mae Ploy Yellow Curry Paste is a good option)
 - 1 tablespoon miso
 - 1 tablespoon of finely minced ginger
 - Three medium potatoes, par-boiled and diced
 - Three sprigs of fresh fennel, finely diced
 - Three sprigs of fresh rosemary
 - All the stock from the steamed clams
 - Two 11-ounce cans of coconut milk
 - 6 tablespoons of rice flour (roux)
 - 2 tablespoons butter or olive oil
 - Optional: Tabasco juice or cayenne to taste.
- I prefer a bit of heat to balance out the sweetness of the coconut milk.



David Campiche

The nectar that sweats from the clams and wine is the base for the Thai mussel chowder.

Preparation:

Steam open the mussels with the white wine, rosemary sprigs with either butter or olive oil in a pan with a lid. Marry in the curry and miso paste. After the shells open, cool. Later, remove the clams from the shells. Do not throw out even a drop of the

precious nectar.

Sauté celery, onions and minced ginger together. When translucent, add chopped peppers. Slowly cook for a couple more minutes. Meld in the flour to make a roux. Thin with the stock (mussel nectar) and stir for a couple more minutes. Toss in the

cooked potatoes and the steamed clams. Add the coconut milk, kefir leaves and fennel. Salt to your liking.

Champagne or pinot grigio are perfect accompaniments.

Help yourself and be inventive. Remember, the world is your clamshell.