

Veal Oscar

Layered with crab, tender asparagus and a rich béarnaise sauce, veal Oscar is a dish fit for a king. In fact, the dish is named in honor of Oscar II, king of Sweden, 1872-1902, because it was made with his favorite ingredients.

Veal Oscar isn't on many menus today, but for Richard Deivert, chef instructor at Keiser University, Sarasota, Florida, it reminds him of culinary school. "It was a dish that stuck with me as a student," he says. "It had many ingredients and methods that I had never eaten or done."

Deivert's first professional position was as a rounds cook at Williamsburg Inn, Williamsburg, Virginia, which featured the dish on its seasonal menu. It was one of his favorites. Now, he is putting a postmodern twist on this 19th century dish by incorporating molecular gastronomy. He decided to use molecular gastronomy in his modern version of veal Oscar because this technique strongly influences modern cuisine. "A handful of chefs, such as Wylie Dufresne and Grant Achatz, carved their niche building repertoires based on these techniques," Deivert says.

However, it is important to not get caught up in cooking with this technique only, as many chefs have failed to make a living cooking with molecular gastronomy. The technique and ingredients are not universally accepted by chefs and guests.

Deivert believes that students should learn how to recreate classic dishes that have influenced today's chefs and cuisine. By updating these dishes to fit today's healthier lifestyles and varying textures, many of them could be rediscovered. All it may take is one talented chef's successful rendition, a viral video or Yelp review to bring these classical dishes back into the mainstream.

Lisa Tower, a student at Keiser University, grew up with Swedish cuisine in the home as her mother's heritage is Swedish. Tower and her family would spend summers with her grandmother in Finland. There she would help smoke fresh fish, and forage for mushrooms and blueberries. Using her knowledge of this cuisine, she was able to add small touches to the classical veal Oscar version while staying true to the country's cuisine.

Recreating this classical dish is important to Tower because she believes that a strong foundation of classical techniques is the basis of cooking—and most everything in life. "You can't expect to start creating and innovating before you understand where it all began and fully grasp the fundamentals of what you have done," she says.

classical VEAL OSCAR

1. ½-inch thick veal cutlets seared to golden brown sit on top of a potato and onion rösti.
2. Crabmeat or crawfish is the classic topping for this dish.
3. Crisp and bright green asparagus spears are the traditional vegetable served with veal Oscar.
4. Béarnaise is a versatile classic French sauce that pairs well with meat, fish, eggs and vegetables.
5. Shredded potatoes and onions make up a rösti, a crispy pancake-shaped Swiss side dish.

Tower was born in Montreal and spent 23 years there. Montreal has the highest number of restaurants per capita in Canada and is second to New York in North America.

Food was a big influence in Tower's life, and her mother was a great cook. Her first food memory was smoked salmon and new potatoes with dill and blueberry pie for dessert. "I remember many times, growing up, I would be disappointed by salmon and food at a restaurant," she says. "I couldn't understand why people would pay for something they could make at home cheaper."

She worked in several restaurants, and eventually held management positions. But she shifted to a career in cosmetics and was a product manager in Italy for several years. Then, she started an online pet products company that donated a percentage of proceeds to pet charities. But Tower wanted to make a change. She had always loved to cook for family and friends, so she decided to go to culinary school. "Food is what brings us together, and every food experience, good or bad, remains imprinted in our memories forever," she says.

This was the first time Tower had prepared veal Oscar. The technique she perfected making this dish was sauteing potatoes. Properly sauteed potatoes reflect a browned appearance and have a crispy texture, and it can be difficult to master. But perfectly sauteed potatoes can be achieved with consistent practice, she says. The potato and onion rösti was the hardest part of the dish for Tower. She used mealy potatoes, but afterwards felt that waxy potatoes would have worked better for this side dish, as mealy potatoes are too soft and dry. An original potato rösti recipe does not have onions. But by including onions, it added a dimension of flavor while staying true to Swedish cuisine. It is common in Scandinavian countries to eat potatoes and onions together. Squeezing the moisture out of the onions before adding to the potato mixture is key. “If they are too wet, it would make the cooking process uneven and render the end product mushy.”

