Sauces / France

Beurre Blanc

The Loire's great white butter sauce — a tart reduction of wine, vinegar and shallot whisked drop by drop with cold butter until it billows into a pale, glossy emulsion light enough to coat a fillet of fish yet rich enough to make it sing. A sauce that lives or dies by temperature: too cool and it never comes together, too hot and it splits into oily ruin.

Time 25 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Cold unsalted butter (cut into 2 cm cubes, kept refrigerated)
- ☐ 30 parts Dry white wine (Muscadet or Sauvignon Blanc)
- ☐ 12 parts White wine vinegar
- ☐ 10 parts Shallot (very finely minced)
- ☐ 8 parts Heavy cream (optional, for stability)
- ☐ 1 parts Fine sea salt
- ☐ 2 parts Lemon juice (to finish, to taste)
- ☐ 1 parts White pepper & snipped chives (optional)

Let's make it.

01 In a small heavy non-reactive saucepan, combine the white wine, vinegar and minced shallot. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and reduce until almost dry — only 1-2 tablespoons of syrupy, glistening liquid remain among the soft shallots, 5-7 minutes. This concentrated, acidic base is what will hold the butter in suspension.

02 Reduce the heat to the lowest possible flame — the reduction should be warm, never simmering. If using cream, whisk it into the reduction now and let it warm through for a minute; the cream's emulsifiers make the sauce far more forgiving. The pan should feel hot to a hovering hand but the liquid must not bubble.

03 Whisking constantly, add the cold butter two or three cubes at a time, letting each addition melt and emulsify into a creamy mass before adding more. Never let the butter melt to clear oil — it must soften and disappear into a thick, opaque sauce. Move the pan on and off the gentle heat as needed to keep it warm but never hot, building the emulsion cube by cube until all the butter is incorporated.

04 Off the heat, season the sauce with fine salt and a few drops of lemon juice, tasting as you go to balance the richness against the acidity. For a classic silken sauce, strain out the shallots through a fine sieve; for a rustic version, leave them in. Add white pepper and chives if using. Serve immediately — beurre blanc cannot be reheated or held hot for long without breaking. Keep it barely warm in a water bath if you must wait a few minutes.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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