

Dining by Design

Oh Là Là!

A French Adventure
in Food, Family, and
History with a Toast
to Life and Liberty

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Nothing says France like food, family, and fun. My husband John and I recently traveled to meet our son Andy and his family—who live in Harrogate, England—for a long-awaited visit with grandkids. And what better meeting place than the heart of France... Paris! What an adventure it was.

Normandy was a journey through history. Our trip began in Normandy, a region steeped in history and beauty. Over the course of our three-day expedition, I was overwhelmed with pride and gratitude for the American men and women who gave their lives to preserve the freedom of France and its people during World War II. It's impossible to walk those historic grounds without being moved.

We drove four hours from Paris to Normandy, finally arriving—albeit ten hours late—after a few canceled flights.



A good night's sleep in our charming hotel in Bayeux was just what we needed. Bayeux, a picturesque town on the Aure River, is just 10 kilometers from the D-Day landing beaches and home to the incredible 11th-century Tapisserie de Bayeux, which depicts the 1066 Norman invasion of England. It's a masterpiece not to be missed.

Driving near the beaches brought a solemn stillness to John and me. The narrow roads, once thundered over by tanks, are now lined with monuments, memorabilia, and memories. As our guide walked us through the events of June 6, 1944, we were transported. I shivered—not just from the chill, but from the powerful emotion of standing where our soldiers once landed, under enemy fire, in the name of freedom. Tears filled my eyes as I thought of the mothers and fathers whose children stormed those beaches. The courage it took. The lives lost. And the freedoms preserved—not just for France, but for all of us.

After a moving morning, we paused for a traditional Norman lunch: seared duck breast, pommes frites, and a glass of Calvados—apple brandy native to the region. Then we made our way to the American cemetery. Words fail to describe the power of that sacred place. Silence spoke volumes.

Our drive back to Bayeux passed through fields of golden yellow flowers, grown for canola oil. Black and white dairy cows grazed contentedly in the lush countryside. Happy cows,

as we all know, make the finest cream, butter, and of course, ice cream.

That evening, we dined at Le Rapière, a small, exquisite French restaurant nestled in the heart of Bayeux. Romantic, intimate, and full of charm—it's easily a five-star experience in my book. The three-course menu was a symphony of flavors. If you ever visit Bayeux, be sure to reserve a table. It's unforgettable.

Back in Paris, the real fun began. We reunited with our family for days filled with ice cream in the park, watching sun-soaked Parisians lounge on wooden chairs as if they were characters in a Monet painting. We visited Disney Euro, explored the Sacré-Cœur Basilica, walked the Champs-Élysées on a rare car-free day, and shopped the local market at Place Bréguet-Sabin (where I'm almost certain I spotted Jacques Pépin). Of course, no trip would be complete without a visit to the Eiffel Tower and countless other iconic sights.

And now, to the heart of my story—a taste of French food. French cuisine is a love language all its own, and I brought home more than just memories and a few extra pounds. In the next section, I'll share a few of my favorite recipes inspired by our time in France—my humble attempt to bottle up a bit of that French magic. Stay tuned—and bon appétit!



◀ Perry McKinley
sampling crème brûlée

ARTICHOKE WITH GARLIC BUTTER SAUCE

Garlic Butter recipe
18 garlic cloves (fresh)
2 C. olive oil

½ C. salted butter at room
temperature
Kosher salt to taste

Place the garlic cloves in a small ovenproof dish submerged in the olive oil. Make sure all cloves are covered. Bake for one hour at 250 degrees.

Remove the soft cloves and set them on the side. Save the garlic oil on the counter for several weeks to use at will. It is yummy.

Mash the garlic in a bowl with butter and a small amount of kosher salt.

Preparing the Artichokes:

Have a large pot of water boiling on the stove. Cut the stems off about 3 inches from the bottom, making sure it is flat on the bottom to stand as steaming.