Béarnaise is Tower’s favorite sauce. She enjoys the marriage of flavors and its versatility with food. The sauce works well with starches, vegetables, meat and fish. She prefers béarnaise on the acidic side and stays away from the pudding texture common for the sauce by going easy on the fat. “You don’t want to add more than 6 oz. of oil per yolk or the product will break,” she says.

If putting this dish on the menu at her own location, she would change the presentation. “I would separate each item so guests could sample each flavor with the béarnaise sauce.” Depending on the season, she would change the side offerings. “If serving this in the summer, I would serve it with new potatoes.”

Classical Veal Oscar

Yield: 4 servings

Potato and onion rösti

Ingredients:

8 oz. all-purpose potatoes

4 oz. onion

Salt and pepper, to taste

Clarified butter or lard

Method:

1. In stockpot, parboil potatoes in salt water. Drain; cool. With cheese grater, coarsely grate potatoes.
2. Peel onion; coarsely grate. Wrap grated onion in cheesecloth, squeezing out liquid. Mix onion and potato; season with salt and pepper.
3. In large skillet, heat butter or lard (if using saute pan, increase amount and lower heat). Place 4-inch metal round-form cutter in pan; fill with potato/onion mixture to desired thickness. Pack down. Slowly remove cutter, twisting gently. Repeat.
4. Cook röstis over medium-high heat until each side is brown and crusty, approximately 10 minutes each side. Smooth edges as needed with spatula.

Asparagus

Ingredients:

20 medium-size asparagus (approximately 2 bunches)

1 oz. clarified butter Kosher salt and white pepper, to taste

Method:

1. Trim asparagus to desired length. Prepare ice bath.
2. In salt water, blanch asparagus for 30 seconds or until slightly tender. Place asparagus in ice bath. Keep in ice bath until ready to saute.
3. In saute pan, lightly saute asparagus in butter over medium to high heat. Add salt and pepper, to taste.

Crabmeat

Ingredients:

1 oz. unsalted butter, split

1 T. shallot, fine diced

8 oz. lump crab Salt and white pepper, to taste

2 oz. white wine

2 t. tarragon, minced

2 t. parsley, minced

2 t. chervil, minced

2 t. chives, minced

Method:

1. Heat butter in saute pan, add shallot; sweat. Add crab; season with salt and white pepper.
2. Deglaze with white wine; adding remaining butter, emulsify. Remove pan from heat; add tarragon, parsley, chervil and chives. Set aside.

Seared veal cutlets

Ingredients:

8 (2.5 oz.) veal cutlets

2 oz. flour, seasoned with kosher salt and pepper
3 oz. clarified butter, divided

Method:

1. Cut/trim veal cutlets. Pound veal cutlets to ½-inch thickness; dust with seasoned flour.
2. Preheat large saute pan over medium to high heat, adding 1.5 oz. clarified butter.
3. Place dusted veal cutlets in pan. Sear until golden-brown, about 2 minutes each side. Cook in batches, if necessary. Use remaining clarified butter as needed.

Tarragon reduction

Ingredients:

2 oz. tarragon vinegar
4 oz. white wine
4 T. shallot, fine diced
2 T. dried tarragon leaves
1 t. white pepper, fresh ground
4 T. fresh tarragon, chopped

Method:

1. Simmer tarragon vinegar, white wine, shallot, tarragon leaves and white pepper to au sec.
2. Remove from heat. Cool slightly; add fresh tarragon.

