Main dishes / France

Lobster Thermidor

The grand-dame of belle-époque cookery — sweet poached lobster folded back into a mustard-and-cognac cream sauce, heaped into its own scarlet shell, blanketed with Gruyère and run under the grill until the top blisters gold and the whole thing arrives bubbling, fragrant with tarragon and flamed brandy.

Time 75 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Live lobster (about 600 g each, or cooked tail & claw meat)
- ☐ 12 parts Unsalted butter
- ☐ 8 parts Shallots (finely minced)
- ☐ 6 parts Cognac (for flaming)
- ☐ 14 parts Dry white wine
- ☐ 30 parts Heavy cream
- ☐ 4 parts Dijon mustard
- ☐ 5 parts Egg yolk
- ☐ 2 parts Fresh tarragon (chopped)
- ☐ 12 parts Gruyère (finely grated)
- ☐ 1 parts Sea salt, cayenne & white pepper

Let's make it.

01 Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a rolling boil. Plunge the lobsters in head-first and cook just until the shells turn bright scarlet and the meat is barely set — about 6 minutes for 600 g birds, no more. Lift them out and shock briefly in iced water to halt the cooking. Twist off the tails and claws, split the bodies lengthwise, and reserve the empty half-shells for serving.

02 Melt the butter in a wide sauté pan over medium-low heat. Add the minced shallots with a pinch of salt and sweat them gently, stirring, until soft, glassy and translucent without taking on any colour, about 4-5 minutes. This sweet, mellow base carries the whole sauce.

03 Pour in the cognac and, off the flame or with great care, ignite it to burn off the raw alcohol — let the flames die on their own. Add the white wine, raise the heat, and reduce the liquid by about two-thirds until it is syrupy and barely coats the pan floor, concentrating the shallot and brandy into a savoury glaze.

04 Pour in the cream and whisk in the Dijon mustard, a pinch of cayenne and white pepper. Simmer gently, stirring, until the sauce thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon, 4-6 minutes. Taste and season — it should be rich, faintly sharp with mustard, and warm with cayenne. Do not let it boil hard, or it may split.

05 Off the heat, whisk a spoonful of the hot sauce into the egg yolk to temper it, then stir the yolk back into the pan to enrich and bind — never let it boil now. Fold in the lobster meat and chopped tarragon, warming through for a minute. Spoon the mixture generously into the reserved half-shells set on a baking tray.

06 Scatter the grated Gruyère thickly over each filled shell. Slide under a hot grill (broiler) about 10 cm from the element and cook until the cheese melts, bubbles and blisters into golden-brown patches, 3-5 minutes. Watch constantly — it goes from pale to perfect to burnt in seconds. Serve at once, scalding hot, with lemon and crusty bread.

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