Main dishes / France

Lobster Bisque

The grandest of French bisques — whole lobsters roasted and deglazed with cognac, simmered in white wine and fish stock with tomatoes and tarragon, strained twice and mounted with cream into a pale coral soup of extraordinary richness.

Time 90 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 2 whole (600 g each) Live lobsters (or lobster tails + shells)
- ☐ 60 g Unsalted butter
- ☐ 4 whole Shallots, finely diced
- ☐ 1 medium Carrot, finely diced
- ☐ 2 stalks Celery stalk, finely diced
- ☐ 3 cloves Garlic, smashed
- ☐ 30 g Tomato paste
- ☐ 60 ml Cognac or Armagnac
- ☐ 200 ml Dry white wine
- ☐ 1 liter Fish stock or clam juice
- ☐ 200 ml Heavy cream
- ☐ 8 sprigs Fresh tarragon
- ☐ 2 whole Bay leaf
- ☐ 1 pinch Cayenne pepper
- ☐ 6 g Fine sea salt
- ☐ 2 g White pepper, freshly ground
- ☐ 5 g Fresh chervil or tarragon leaves

Let's make it.

01 Dispatch the lobsters humanely by placing them in the freezer for 20 minutes before splitting. Split the lobsters lengthwise with a sharp heavy knife, or use lobster tails and reserved shells. Heat the butter in a wide, heavy roasting pan or large dutch oven over high heat until foaming. Add the lobster shells and tail meat cut-side down. Roast over high heat, turning occasionally, for 8–10 minutes until the shells turn a brilliant, uniform orange-red and the butter has taken on a coral tint from the shell pigments. Remove the tail meat when just cooked through and reserve for garnish.

02 Add the diced shallots, carrot, and celery to the pot of roasted shells. Cook over medium-high heat for 5 minutes, stirring, until the vegetables soften and begin to caramelize at the edges. Add the garlic and tomato paste. Stir the tomato paste constantly into the vegetables and shells for 2–3 minutes until it darkens from bright red to a deep, brick-red — this is pinçage, which removes the raw acidity and develops deep savory sweetness. The fond on the pan base will intensify.

03 Pour the cognac into the pot. On a gas stove, carefully tilt the pan to flame the cognac — the blue flame will extinguish within 10–15 seconds as the alcohol burns off. On induction or electric, simply allow the alcohol to bubble and evaporate for 2 minutes. Add the white wine and scrape up all the caramelized fond from the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon — every bit of this fond is concentrated bisque flavor. Allow the wine to reduce by half before adding the stock.

04 Add the fish stock, tarragon sprigs, and bay leaves. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a gentle, steady simmer. Cook uncovered for 25–30 minutes, allowing the shells to surrender all their flavor to the liquid. Skim any foam that rises to the surface during the first 5 minutes. The liquid will deepen in color and concentrate. Do not rush this step — this long simmer is what distinguishes a restaurant bisque from a shortcut approximation.

05 Remove the bay leaves. Transfer everything — shells included — to a high-powered blender in batches and blend on high for 60 seconds per batch. The shells will fragment and contribute starch, calcium, and color to the bisque. Pass the blended mixture through a fine-mesh sieve, pressing hard with the back of a ladle to extract every drop of liquid. Discard the shell fragments. Pass through the sieve a second time for an especially silky result.

06 Return the strained bisque to a clean saucepan. Add the heavy cream and bring to a gentle simmer. Reduce for 8–10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the bisque coats the back of a spoon and the flavor has further concentrated. Season carefully with salt, white pepper, and a discreet pinch of cayenne. Warm reserved lobster tail meat in the bisque for 60 seconds. Ladle into warmed bowls, place a piece of lobster meat in the center, and finish with fresh chervil or tarragon leaves and an optional drizzle of crème fraîche.

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