Béarnaise sauce

Ingredients:

½ cup white wine
¼ cup white wine vinegar
1 bay leaf
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 t. whole white peppercorns
2 egg yolks
8 oz. clarified butter
1 T. tarragon reduction

Method:

1. In nonreactive saucepan over medium heat, combine white wine, vinegar, bay leaf, fresh thyme and white peppercorns; reduce by half.
2. Strain mixture. Place 2 T. of mixture into stainless-steel bowl; whisk in egg yolks. Place bowl over double boiler; whisk until mixture reaches ribbon stage.
3. Remove from boiler; whisk 20 seconds. Slowly whisk in clarified butter, emulsify. When desired consistency is reached, mix in tarragon reduction to taste.

Plating:

1. Place potato/onion rösti on plate.
2. Place veal cutlet on top of rösti.
3. Layer asparagus.
4. Layer crabmeat.
5. Top with béarnaise sauce.

modern VEAL OSCAR

1. Veal tenderloin poached in olive oil.
2. Veal cheeks cooked sous vide in wine and prunes.
3. Florida crab claw placed on top of claw meat that is cooked in butter, shallot and herbs.
4. Crispy veal sweetbreads complete the trio of nontraditional veal products for this dish.
5. Molecular gastronomy is used to create a deep-fried béarnaise sphere.
6. Potato and parsnip puree adds a creamy texture and complex flavors to the dish.
7. Staying true to the classic version, asparagus spears accompany the dish.

Deivert designed, built and tested wind tunnel instruments for military and civilian aircrafts at NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, for a living. Downsizing caused him to make a career change, and culinary arts was a natural fit. Growing up in rural Pennsylvania, his earliest memories were plowing and planting the soil for the family garden and preparing the harvest for preservation or for family meals.

Deivert enjoys being a culinary instructor because he is constantly learning and relearning techniques he had been taught 20 years ago in culinary school. His experience has taken him up and down the East Coast, including positions as executive chef at The Ritz-Carlton Members Club, Sarasota, Florida, and chef de cuisine at The Circular Dining Room at Hotel Hershey, Hershey, Pennsylvania.

The most difficult part of the modern version of veal Oscar for Deivert was organization. By featuring three nontraditional veal products-sweetbreads, cheeks and tenderloin-rather than the commonly used loin or cutlets, cooking times were longer. To make this dish work, advanced preparation for these items was necessary. When researching this dish, Deivert chose these cuts because he felt they were the epitome of classical dishes. The cuts are a great way to introduce the modern element into the dish by using cooking techniques such as sous vide.

The techniques he used may be intimidating for some. He encourages everyone to cook at his or her comfort level. The cheeks and tenderloin could be cooked on the stovetop instead of sous vide. If unsure about performing molecular gastronomy for the béarnaise spheres, freezing the sauce and then breading the spheres would provide the same result. But there are positives to using modern techniques. "By braising the cheeks in a circulator, they lose little of their original mass and do not need to be cooked well-done to be tender," he says.

Deivert wanted to have fun and create something that could not be reproduced on the line, but that still maintained high standards and featured different textures and techniques. He also wanted to boost the flavors of typical side dishes. For example, he added parsnips in the potato puree "This is one of my favorite vegetables for creating purees, as parsnips are creamy and have an intrinsic sweetness."

When choosing this recipe, Deivert recognized that veal has negative connotations attached to it, but as a food item, it provides guests with a dining experience that is unmatched. However, because of its high cost, he would rarely include veal on a regular seasonal menu in a restaurant. Instead, he sees it as a frontrunner for a special event, holiday menu or wine dinner.

Modern Veal Oscar

Yield: 4 servings

Sous vide veal cheeks

Ingredients:

1 ½ lbs. veal cheek, trimmed Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper, to taste

¼ cup olive oil

½ cup onion, diced

¼ cup carrot, diced

¼ cup celery, diced

1 ½ T. tomato paste

6 oz. dry red wine

6 oz. port wine

1 bay leaf

8 sprigs fresh thyme

6 large prunes, pitted (may substitute apricots, figs or cherries)

1 pint veal stock

1 T. course cracked black pepper

Method:

1. Season veal cheek meat with salt and pepper; set aside.

2. Heat olive oil in heavy-gauge sautoir or small rondeau. Add veal cheek; sear both sides. Remove; reserve.

3. Add onion, season with salt; cook until light brown, stirring often. Add carrot and celery, season with salt; lightly caramelize, stirring often.

