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### THE RECIPES

As told to FRANCINE MAROUKIAN

#### 1 MICHAEL MINA'S BUTTER-POACHED BONE-IN TOP LOIN with Truffled Macaroni and Cheese

Serves two. Prep time: 15 minutes (plus at least 30 minutes to clarify butter). Cooking time: 45 minutes.

- 2 bone-in top loin steaks, 16 to 20 oz each (about 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 inches thick), generously seasoned with coarse salt and ground black pepper
- 1 batch clarified butter\*
- 8 sprigs fresh thyme
- 3 shallots, peeled and coarsely chopped
- a few garlic cloves, peeled and smashed

In the top of a makeshift double boiler (a deep skillet just large enough to hold the steaks, sitting on top of a stockpot of simmering water), bring clarified butter to between 140 and 150 degrees, using the probe of an instant meat thermometer to measure temperature. To stabilize the temperature, keep water at a gentle simmer throughout, and regularly check the butter's temperature with the meat thermometer. (Don't let the probe touch the bottom of the pan, because that will give you a false reading.)

Add thyme, shallots, garlic, and steaks. For every inch of thickness, poach the meat for 30 minutes (internal temperature should be 115 to 125 degrees). (Note: If butter doesn't totally cov-

er steaks, flip steaks halfway through poaching.) Remove steaks, dripping off excess butter. Re-season steaks with salt and pepper and transfer to a very hot cast-iron pan or hot grill. Sear on each side to develop a brown crust, about two minutes total. Serve immediately.

#### \*CLARIFIED BUTTER

In a heavy-bottomed stockpot over very low heat, warm 3 lbs unsalted butter, cut into small pieces. Three things will happen: The milk solids will rise to the top as foam. The water in the butter will settle to the bottom. In the middle will be what you want: the fat. When all butter is melted, skim and discard foam and use a ladle to transfer the butter fat—the very yellow liquid—to a clean container. (When the liquid you're ladling out starts becoming much lighter in color, you're done.) Discard water.

#### TRUFFLED MACARONI AND CHEESE

- 1 lb dry elbow macaroni
- 2 tbsp canola oil
- 2 bone-in skinless chicken thighs, seasoned with salt and pepper and lightly dusted with flour
- 1 yellow onion, peeled and sliced
- 1 garlic clove, peeled and smashed

- small bunch fresh thyme
- 3 tbsp flour
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1/4 cup grated Asiago cheese
- 3 rounded tbsp grated Parmesan
- 1 rounded tbsp crumbled blue cheese
- 1 tbsp white-truffle oil (or more to taste)

Cook macaroni according to instructions on package. Set aside.

In a heavy-bottomed pot, heat canola oil over medium heat. Add chicken thighs and brown, turning once, three to four minutes. Remove and set aside (not fully cooked at this point). Add onion, garlic, and thyme and cook until onion is transparent, four to five minutes.

Add flour and cook, stirring frequently, for another two minutes. Return chicken to pot, add stock, and bring to a simmer, scraping bottom of pot to remove any brown bits. Simmer gently to thicken, about 15 minutes. Remove thighs, now fully cooked, and set aside.

Whisk cream into sauce and simmer to thicken, at least five minutes. Strain sauce into a large bowl (discarding onion, garlic, and thyme sprigs) and whisk in cheese immediately. Pick chicken meat from the bones and stir into sauce, along with the macaroni. Season to taste. Just before serving, stir in the truffle oil.

Michael Mina is the chef of StripSteak in Las Vegas and XIV, opening in Los Angeles next month.

★ THE ESQUIRE ALMANAC OF STEAK ★

#### 2 BILL RODGERS'S FILET MIGNON AU POIVRE with Hash Browns

Serves two. Prep time: 15 minutes. Cooking time: 45 minutes.

- 1 1/2 tbsp whole black peppercorns
- 2 filet mignon, approximately 8 oz each (about two inches thick)
- coarse salt
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp minced shallots
- 3 1/2 tbsp brandy
- 3 tbsp demi-glace (a concentrated brown-sauce reduction available at Whole Foods and specialty food markets)\*
- 3/4 cup heavy cream

In a pepper grinder on the loosest setting, crack the peppercorns. (You want chunks, not dust.) Dredge both sides of the steaks in the peppercorns and season with salt.