Trim the tough outer leaves of the artichoke. You can always find directions on the internet with pictures of preparing the artichoke.

Rub the cut part of the artichokes with lemon half to prevent browning, then place in a bowl of cold water for 5 minutes.

Once the water is boiling place the artichokes in the water, stand them on their stem and then reduce the heat to medium so the water is at a rapid simmer. Cover and steam for 25 to 30 minutes.

Melt Garlic butter while artichokes steam. I do this in the microwave in 30 second intervals.

Drain the artichokes when ready and carefully remove them from the pot. Place onto a paper towel upside down.

Serve in a bowl, sprinkle with sea salt and top with parmesan and drizzle garlic butter to your desire. Eat warm.

CAULIFLOWER GRATIN

This recipe comes from Ina Garten's *Cooking in Paris* cookbook. It is easy and so delicious. I tried to manipulate the version to make it better and my own, but she is the master.

1 (3-pound) head cauliflower,
cut into large florets
2 T. Kosher salt
½ stick unsalted butter, divided
3 T. all-purpose flour
2 C. hot milk

½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
¼ tsp. grated nutmeg
¾ C. freshly grated Gruyere, divided
½ C. freshly grated Parmesan
¼ C. fresh breadcrumbs

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Cook the cauliflower florets in a large pot of boiling salted water for 5 to 6 minutes, until tender but still firm. Drain.

Melt 2 T. of the butter in a medium saucepan over low heat. Add the flour, stirring constantly with a whisk for 2 minutes.

Pour the hot milk into the butter-flour mixture and stir until it comes to a boil. Boil, whisking constantly, for 1 minute, or until thickened.

Remove from heat and add 1 tsp. of salt, the pepper, nutmeg, ½ C. of the grated Gruyere cheese, and the Parmesan.

Pour 1/3 of the sauce on the bottom of an 8 by 11 by 2-inch baking dish. Place the drained cauliflower on top and then spread the rest of the sauce evenly on top. Combine the breadcrumbs with the remaining ¼ C. of Gruyere and sprinkle on top.

Melt the remaining 2 T. of butter and drizzle over the gratin. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until the top is browned. Serve hot or at room temperature.

BEEF BOURGUIGNON

1 T. olive oil or more as needed	½ C. Cognac
8 ounces bacon, diced	1 bottle dry red wine
2-½ pounds chuck beef cut into 1-inch cubes (fat removed)	2 C. beef broth
Kosher salt	2 T. tomato paste
Freshly ground black pepper	5 bay leaves
1 pound carrots, sliced diagonally into 1-inch chunks (must be whole peeled carrots not baby carrots)	4 T. butter at room temperature, divided
2 yellow onions, sliced	3 T. all-purpose flour
2 tsp. chopped garlic	1 pound fresh mushrooms, stems discarded (must be fresh mushrooms)

Preheat the oven to 250 to 325 degrees. Heat the olive oil in a large Dutch oven. Add the bacon and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the bacon is lightly browned. Remove the bacon with a slotted spoon to a large plate.

Dry the beef cubes with paper towels and then sprinkle them with salt and pepper. In batches in single layers, sear the beef in the hot oil for 3 to 5 minutes, turning to brown on all sides. Remove the seared cubes to the plate with the bacon and continue searing until all the beef is browned. Set aside.

Toss the carrots, and onions, 1 T. of salt and 2 tsp. of pepper in the fat in the pan and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the onions are lightly browned. Add the garlic and cook for 1 more minute. Add the Cognac, stand back, and ignite with a match to burn off the alcohol. Put the meat and bacon back into the pot with the juices. Add the bottle of wine plus enough beef broth to almost cover the meat. Add the tomato paste and bay leaves. Bring to a simmer, cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid and place it in the oven for about 4 hours or until the meat and vegetables are very tender when

pierced with a fork.