4. Add tomato paste; pincé; deglaze with wines. Scrape pan bottom to remove fond. Add bay leaf, thyme, prunes and cheek to pan; simmer, reducing wine by half. Add veal stock, simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from heat.

5. Cool mixture to below 70°F within two hours in ice bath. Preheat water bath to 71°C. In vacuum pouch, seal small quantities cheek with equal parts liquid and solid. Cook in water bath for 12 hours.

6. Remove cheeks from bags; strain liquid into saucepan. Reduce to sauce consistency. Add cheeks to sauce. Gently reheat for service.

Olive oil poached

veal tenderloin

Ingredients:

2 (8 oz.) veal tenderloin, cleaned, trimmed

½ cup Arbequino extra virgin olive oil
¼ large shallot, thin sliced
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 t. white peppercorns, crushed
¼ cup grapeseed oil Kosher salt and fresh cracked white pepper, to taste
½ T. tarragon, chopped
½ T. parsley, chopped
½ T. chervil, chopped
½ T. chives, chopped
2 T. shallot, fine diced
2 oz. white wine
2 cups veal stock
1 t. unsalted butter

Method:

1. In vacuum bags, seal tenderloins, olive oil, thin sliced shallot, thyme, garlic and peppercorns. Place in 51°C water bath for 45 minutes.
2. Heat grapeseed oil in heavy-bottomed saute pan over medium-high heat. Remove tenderloins from package, season with salt and pepper; sear both sides for 10 seconds. Remove from pan.
3. Roll tenderloins in mixture of tarragon, parsley, chervil and chives, reserve. Place fine diced shallot in pan; cook lightly. Deglaze with wine; reduce. Add veal stock; reduce by half.
4. Mount with butter; strain. Reserve for service.

Crispy veal sweetbreads

Ingredients:

8 oz. veal sweetbreads
1 qt. court-bouillon Seasoned flour, as needed
¼ cup grapeseed oil
2 oz. unsalted butter
1 T. shallot, fine diced
1 T. lemon juice
1 lemon, supremed; reserve several pieces for garnish
1 t. parsley, chopped

Method:

1. In lightly salted water, soak sweetbreads overnight to remove residual blood. Drain; rinse well.
2. Poach sweetbreads in court-bouillon for 30 minutes. Place in ice bath; peel membrane. Wrap in cheesecloth; gently press overnight in refrigerator.
3. Slice ¼-inch medallions; sprinkle with seasoned flour, shaking off excess. In heavy-bottomed saute pan with grapeseed oil, sear medallions on each side until golden-brown. Remove from pan; reserve.
4. Add butter to pan; brown. Add shallot, lemon juice and segments. Return sweetbreads to pan; toss to combine. Sprinkle in parsley; reserve for service.

Potato parsnip puree

Ingredients:

8 oz. russet potatoes, peeled, diced
12 oz. parsnips, peeled, diced
1 cup whole milk
2 cups heavy whipping cream Kosher salt and white pepper, to taste
2 oz. unsalted butter

Method:

1. Place potatoes, parsnips, whole milk, whipping cream, salt and pepper in heavy-bottomed saucepan. Simmer until parsnips are tender. Drain; reserve liquid.
2. Puree with butter in blender until smooth, adding reserved liquid as needed. Adjust seasonings; reserve for service.

Deep-fried béarnaise

Tarragon reduction

Ingredients:

4 T. shallot, fine diced
2 T. dried tarragon leaves
2 oz. tarragon vinegar
4 oz. white wine

1 t. fresh ground white pepper
4 T. fresh tarragon, chopped

Method:

1. Simmer shallot, dried tarragon leaves, tarragon vinegar, white wine and white pepper in nonreactive saucepan to au sec. Remove from heat; cool slightly; add fresh tarragon.

