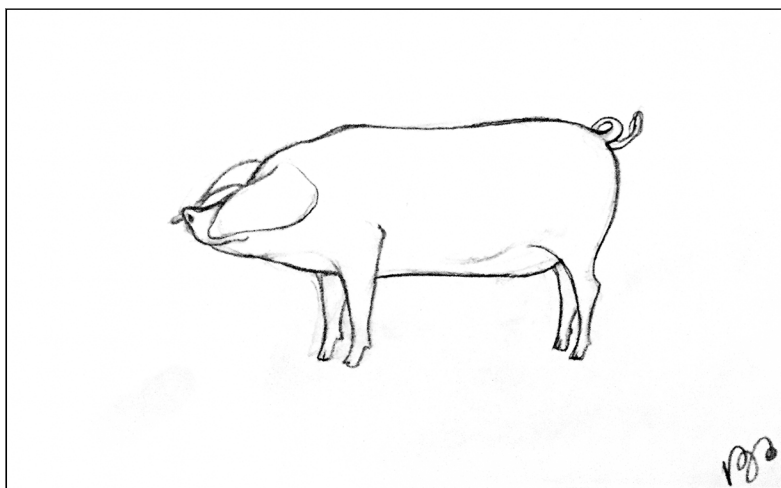


Gratin of Green Tagliolini with Braised Pig's Cheeks, Lime and Bay

Daniel de La Falaise



LIST OF INGREDIENTS:

Pig's head
Bay leaves
Lime
Milk
Anchovy
Chard

**GRATIN OF GREEN TAGLIOLINI
WITH BRAISED PIG'S CHEEKS, LIME AND BAY**

The primary concern with ingredients relates to their provenance. Vegetables, fruit and herbs are best sourced from producers who farm by natural method, which is to say in live soil, irrigated with clean water. Agriculture that rejects artificial fertilizers and chemical pesticides and fungicides in favor of traditional practices that maintain and enhance ecological harmony offers far better flavor. In cookery, a deft hand in conveying vitality from field to plate is the objective.

So let us ponder awhile upon the ingredients listed above. What have we got and what can we do with it?

Chard is the new kale, soon to be eclipsed by ramps, today's hipster vegetable of choice. Shallow steamed with ginger, or rapidly blanched in boiling water, and then seasoned with fleur de sel, the tender shoots of chard are indeed delectable.

Anchovies packed in salt offer the best eating, and are preferable to those sold in oil or brine, where rancidity often lurks. Anchovies marked for salting are prize specimens; they are gutted and air dried to purge excess liquid, then packed in salt. To prepare them – they are whole and still wearing their heads – rinse them thoroughly under cold water. Then lift the fillets off the bone; they will surrender easily. Anchovy has an affinity for parsley and garlic. Think of anchovy as a secret weapon of umami.

Milk contains everything we need. My son is seven months old and he has more than doubled in weight since birth by eating nothing else. The key factor is the diet of the mother: spring pasture makes for fine sheep, goat and cow's milk. Milk from a single herd that grazes and ruminates as one is the ideal.

Limes enjoy a rousing aura with their tart juice and fragrant zest. With most citrus fruit, taste is to be found in the zest, and flavor in the freshly squeezed juice. Think of a clementine, an orange or a grapefruit. For limes the inverse is true.

Fresh bay leaves are an essential seasoning as their flavor is graciously ephemeral. Once dried they bridge from herb to spice – devolving to a bitter taste. Fragrant green turns to bitter gray once the chlorophyll of the leaves oxidizes when exposed to heat. So the key is an abundance of fresh bay leaves, branches of them, and ideally in flower. Replace bay regularly throughout the cooking of a dish, so as to harness optimal flavor.

The prize morsels of a pig's head are the cheeks and the tender eye sockets. You can of course use the whole head from ear to nose to make brawn, which you might serve sprightly seasoned with gherkins, parsley, raw onion and mustard. Such a *salade de museau* – snozzle salad – makes a rustic delicacy befitting a summer lunch. You can breadcrumb and fry the brains for breakfast. Or, as is the habit of my octogenarian neighbors, Roger and Huguette Vern, you can make blood sausage. Add to a cauldron and set upon a gentle flame to simmer, a pig's head wearing its tongue and ears with the lungs attached by the esophagus. This meat once cooked, picked and seasoned with the blood harvested from the animal's jugular at slaughter is then encased in short lengths of thoroughly cleansed lower intestine, before being carefully poached to make blood sausage. This all makes sense to the wise Verns who live the way they grew up: timelessly and autonomously. Each year they fatten a pig and come January kill it, taking the time to process every last morsel of the animal that has been their companion into larder staples for the year ahead.

