



Simplicity in the Kitchen: A Chef's take on Cooking for Passover *From Executive Chef Todd Aarons, Tierra Sur Restaurant*

Simple remains the best. Uncluttered dishes with a focus on wholesome, unfettered flavors help paint dishes that might make us think of a Norman Rockwell painting. At home for my family, these are the dishes that emerge from our humble kitchen. Their techniques and the mastering of them are the very pillars of the culinary world. They are the essential tools that fill up all the toolboxes of great cooks and chefs alike – from my grandmother to Escoffier. The technique of braising is forever like a magic wand, filling pots with the sweet ambrosia of pot roasted meats and succulent vegetables. These dishes evoke the very essence of family, and especially during Passover, the remembrance of tradition.

A modest one-pot meal of a braised piece of beef shoulder can become the soul warming dish of a family's fond memory of dinner together; the smells and tastes that embellish our shared good times. Braised beef, or in French, *boeuf en daube*, is better known in America as a pot roast. A braise employs a moist heat cooking method that will slowly break down connective tissue and sinew, and then increases the body of the red wine enlivened broth it is cooked in. The vessel in which this occurs is a daubière. A sturdy casserole pot with a concave lid was used in simpler times, when real fired coals were used on top and surrounding the daubière to entrap its heat. A cast iron Dutch oven or enameled iron roaster are the best. I'm sure if you visit your grandmother's kitchen, you can excavate one from the depths of the pan cabinet, one that is already seasoned with history. Our journey starts with simple ingredients – first the meat. I prefer a fatty piece of boneless beef shoulder or chuck, and even large pieces of short ribs cut into 3 inch bone segments. All of these muscles are well used and tougher so they benefit from the long slow cooking time.

During Passover, which begins this year with the first Seder on the evening of March 29, the term *chometz* is used for all food and drink made from leavened wheat, barley, rye, oats, spelt or their derivatives. They are forbidden during Passover and we take special care to avoid *chometz*. Thus, as a wonderful accompaniment to the braised beef, I serve this gnocchi recipe using matzah flour. They are a great representation of the dish, which typically uses wheat flour. Pair this meal with a bottle of 2007 Herzog Special Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon from Alexander Valley (SRP \$38) and enjoy the memories. Happy Passover!

Braised Beef Shoulder

4-5 lb. piece of boneless beef shoulder, tied with butcher string to make it a more uniform shape

Marinade:

4 cups red wine such as Baron Herzog Merlot

8 crushed black peppercorns

Shallots, sliced

Bay leaves

sprigs thyme

2 cloves garlic

1 carrot

¼ cup brandy

Aromatics:

carrots peeled and cut into ¼ inch rounds
celery stalks cut into ¼ inch pieces
2 medium Spanish onions julienned
cloves garlic sliced
¼ cup tomato concasse or 2 tablespoons tomato paste
bouquet garni of ; thyme sprigs, parsley, bay leaf, and outer leek leave tied into a bundle
3 Tablespoons olive oil
Sea salt and coarsely ground black peppercorns

Liquid:

Strained cooked marinade plus 3 cups red wine
Broth to cover 1/3 of beef roast
Red wine vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 325°F. Add all marinade ingredients to a pot and bring to a boil. Simmer to reduce by a quarter. Let cool and place roast inside marinade, refrigerate for at least 24 hours, turning at 12 hours. Dry the meat from marinade and liberally season with sea salt and black peppercorn. Reserve the marinade. Inside your roasting pot heat up the olive oil and add the beef. Sear all sides of the roast until you reach a deep rich brown color. Remove roast to a separate plate. Add your aromatics to the render beef fat left in the pot and sauté until lightly browned and translucent. Add the tomato paste and continue to cook until the tomato turns a rich brown color. Nestle roast back into the vegetables. Strain reserved marinade over the roast while pot is on a medium flame. Add the new wine and simmer until all alcohol has dissipated. Pour in broth to cover at least 1/3 the roast. Add your bouquet garni bundle and cover with a piece of parchment paper then place lid over pot. Place pot into preheated oven and continue to cook for approximately 2 hours. Check doneness with a wooden skewer. You should be able to pierce meat and easily pull out skewer. If it is not ready continue to cook and check at 45 minute intervals. Serves 6.

Potato and Porcini Mushroom Gnocchi

3 cups of baked potato peeled, fed through a potato ricer
¾ cup of matzah cake flour, plus 3 Tablespoons for dusting the table
3 Tablespoons dried ground porcini (cèpes) mushrooms
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
2 teaspoons salt
1 Tablespoon olive oil

On a flat tabletop sprinkle some of the matzah flour and place the potatoes on top. While potatoes are still warm, make a well in the middle of them. Pour in matzah flour, porcini dust, eggs and salt. With a fork slowly mix eggs with the flour and work into the potatoes. With your hands, fold mixture until it is homogenous. The dough should be slightly sticky, if it is to wet sprinkle additional matzah flour over and work it in. The dough should be firm but do not overworked. Roll the dough into a three inch cylinder. With a knife cut a 1 inch slice and on a well dusted part of the table roll into a 1 inch thick cylinder. At every 1 inch intervals cut and slightly pinch gnocchi with thumb and forefinger. Roll pieces into some matzah flour and bring a pot of water to a boil. Salt the water to taste and place gnocchi into the boiling water. Once gnocchi rise to the top and have cooked for approximately 5 minutes, strain from pot with a slotted spoon into a flat plate. Drizzle a little olive oil over in order that they do not stick to each other. To serve: Heat up a sauté pan with a Tablespoon of olive oil and place 10-12 gnocchi into the hot pan. Brown on each side for approximately 2 minutes. Serve on each plate with the braised beef.