In a cast-iron pan, heat oil and butter over medium heat. When butter stops sizzling, add steaks. Cook until internal temperature is 115 to 125 degrees, about four minutes on each side. Remove steaks and cover with foil.

\*We tried this recipe once without the demi-glace. Still tasty, but use it if at all possible.

Pour out most of any remaining fat and return pan to heat. Add shallots and scrape up the bits of meat and pepper with a wooden spoon. After ten seconds, pull the pan from the heat and slowly add 3 tbsp brandy, keeping your face away from the pan—the brandy fumes can ignite.

Return pan to heat and tilt it toward the burner until brandy ignites. Stir and scrape again. Reduce brandy until it's syrupy, add demi-glace, and cook 30 seconds more. Add cream and continue to cook, constantly whisking, three to five minutes. Add a touch of salt and the remaining 1/2 tbsp brandy.

#### KEENS' HASH BROWNS

- 3/4 lb small Yukon gold potatoes (about 4), washed but not peeled
- 1 1/2 tbsp coarse salt
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup diced Spanish onion
- 1 tsp chopped garlic (about 2 cloves)
- 1 tsp chopped fresh thyme

- 1 tsp chopped fresh rosemary
- 2 tsp chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Put the potatoes in a pot, cover with cold water by two inches, add 1 tbsp salt, and bring to a simmer.

While the potatoes are cooking (they'll take about 30 minutes), heat half the oil and butter in a small sauté pan over medium heat. Add onion, garlic, and 1/2 tsp salt and cook until the onion begins to caramelize, about eight minutes. Set aside.

When potatoes are cooked (a toothpick inserted should offer no resistance), drain them and put into a large bowl. Add onion mixture and herbs and mix with a wooden spoon just until the potatoes break up and the onions and herbs are incorporated. (It should be chunky.) Add fresh pepper to taste.

With your hands, form two loose patties (or more, if there's enough mixture) about the size of your palm. In a nonstick pan, heat the remaining vegetable oil and butter until foamy. Add the hash browns and brown on one side, three to four minutes. Flip to the other side and place in oven until the second side is crisp, eight to ten minutes.

Bill Rodgers is the executive chef at Keens Chop House in New York City.

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### DAVE WALZOG'S BARBECUE-SPICE- RUBBED SKIRT STEAK with Charred Onions and Jalapeños

Serves four. Prep time: 15 minutes (plus two hours to marinate). Cooking time: 30 minutes.

Combine 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar, 2 tbsp cider vinegar, 2 tbsp corn oil, and 1/2 cup ketchup in a bowl. Add two 16-oz skirt steaks and marinate for two hours. Remove steaks, blot excess marinade with a paper towel, and rub both sides with barbecue spice rub.

#### SPICE RUB

- 2 tbsp chile powder
- 2 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp Spanish smoked paprika (La Chinata is the best)
- 2 tbsp light-brown sugar
- 2 tsp coarse salt
- 1 tsp dried oregano

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat 12-inch cast-iron skillet over moderately high heat until just smoking. Generously film bottom with corn oil to prevent spices from burning. Cut steaks in half so they fit in the pan. Working two pieces at a time, sear steaks for three minutes on each side, transferring to sheet pan when each batch is done. Place pan in oven and cook until internal temperature is 115 to 125, approximately six minutes. Remove from oven and let rest three or four minutes before slicing. Serve topped with charred onions and jalapeños.

#### CHARRED ONIONS AND JALAPEÑOS

- 2 white onions, peeled and sliced into one-inch slices
- 6 jalapeños
- 4 small sweet peppers (mixed red and yellow, if possible)
- corn oil (just enough to coat vegetables)
- 1 1/2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme

Lay vegetables on sheet pan, coat with corn oil, and season with salt and pepper. Heat a 12-inch cast-iron skillet over moderately high heat until just smoking. Working in small batches, char vegetables on all sides. (Alternatively, vegetables can be charred on a grill.) Return all vegetables to pan, then add butter, stock, and thyme and cook uncovered over medium heat until vegetables are fork-tender and broth is reduced to a thickened sauce, about 20 minutes.

Dave Walzog is the chef of SW Steakhouse in Las Vegas.

### THE STEAK INFORMATION CENTER By Francine Maroukian

**WHY BEEF IS AGED, AND HOW:** Beef must be aged to allow natural enzymes to break down fibrous connective tissue that holds the muscle together.