Combine 2 T. of butter and the flour with a fork and stir into the stew. Sauté the mushrooms in 2 T. of butter for 10 minutes until lightly browned and then add to the stew. Bring the stew to a boil on top of the stove, then lower the heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Season to taste.

Serve over mashed potatoes with a slice of thick crusty bread.

CREAMY ASPARAGUS SOUP

2 bunches asparagus (about 2¼ pounds), bottom ends trimmed	6 C. chicken broth
3 T. unsalted butter	Salt to taste
2 medium yellow onions, chopped	Cayenne pepper (optional)
3 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed	Freshly ground black pepper
	½ C. shredded Parmesan

Before serving, I stir 1 T. cornstarch into ½ C. half-and-half or whole cream. Whisk into the hot soup to thicken.

Melt the butter in a large pot over medium heat. Add the onions and garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until soft and translucent, about 8 minutes. Do not brown; reduce the heat if necessary.

In the meantime, cut the tips off of one bunch of the asparagus and set aside (you'll use those for a garnish). Cut the remaining spears and the other bunch of asparagus into ½-inch pieces.

Add the chopped asparagus to the pot (minus the reserved tips), along with the chicken broth, 1 tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper. Bring to a boil, then cover and turn the heat down to low. Simmer for about 20 minutes, or until the vegetables are very tender.

Meanwhile, bring a small pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the reserved asparagus tips for a few minutes, or until tender-crisp and still have a bright green color. Drain the tips and then place them in a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking process. Drain them and set aside.

Purée the soup with an immersion blender until completely smooth. You can use a standard blender to purée the soup in batches, but REMEMBER to hold the lid on the blender as the hot soup will make the lid fly off. Bring the soup back to a simmer and stir in the cream and Parmesan cheese. Taste and adjust seasoning, if necessary. To thicken the soup, allow it to simmer, uncovered, until the desired consistency is reached.

Ladle the soup into bowls, then top each bowl with asparagus tips and Parmesan cheese.

CHOCOLATE CRÈME BRÛLÉE

2 C. heavy cream

½ C. sugar, plus more for serving

1/8 tsp. salt, not Kosher

4 large egg yolks

3 oz. bittersweet chocolate,
chopped into small pieces

2 tsp. vanilla extract,

I prefer Mexican

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Place six small ramekins (5 to 6 ounces each) into a large roasting pan or baking dish.

Add the cream, half of the sugar (¼ C.), and the salt to a medium saucepan over medium-high heat and bring to a boil, stirring gently. Remove from the heat.

Place the chopped chocolate into a microwave-safe bowl. Microwave in 20-second intervals, stirring well after each, until just melted. Chocolate will still have a nice sheen to it.

In a large bowl, whisk the egg yolks with the remaining sugar (¾ C.) until well blended.

While whisking, slowly stream approximately half of the hot cream into the eggs, a little at a time. Then, switch from whisking the eggs to whisking the liquid in the saucepan, and slowly pour the tempered eggs with half of the cream back into the saucepan.

While whisking, slowly pour the custard into the melted chocolate. Whisk in vanilla, then strain the mixture through a fine-mesh strainer, removing any lumps. (This sounds labor intensive but you are basically just tempering the eggs.

Place the roasting pan with the ramekins in the oven. Add very hot water into the pan with your ramekins. Enough hot water into the pan to come halfway up the sides of each ramekin.

Ladle the chocolate custard into the ramekins so that they are approximately ¾ full.

Bake the crème brûlée until just set in the middle (the center should still wobble slightly), 25 to 30 minutes.

Remove the ramekins from the water bath and wipe them dry. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours and up to 3 days.

Remove the ramekins from the refrigerator at least 30 minutes before serving. Just before serving, evenly sprinkle the surface with a thin layer of sugar.

I use a culinary torch to melt and caramelize the sugar. Allow the sugar to cool and harden before serving the crème brûlée. This can also be done under the broiler, just watch carefully. *AW*



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