Sauces / Japan

Dashi Beurre Blanc — Sake-Mirin Butter Sauce

A Franco-Japanese emulsion that begins as a dashi reduction laced with sake and mirin and finishes in a rapid mount of cold butter — trembling, pale gold, alive with umami in a way that no classic beurre blanc can match, clinging to fish and vegetables with a silky, barely-there weight.

Time 45 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 200 ml Ichiban dashi (first-draw kombu and katsuobushi)
- ☐ 100 ml Sake (dry, drinking quality)
- ☐ 50 ml Mirin (hon-mirin)
- ☐ 40 g Shallot, very finely minced
- ☐ 20 ml Rice vinegar
- ☐ 200 g Unsalted butter, very cold, cut in 1 cm cubes
- ☐ 3 g Fine sea salt
- ☐ 10 g Chives, finely sliced, for finish

Let's make it.

01 Combine the dashi, sake, mirin, minced shallot, and rice vinegar in a small, heavy-bottomed saucepan — stainless steel is ideal, as it lets you see the color of the reduction clearly. Bring to a boil over medium-high, then reduce to a vigorous simmer and cook until the liquid has reduced to a glaze — approximately 2–3 tablespoons of highly concentrated, syrupy liquid. This takes 12–15 minutes. The reduction is the foundation of the entire sauce and must be cooked thoroughly to drive off all the alcohol from the sake and mirin. If you can still smell raw alcohol in the steam, continue reducing. The finished reduction should smell intensely of the sea (dashi), sweet caramel (mirin), and shallot. The shallot will have become very soft and almost translucent, suspended in the glaze. Do not strain the shallot out — it provides additional body and flavor. The color will deepen from pale gold to a darker amber.

02 This is the technically demanding step. Remove the pan from direct heat and let it cool for 30 seconds — the base must be hot but not scorching. Place the pan over the lowest possible heat or use a double boiler. Begin adding the cold butter, two or three cubes at a time, whisking constantly in a rapid circular motion. Wait for each addition to be fully incorporated before adding the next. The cold butter performs two functions simultaneously: it lowers the temperature of the base (preventing it from overheating and breaking) while its emulsifiers (primarily lecithin in the butter fat) bind the water phase and the fat phase into a stable emulsion. The sauce will gradually transform from the dark reduction into a pale, creamy, opaque emulsion as you add more butter. If the sauce looks greasy and separated, it has overheated — immediately remove from all heat and add a cube of cold butter while whisking vigorously. Once all butter is incorporated, season with fine salt and taste. The sauce should be rich, smooth, and intensely umami with a bright lactic finish.

03 Fold the sliced chives (or mitsuba or shiso) into the mounted sauce with a few gentle turns of the whisk — do not over-agitate or you will break the emulsion. Taste and adjust seasoning. The sauce should be served immediately or held in a warm water bath (50–55 °C) for no longer than 20 minutes before service. Beyond 20 minutes, the emulsion begins to weaken as the butter fat slowly separates. When plating, spoon the sauce under or alongside the protein — fish, scallops, or vegetables — never over the crispy surface of something you spent effort crisping. The sauce should pool elegantly and form a thin, luminous skin where it contacts the hot plate. Drizzle any remaining sauce from the spoon in a single deliberate motion: a beurre blanc waits for no one.

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