There are two ways to self-tenderize: • **Dry aging:** Expensive and time consuming. The beef is stored in temperature- and humidity-controlled coolers for up to six weeks. Moisture evaporates, improving texture and concentrating flavor. Between the evaporation and trimming of the thin coating of mold that develops, there's weight loss of up to 20 percent.

• **Wet aging:** The beef is refrigerated in vacuum-sealed plastic and allowed to tenderize in its own juices. No evaporation means no moisture is lost. Less waste but also less concentrated taste.

#### SOME TYPES OF BEEF YOU SHOULD KNOW

**ABOUT: Akashi:** Rare "red" cattle (the same breed that produces Kobe beef) raised in Texas by Heart-Brand Beef—the only herd outside of Japan. They started with eleven head of cattle, which have been guarded by armed Texas Rangers for the past fourteen years while the herd has grown to more than five thousand. (heartbrandbeef.com) • **Grass-fed:** Healthier but, some say, less flavorful than corn-fed. Raised in open pastures. Not necessarily organic. (Grain-finished cattle—which are switched from grass to grain for the last few weeks before slaughter—develop more marbling.) • **Heritage:** From rare heirloom breeds, pasture-raised on small farms without the hormones or pesti-

cides used in conventional agribusiness. • **Angus:** Aberdeen-Angus is a pure breed found in the U.S., England, Scotland, and Ireland. Certified Angus Brand is a brand name and may or may not include meat from Aberdeen-Angus.

#### THE GRADES OF MEAT:

**Prime:** What you want. Typically found only at fine butcher shops, its interlacing of intramuscular fat—like a cobweb—assures tenderness, juiciness, and flavor. • **Choice:** Pretty good. More affordable and accessible than prime, moderate marbling still yields juicy, flavorful cuts. • **Select:** You're on a plane.

#### GENERALLY IMPORTANT POINT (COOKING):

Cooking times in recipes are predicated on starting with meat that's not too cold. All steaks should be taken out of the refrigerator at least thirty minutes before cooking.

**THE PAN:** Lodge, an American maker of high-quality cast-iron pans for more than a hundred years, pre-



seasons pans in the factory (its "Logic" line). The 10.25- and 12-inch, with 2-inch depth, are most practical—any larger and, depending on the size of the steaks, the oil could run off to the sides (where there's no meat) and burn. • The pan must be hot enough to sear the meat on contact, to prevent surface moisture from creating steam, which can prevent browning. • While

some chefs say the pan should be "smoking" before adding oil, most call for the intuitive "hot but not smoking." Basically, really goddamn hot.

**A NOTE ON SALT:** When you salt meat before cooking, you need a lot—and a lot falls off—so standard coarse salt will do. After cooking is the time to use fine sea salt. It's pricey, but the large, crackly flakes are intense, so you don't need much.

**HOW TO USE OIL:** Before the meat goes in, the skillet should be filmed with oil—it should coat the surface without pooling. (You can add it when the pan is cold or hot.) At the right temperature, the oil will shimmer and gently ripple, as if you dropped a pebble into a pond. It shouldn't spatter or smoke.

**THE FINISH:** Meat's temperature keeps rising after cooking. Remove steaks from the heat when a meat thermometer reads 115 to 125 degrees. Then wait. During the all-important resting period, the temperature will rise to the medium-rare range, 120 to 130 degrees. • Get a good thermometer, preferably with a digital probe and large readout, like the Super-Fast Thermopen (four seconds with 1 percent accuracy). It is a potentially life-changing device. (thermoworks.com) • Always start with a recipe's minimum cooking time. You can't cook a steak less. • If you don't have a thermometer and you don't want to cut into the meat, press the cartilage at the tip of your nose. That's what medium rare feels like.

### ★★★ THE SOURCE: LOBEL'S ★★★

The beautiful meat in the large photographs on the preceding pages originated at Lobel's, the Manhattan butcher shop that is quite possibly the best in the world. (It is certainly the best butcher shop in the world that will send you meat overnight.) And much of the information above was supplied or corroborated by Evan Lobel, the shop's preternaturally knowledgeable proprietor. He is the fifth generation of Lobel to join the family business. We trust his steak, and we trust him. (lobels.com)