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Senia rice with eel stock and cherries (2006)

Temperature: 50°C/122°F

COMMENTS

In a region with local rice, eels and cherries, we have successfully combined these three elements to achieve a balanced new flavor. We have thus created a very original rice dish from very common ingredients. Also important is a concept we applied a lot in 2001, that of using a dissociative element in the dish. An element that breaks the established harmony to create a new harmony while simultaneously enhancing the initial one. This rice dish can be very rich, balanced, perfect... but the cherries seem like the uninvited artists. On paper, the combination is not a good one; but the fact that an element disrupts the balance, bringing acidity and sweetness, makes the dish evolve differently and provides a twist that lightens the smokiness and fat. It makes for a much greater and more complex harmony. In theory, it breaks it, only to then become the fourth leg of the table and give it stability and flare.

There is also the texture of the cherry, with its subtle crunchy membrane... The whole ensemble makes for an especially complex dish within its simplicity.

The rice cooking method is meant to make it creamy without the need for added fats. We are after the release of soluble solids from the Senia rice, so that an emulsion is created with the eel fat and stock; the texture of a *risotto* is thereby achieved without the need for an external source of fat. The result is a light *risotto*.

Another important point that sets it apart from our concept of rice dishes in 2005 is that then, we used rice simply as a vehicle for flavor, whereas now we are also seeking the rice's flavor.

SMOKED EEL STOCK

Ingredients: 370 g smoked eel, olive oil for frying, 335 g fresh eel, 1 unpeeled purple garlic clove, 20 g olive oil, 100 g spring onions, 85 g carrots, 85 g leek (the white part), 40 g chopped aloin-free (5 years old) aloe vera flesh, 6 black peppercorns, 300 g monkfish skins, 335 g dried chickpeas, 6.5 l mineral water, 4 sprigs wild rosemary from Montgó, salt.

Method: chop and fry the smoked eel in plenty of olive oil. Brown evenly, then drain well on paper towels. Gut, bleed and chop the fresh eel. Fry in the same oil as the smoked eel. Brown evenly, then drain well on paper towels. Reserve the oil.

Brown the garlic in a pot with 20 g of olive oil. Add the peeled chopped vegetables along with the aloe vera. Allow them to gain some color, then add the pepper, monkfish skins, fried eels and previously soaked chickpeas. Cover with mineral water and bring to a boil.

Skim and keep over low heat, without letting it boil, for 6 hours. At this point, add the rosemary to infuse. Steep the mixture for 6 hours more and strain. Salt to taste if necessary.

ROSEMARY OLIVE OIL

Ingredients: 2 l mild olive oil, 1 l grape seed oil, 300 g wild rosemary from Montgó.

Method: infuse the ingredients sealed sous-vide at 80°C/176°F for 1 hour. Refrigerate for 6 hours. Strain and set aside.

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CHERRY MARBLES

Ingredients: 1 kg Picota cherry pulp, 0.5 l mineral water, 30 g sugar, 12 g aloe vera powder, rosemary olive oil (see above).

Method: pour the cherry pulp and strain through a cloth. Save the solids and mix with the water. Leave for 2 hours more, decant and strain.

This process yields 1 liter of clean cherry juice. Add the sugar and aloe powder to half of the liquid and bring to a boil. Remove from heat and add the other half of clean cherry juice.

Transfer the warm liquid to a syringe and drip over the cold rosemary oil. Let the marbles cool and coagulate for 12 minutes. Strain and set aside.

RICE PREPARATION (ONIONS + CUTTLEFISH + 2 RICE COOKING PHASES)

(a) onion noisette

Ingredients: 100 g beurre *noisette*, 100 g spring onions.

Method: place the butter in a large pan and, once hot, add the finely chopped onions. Poach for 3 hours until tender and evenly browned. Strain while still hot and save all of the butter. This way, the onions have a special flavor but no fat.

(b) cuttlefish

Ingredients: 500 g fresh Mediterranean cuttlefish

Method: gut and clean the cuttlefish. Chop into small, regular dice. Set aside.

(c) 1st rice cooking phase

Ingredients: 10 g oil from frying the smoked eel, 60 g onion *noisette*, 250 g Senia rice with Valencia D.O. (Denomination of Origin), 800 g smoked eel stock.

Method: sauté the onion *noisette* in the smoked eel oil.

Add the rice, immediately followed by the hot stock. It is important not to fry the rice, to prevent it from becoming impermeable. This way, it will more easily absorb the flavor of the remaining ingredients.

Once it begins to boil, lower the heat and cook for 8 minutes. Stop from cooking by straining the mixture and cooling the rice. Save the stock for the second cooking phase.

(d) 2nd rice cooking phase

In this second cooking phase, we proceed with what will be the final cooking step. We must keep in mind that this is a rice dish with very complex flavors, and because of its natural structure it is served in small portions. The magic of the dish is due in large part to a portion that is not too large.

FINAL PREPARATION

Ingredients: 20 g smoked eel frying oil, 60 g chopped cuttlefish, 160 g precooked rice, 120 g stock from the first cooking phase.

Method: sauté the chopped cuttlefish in 10 g of oil. Add the stock and, once boiling, mix in the rice. This rice only needs 4 minutes to be perfectly done – very pleasantly smooth on the palate without having a texture erroneously

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called “al dente.” During these final minutes, stir the rice continuously to facilitate the release of soluble solids and the resulting natural emulsion of juices with the grain’s starch. To finish, add the 10 g of remaining oil to reinforce the smoked eel aromas that may have evaporated during the cooking process.

ASSEMBLY

Other ingredients: 6 cherries, rosemary flowers.

Serve the rice on a deep plate. Finish with 3 half cherries, the marbles and rosemary flowers.