Chances are that for most of us cauldrons are few and far between, so a use of a pig's head better tailored to modern life might lead us towards improvising *a dish* that tips its hat at an Italian classic: a gratin of green tagliolini with braised pig's cheeks, seasoned with lime and bay.

Dishes are one pot wonders with texture. Whereas a stew is liquid, a dish is unctuous. This is achieved with recourse to one of the *roux* based “mother sauces” of classic French cookery. The key to assembling a standout dish lies in conjuring fragrant broth-based veloutées. These are vastly more flavorful and more nutritious than milk-based béchamel. Use lobster broth for fish pie, a dashi broth for universal umami, pork broth for a gratin of pig's cheeks, and so on.

We will need to add to our prescribed ingredient list: parsley, an onion, milled flour, mace, a little butter, egg yolks, cream and some grated parmesan. You can make the *tagliolini verde* yourself if you have spinach, eggs, flour and the elbow grease required – alternatively you will do well to purchase some ready made online from Cipriani.

Find a good butcher, the sort that might select his beasts alive and have them slaughtered to order. Ask him for a naturally farmed pig's head. Have him lift the cheeks and tender eye sockets from the head, and saw up the skull for you into fist sized bones with which you will make a broth.

Let the skull bones stand awhile in cold water to purge them of blood. Add them to a stockpot, cover with mineral water and bring this up to a gentle simmer, skimming away any impurities that rise to the water's surface. Then add bay leaves, a twist of lime zest (free of all pith), and parsley stalks. Patiently simmer the broth to taste. Strain it through muslin and set it aside.

Set a low oven and take a cocotte large enough to hold the meats. The plan is to braise the pig cheeks and eye sockets slowly in a shallow covering of broth so as to render them so tender that the meat will pull with the hand. Keep an eye on it as you go, adding a ladle of broth when and as necessary. Three hours at 150° C should suffice. Once cooked pull the meat into strips and reserve.

To make the skull broth *velouté*, think in terms of the following proportions: ten parts liquid, to one-part flour, one-part butter, plus herbs and spices. Bay and mace will be our herbs and spices in this instance, along with a seasoning of anchovy fillet and lime zest, all fused together with the help of a finely chopped onion.

Line a big pan with a thin coating of olive oil and a knob of butter; add anchovy, bay, and lime zest to infuse the fats. Then add a finely diced onion, to gently fry without coloring. Then all whilst maintaining a constant and moderate heat, steadily stir in the flour; amalgamating onion, seasonings and flour into one consistent mass. Raise the heat, and begin to add the broth; patiently and methodically whisking as you go. The objective is to progressively stretch the roux with the added liquid, *not* to have lumps of flour floating in broth. Once your *velouté* is successfully amalgamated, reduce the heat to very low indeed. Gently simmer it for a good half hour to cook out the flour, whisking often to make sure that no lumps form, nor anything stick to the pan's bottom. Change the bay leaves regularly, before they discolor and oxidize. Once the depth of flavor and desired unctuous consistency of your *velouté* is attained, strain it through a fine sieve and reserve. To finish the sauce, you will need to energetically incorporate egg yolks and whipping cream.

To assemble the dish:

Reheat the sauce, adding the double cream. Add the pulled meat, season with grated lime zest, and mace. Preheat the grill. Boil the tagliolini in abundant salted water for two minutes, then drain and add to the sauce. Sauté the pan with a flick of the wrist to combine the ingredients, rotating the top to the bottom and vice versa. Transfer to a gratin dish, grate a light covering of parmesan upon it and grill to just crisp.

Serve immediately accompanied by a chilled glass of unpasteurized milk.

Velouté Sauce

500 ml broth
50 g flour
50 g butter
The zest of a lime
A branch of bay leaves
A salted anchovy fillet
3 egg yolks
3 tablespoons of whipping cream
2 tablespoons of double cream

Pasta

Tagliolini verde (250g Cipriani)

Pig's Head

Skull sawn into fist sized bones for broth
Cheeks and eye sockets (to braise in a shallow covering of broth).

Garnish and Accompaniment

Shallow steamed tender shoots of chard (using a ladle of skull broth and a knob of ginger).
A chilled glass of fresh unpasteurized milk

