

PRIME INGREDIENT: LOBSTER

THE IMMORTAL LOBSTER

They come in nearly 50 different species and are almost universally regarded as the most desirable shellfish, but their popularity in haute cuisine is relatively recent in Europe and even more so in the USA.



Uncommon with that other perceived 'luxury' shellfish, the oyster, lobster was once considered a food fit only for the poor, perhaps because it was easier to catch than fish which had the ability to swim away as soon as the fisherman approached. Lobster pots encouraged the creatures to clamber inside them, only to find that they then couldn't get out and, indeed, that method of capture hasn't changed today.

An interesting fact about lobsters is that they apparently don't age as other animals do. They have an obscure enzyme which repairs their DNA on a rolling basis and those which escape capture or being eaten by another marine creature, could theoretically live for ever. For this reason, giant lobsters have been recorded by marine biologists over many years, with the world record-holder, caught in Canada, weighing in at something over three stone.

European lobsters – particularly the 'royal blue' or Audresselles (named after the coastal village near Calais) – are generally found around the coast of Great Britain and Ireland and are much smaller than the American varieties, but more popular with chefs because of their versatility. They became part of haute cuisine in about the 17th century amongst aristocratic families in Europe when chefs realised how many different ways they could be prepared. One of the classics is lobster thermidor, served with a cream sauce of egg-yolks and Cognac with a crust of Gruyère cheese, as developed in 1894 at Marie's in Paris (next door to the Comédie Française which was premiering a play called Thermidor).

Lobster didn't really become a staple of American cooking until the 19th century, and in the same year that thermidor made its début in Paris, a US sea captain called Ben Wenburg perfected a dish of lobster, butter, cream, eggs, brandy, sherry and Cayenne pepper which was picked up by Delmonico's restaurant in New York. There was some unpleasantness between the chef and the captain, and the dish was removed from the menu, but restored after customers continued to demand it, under the name Lobster Newburg.

Since then, lobster has been presented under a myriad different guises, boiled, baked, roast, marinière, Cardinal, Mornay, cocktail and many more, although the true aficionados tend to prefer it plain boiled and served fresh.

On that subject, there have been many suggestions that, because lobsters have to be cooked live in boiling water they suffer pain, and the animal rights lobby contend that it's cruelty. Biologists differ on whether the animals do suffer pain, but there have been several suggestions on how to minimise it, assuming that they do: an hour in the fridge is supposed to 'stun' the lobster before cooking, and in 2006 a British inventor called Simon Buckhaven created the 'Crustastun' which electrocutes lobsters in a few seconds before they go into the boiling water. It's used by some restaurants and there's also a domestic version.

Whatever the final debate, lobster remains one of our most desirable crustacea, so much so that 'lobster substitute' appeared on the market some years ago, sometimes made from prawns, shrimps and other members of the Nephropidae family, and sometimes from crab or even from white fish, flavoured to taste like the real thing. They do say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

KENNEBUNKPORT LOBSTER ON BRAISED LENTILS AND ROSÉ BUTTER SAUCE

BY JONATHAN CARTWRIGHT, GRAND CHEF, WHITE BARN INN AND SPA, MAINE, USA

Serves 4



Ingredients

- 100g lentils du puy
- 25g root vegetables, brunoise
- 225g unsalted butter
- 355ml chicken stock
- 2 Maine lobsters, 680g each
- 235ml Côtes du Rhône rosé
- 1 tsp shallots, diced
- 1 sprig of lemon thyme
- 6 cracked black peppercorns
- salt, pepper, cayenne pepper
- 1/2 lemon, juice
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