Béarnaise

Ingredients:

½ cup white wine
¼ cup white wine vinegar
1 bay leaf
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 t. white peppercorns
2 egg yolks
8 oz. clarified butter
1 T. calcium lactate
¼ t. xanthan gum
1 T. tarragon reduction Kosher salt, white pepper, cayenne pepper, Tabasco and lemon juice, to taste

Method:

1. Combine white wine, white wine vinegar, bay leaf, thyme sprigs and white peppercorns in small, nonreactive saucepan; reduce by half over medium heat. Strain mixture.
2. Place 2 T. of mixture into stainless-steel mixing bowl; mix in egg yolks. Place mixing bowl on double boiler; whisk until mixture reaches ribbon stage. Remove from stove; slowly drizzle in warm clarified butter, whisking constantly to incorporate.
3. Add calcium lactate, xanthan gum and tarragon reduction; whisk to combine. Season to taste; reserve for spherification.

Béarnaise spherification

Ingredients:

Alginate bath (1 liter room-temperature water; 6 g sodium alginate)
Béarnaise sauce
Seasoned all-purpose flour
2 eggs, whisked
1 cup panko, fine ground
Oil for frying
Kosher salt, to taste

Method:

1. Combine water and alginate; blend well in immersion blender. Put mixture in container; place in cryovac to remove air from mixture (mixture can be made a day ahead and gently warmed to room temperature in advance).
2. Submerge 1 T. béarnaise in alginate bath; invert to release from spoon. Repeat with remaining béarnaise; allow spheres to rest in alginate bath for 10 minutes. Remove spheres from bath; rinse in fresh warm water.
3. Blot dry with paper towel. Sprinkle with seasoned flour, dip in egg wash, then panko.
4. Deep-fry at 350°F until golden-brown; Drain. Season with salt; reserve for service.

Florida stone crab claws

Ingredients:

4 large Florida stone crab claws
2 T. unsalted butter, divided
1 T. shallot, fine diced Kosher salt and white pepper to taste
2 oz. white wine
1 t. fresh tarragon, chopped
1 t. fresh parsley, chopped
1 t. fresh chervil, chopped
1 t. fresh chives, chopped

Method:

1. Use heavy-duty spoon to crack crab shells. Remove claw and knuckle meat; keep meat whole.
2. In saute pan, heat 1 T. butter; sweat shallot. Add crab, season with salt and pepper. Deglaze with wine; emulsify with remaining 1 T. butter. Finish with herbs; reserve for service.

Asparagus

Ingredients:

20 large green asparagus (approximately 2 bunches)

4 large chives
½ cup light chicken stock
2 oz. unsalted butter, diced small
1 T. shallot, fine diced
Kosher salt and white pepper, to taste

Method:

1. Peel and trim asparagus to desired size; prepare ice bath.
2. In large stockpot, bring water to a boil, season with salt. Add asparagus; blanch until tender. Place in ice bath. Blanch chives for 5 seconds; place in ice bath.
3. Place chives on work surface; lay 5 pieces asparagus same direction on each chive. With each chive, tie four tight bundles; trim excess.
4. In saucepan, heat stock to rapid boil. Whisk in butter in stages to emulsify. Add shallot; season to taste; reduce heat. Place asparagus bundles in butter sauce; gently reheat for service. Drain excess butter. Serve one bundle per guest.

Plating:

1. Place large swipe of potato/parsnip puree down center of plate.
2. Center three slices each of veal cheeks and tenderloin along with sweetbreads on top of puree.
3. Directly across from tenderloin, place standing asparagus bunch.
4. Surround plate with sauce from veal cheeks.
5. On a diagonal across from asparagus, place deep-fried béarnaise sphere.
6. Lay crabmeat next to sphere and place crab claw shell on top.