

Butter My Biscuit

Food musings of a southern ex-pat



Courtbouillon for Dummies

I confess, I'm still stuck on the Louisiana thing ... which I didn't foresee some weeks ago. And what was originally planned as my non-BMB cooking adventure last weekend turned out to be a worthy and interesting post subject. Or so I think.



Many of you are reading this and thinking, "Courtbouillon?" What the heck is that? Well, it's sort of a fish soup, burgeoning on a stew ? all with a NOLA twist. And no, we won't utter that Rachel Ray-ism of "stoup" which seems so déclassé. I was introduced to courtbouillon via an Emeril Lagasse episode on Food Network some years ago, and gave the recipe a try way back then. Loved it. Unfortunately, I lost track of the recipe over the years, forgetting what a great meal it was ? until I was cruising my Louisiana and Cajun cookbooks recently. Given that it's still winter, the warm spicy soup's appeal beckoned for a do-over. It's also easy on the fats and calories ? all the better for the chubby challenged. First, a little history ... compliments of "[Tales of the Courtbouillon](#)" which is straight off of [Emerils.com](#). Seems that the etymology of court-bouillon [pronounced *cour-bouillon*] was a French poaching liquid for fish, specifically a Lenten broth that included wine, butter, spices and herbs. In fact, this article cites bouillabaisse as a cousin to court-bouillon, reinterpreted to reflect the seaport of Marseilles where saffron, tomatoes and pepper were incorporated ? as well as oil (e.g. the Provençal rouille). But as the greater Louisiana area was populated by the influx of French and Spanish settlers along with the Acadians and African slaves, the Louisiana rendition became localized as well. There it started with a roux for flavor & thickening, was tomato based, then enhanced with local bounty from the marshes: shrimp, crab, redfish and catfish along with ground sassafras leaves (filé) and okra.

Distinction to its European counterpart was made through spelling (one word ?courtbouillon,' dropping the hyphen), as well as pronunciation [pronounced **cou-be-yon**]. You can usually find a number of different recipes for it, many of them redfish based. But since the fishmongers of New England don't import redfish into cod country, I went with another standby that is available: monkfish *aka* "poor man's lobster." Honestly, I think any sturdy white fish will do, so don't feel hemmed into monkfish. I finally found the original recipe that I tried years ago, and it is available on [Emerils.com](#).

So what does this mysterious *Cou-Be-Yon* taste like? To me it's the essence of everything Creole; tomatoes, peppers and onion dominate the palate with rustic appeal. The color is a sultry, muddy, red ? yet thick enough to call opaque. But please note: courtbouillon is also quite spicy! The kind of spicy that you feel on the back of your throat as you swallow, but doesn't require a glass of milk to counter the heat. Then, just when you think you've locked on the flavor profile in your mind, you taste a smoky, nutty under-note which I attribute to the dark roux. If you are unfamiliar with making a roux, you might want to study up on that offline prior to attempting the recipe. I don't want to scare any one off from trying this; it's not rocket science. But, roux can be tricky, and this recipe utilizes the dark chocolate colored variety which can be a hair away from becoming a

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burning mess if you happen to run light on experience and technique. One can reference a number of sources, but the [Southern Gumbo Trail](#) is a great place to start, and has some pictures to help the layperson visualize how things should look along the way.

Courtbouillon is typically served over rice, but can certainly stand alone without the starch. Even better is when it's served with a clean, minerally Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc. **COU-BE-YON!**

"Monkfish Courtbouillon"

Adapted from [Emerils.com](#) by Emeril Lagasse

Soup Ingredients

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- 1½ pounds monkfish tails, cleaned
 - Essence (recipe follows)
 - 1/3 cup vegetable oil
 - 1/3 cup flour
 - 1 cup chopped celery
 - 1 cup chopped onions
 - ½ cup chopped green bell pepper
 - 2 mild green chilies or banana peppers, chopped fine (see note below)
 - 2 bay leaves
 - 1 Tbsp minced garlic
 - 2 cups chopped, peeled tomatoes and seeded tomatoes (or 2 cups chopped canned tomatoes)
 - ½ cup white wine
 - 2 cups chicken stock
 - ¾ tsp salt
 - ¼ tsp cayenne pepper
 - ¼ cup chopped green onions (scallions)
 - 2 Tbsp chopped parsley
 - 1½ cups cooked white rice

"Essence" Ingredients (Emeril's Creole Seasoning)

- 2½ Tbsp paprika
- 2 Tbsp salt
- 2 Tbsp garlic powder
- 1 Tbsp black pepper
- 1 Tbsp onion powder
- 1 Tbsp cayenne powder
- 1 Tbsp dried oregano
- 1 Tbsp dried thyme

Combine all spice ingredients thoroughly and store in an airtight jar or container. Yield: about 2/3 cup.

Cut the fish into 2-inch pieces. Season with 1 tablespoon of the Essence and set aside.

In a large, heavy stockpot, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the flour and stir constantly with a heavy wooden spoon until it becomes a dark roux the color of chocolate, about 15 to 20 minutes. Add the celery, onions and bell peppers, and cook,

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stirring, until the vegetables are wilted, 6 minutes. Add the bay leaves and garlic, and cook for 2 minutes. Add the tomatoes, wine, stock, salt and cayenne, and stir well. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer uncovered, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 30 minutes. Add the fish and cook until it flakes with a fork, about 10 to 15 minutes.

Stir in the green onions and parsley during the last 5 minutes of cooking time. Remove the bay leaves and serve hot in soup bowls ladled over rice. Yield: 4 servings

PERSONAL NOTES: You'll notice that I made the addition of 2 chilies to this recipe. When searching for this recipe, I found it on Food Network as well, where there were slight differences to the recipe that is currently published on Emerils.com ? one being the chilies. Since I love heat, I did go ahead and add it, even though the link above to Emerils.com does not include it.

Additionally, since I didn't want to eat monkfish courtbouillon for a week straight (and cooked fish doesn't freeze well), I cut back on the monkfish quantity by half and then put half of the soup base in a container for freezing (and that was done prior to poaching the fish). That way, I can thaw the soup base for future use, buying fresh seafood for the latter run.

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