to serve:
selection of micro greens or picked herbs

Method

1. Soak the lentils in cold water for 3 hours, sweat the root vegetable brunoise in a tablespoon of the butter for 2 minutes over a medium heat without colour.
2. Add the drained lentils and cover with approximately 235ml of chicken stock.
3. Cook until tender, simmering for approximately 15 minutes.
4. Steam the lobsters for 5 minutes, cut in half, clean out the head area and cut open the claws and knuckles (this can be prepared up to a day beforehand).
5. Reduce the rosé wine with the shallots, thyme and peppercorns by half, add the remaining 120ml cup of chicken stock and reduce by half again.
6. Then slowly whisk in the remaining butter, season to taste with salt, pepper, cayenne and lemon juice. Strain and reserve in a warm spot until the dish is ready for saucing.
7. Brush the lobster halves with the extra virgin olive oil and grill for 3 minutes, flesh side down.
8. Then turn the lobster over so the shell side is down on the grill bars for 3 minutes until cooked and hot.

to serve:
Place the lentils in the centre of a plate and arrange the grilled lobster on top, sauce over and around the lobster, sprinkle micro greens or herbs on top and serve.

STUNNING

THE HUMANE WAY TO KILL LOBSTERS

THE CRUSTASTUN IS THE WORLD'S FIRST AND ONLY COMPASSIONATE ELECTRO-STUNNING SYSTEM FOR LOBSTERS, CRABS AND CRAYFISH. RECOMMENDED BY THE RSPCA, THE HUMANE SLAUGHTER ASSOCIATION, ADVOCATES FOR ANIMALS AND THE SHELLFISH NETWORK, THIS NEW METHOD BREAKS BOUNDARIES IN TYPICAL KILLING METHODS.

Boiled, chilled, butchered or drowned, it is clear that lobsters or crabs haven't had the easiest end-of-life experiences. However, new research and technology have resulted in a machine that makes death quick and painless. The Crustastun anaesthetises and kills lobsters, crabs and other shellfish in seconds by stunning the animals with a current that instantly interrupts the nerve function. This means the shellfish cannot receive stimuli and therefore cannot feel pain.

To merely stun the lobster the Crustastun takes less than half a second but a prolonged application of the stun, up to 10 seconds, kills the animal with the current passing through 13 brain centres of a lobster, or the two brain centres of a crab. Not only is this method quicker and more humane, but the Crustastun ensures that shellfish die with minimum distress which improves meat quality. During traditional drowning or boiling methods crabs and lobsters produce a stress hormone which affects the taste and quality of the meat.

As well as this the Crustastun destroys harmful bacteria, reduces scum and is safe and easy to use with stress-free killing carried out by unskilled staff with a touch of the button.



Ask the experts:

THE FISHMONGER – Ray Lindsey GM
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THE MAIL ORDER SEAFOOD SPECIALISTS –
Gareth Griffiths and Mary White (proprietors)
Selective Seafoods, North Wales
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THE CHEF – Richard Davies (Executive Chef)
Bybrook Restaurant, Manor House Hotel and
Golf Club, Wiltshire
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"Here at Haymans Fisheries, we always look for new and innovative ideas. I believe the Crustastun is without doubt the best piece of technology there has been in the fish industry for many years, easily on a par with the introduction of the new generation of lobster, crab and mussel tanks four years ago. So many

customers are a lot happier to buy crab and lobster now that we can offer a very quick and clean way of getting them ready to cook, and the meat is so very much tastier, I think. We look forward to many years of healthy lobster and crab sales."



"We are very pleased – it's so efficient and provides such an excellent quality of meat. The stress factor is low which means a more tender meat as the shellfish aren't tensing their muscles. Plus the shellfish is so fresh; we used to get our crab at 6pm, drown them over night and then drain them at 9am the next day. Now we do it all in the evening and put them straight into the refrigerator."

"The first thing that attracted me to the Crustastun was its humane method of killing. There is so much focus on this with other animals but this is the first product I have seen for shellfish. When we first tested the machine I admit I was sceptical and we were very surprised with the results. Due to not being under stress the lobster meat is sweeter and softer compared to killing in the usual way as it can become quite tough. We had many tests between the Crustastun and traditional methods and in a blind taste test the Crustastun won every time, plus the electrodes help to tenderise the meat of the shellfish – making it even softer."

For more information about Crustastun visit
www.crustastun.com



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