



Consomme, served with wine and baguettes, hits the spot after a cold and damp hunt. It's kept warm in a hanging caldron.

Hunter's Broth à la Champchevrier

BY MARC PATOILE

Those new to witnessing the grandeur and pageantry of a foxhunt are often transported back a century or more to a long lost time. This is no more true than in France, where mounted followers, with different packs of hounds, still pursue stag, roebuck, wild boar, hare and rabbit. Even the French hounds look a bit from a bygone era, as they still have a sliver of wolf blood bred into many of the French breeds. The riders are in their full glory with sabers and French hunting horns accompanying their long frock coats and their boots, turned up to protect the knee.

Sometimes, cooking also takes you back to a bygone era, an era when things were made simply and at home, before commercialization took over everything. This recipe takes us back, not only to the era when soups didn't come from a can or a box, but back to Le Château de Champchevrier in the Loire valley, where the Bizard family, who has lived in this grand palace in the forest, has been hunting stag since 1728. They serve a version of this hunter's broth in a gathering room next to the

stables after hunts that can often be cold and damp, as a way of refreshing and warming the hunters who stand by the fire where the broth is kept warm in a hanging caldron.

In French cooking, a consommé is a type of clear soup made from richly flavored stock that has been clarified, a process which uses egg whites to remove fat and sediment. A broth is a liquid in which meat, fish or vegetables have cooked when the goal is also to consume the meat, fish or vegetables. Stock is a liquid in which the meat, fish, bones, or vegetables have simmered for a long period and then been discarded.

I often roast ducks and chickens and use the carcasses to make this delicious and easy stock, but a left-over chicken carcass works just as easily. The stock can be frozen for later use, and I find one liter plastic orange juice jugs to be the perfect storage vessel. ■

Hunter's Broth

- **1-2 PHEASANT CARCASSES** (more if using smaller birds such as quail), but this works equally well with ducks or chickens, including necks and backs, unused legs, etc. The carcasses can be cut into separate pieces, either still raw or having already been roasted. (I usually keep a number of these carcasses ready, pre-frozen in large freezer bags for when I have an hour or so to make the stock.)
- **1 LARGE ONION**, cut into large chunks
- **2-4 CARROTS**, cut into large chunks
- **2-4 RIBS CELERY**, cut into large chunks
- **10 SPRIGS FRESH THYME**
- **10 SPRIGS FRESH PARSLEY**, or just the stems (Again, you can throw the stems into the freezer bag with the birds, having used the leaves for some other recipe.)
- **2 BAY LEAVES**
- **8 to 10 PEPPERCORNS**
- **2 WHOLE CLOVES GARLIC**, peeled
- **2 GALLONS COLD WATER**

Place carcasses, vegetables, herbs and spices in a 12-quart stockpot and pour in the water. Cook on high heat until you begin to see bubbles break through the surface of the liquid. Turn heat down to medium low so that stock maintains a low, gentle, slow boil. Using a ladle, frequently skim the foam and impurities from the stock for the first 10 minutes of slow boiling. Reduce to a simmer for at least one hour. Add hot water as needed to keep bones and vegetables submerged. This can simmer uncovered for one to eight hours.

Using a fine mesh strainer or cheesecloth (or both, if you want it extra clear), strain stock into another large stockpot or heat-proof container; discard the solids. Cool immediately in a sink full of ice water to a temperature below 40 degrees. Place in refrigerator overnight. Remove solidified fat from surface of liquid and discard. Stock

can be kept in the refrigerator for two to three days or in freezer for up to three months. Prior to use, bring to a boil for two minutes. To use as a broth, serve in tea cups to warm hunters, or as a homemade stock for other recipes. Voilà!

