Soups / France

Lobster Bisque Base

A rich, rust-orange crustacean stock built from roasted lobster shells — the intensely flavored backbone of a proper bisque, with a complexity that only comes from roasting, flambéing, and long extraction of shells that most cooks discard.

Time 150 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 600 g Lobster shells and heads (from 2 lobsters)
- ☐ 150 g Yellow onion, diced
- ☐ 100 g Carrots, diced
- ☐ 80 g Celery stalks, diced
- ☐ 4 cloves Garlic cloves, crushed
- ☐ 40 g Tomato paste
- ☐ 200 g Canned whole tomatoes
- ☐ 80 ml Cognac or brandy
- ☐ 200 ml Dry white wine
- ☐ 40 g Unsalted butter
- ☐ 4 sprigs Fresh tarragon sprigs
- ☐ 2 leaves Bay leaves
- ☐ 1 g Cayenne pepper
- ☐ 1500 ml Cold water or light fish stock
- ☐ 8 g Fine sea salt

Let's make it.

01 Break the lobster shells into smaller pieces using kitchen shears or a heavy knife — this dramatically increases the surface area for extraction. Spread on a heavy baking sheet and roast at 220 C (425 F) for 15–20 minutes, turning once, until the shells have turned bright red-orange and the kitchen smells powerfully of roasted shellfish. Any clinging meat will caramelize and add flavor. Do not over-roast — black shells contribute bitter, acrid flavors.

02 In a large, heavy stockpot or Dutch oven, melt butter over high heat. Add the roasted shells and cook, stirring, for 2–3 minutes. Add all the mirepoix vegetables (onion, carrot, celery, garlic) and cook over high heat for 5–8 minutes, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are softened and beginning to caramelize. Add tomato paste and stir constantly for 2 minutes — it should darken slightly and stick to the pot, adding color and depth. Add the canned tomatoes and cayenne.

03 Remove the pot from heat. Add the cognac. Return to heat and carefully tilt the pot or use a long match to ignite the cognac — it will flambé with a blue flame for 15–30 seconds, burning off the raw alcohol. Once the flames die, add the white wine and stir vigorously, scraping all the fond from the bottom of the pot. The wine will hiss violently and the steam will smell of shellfish and wine. Cook for 2–3 minutes at a boil until the wine has reduced by half.

04 Add cold water (or light fish stock), tarragon, and bay leaves. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a gentle simmer. Simmer uncovered for 45–60 minutes. The shells will continue to release flavor and color, turning the broth a deep rust-orange. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer lined with cheesecloth, pressing firmly on the shells to extract every last drop. Reduce the strained stock by one-third for a more concentrated bisque base. Season lightly — it will be seasoned further when building the finished bisque.

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