

## Chicken "Bouillabaisse"

(Serves 4)



Chicken Bouillabaisse sliced onions and fennel Photo Susie Iventosch

Recipes Courtesy of Rosa Jackson, Les Petits Farcis, Nice France  
Notes from cooking instructor Rosa Jackson: "I first tasted this dish at a restaurant up in the hills of Nice. It has the flavours of the Provençal fish stew bouillabaisse, but with chicken replacing the fish. The chef wouldn't give me the recipe but with a little research and tinkering I came up with this version, which is possibly better than his! Susie's notes: I wondered about a chicken bouillabaisse when we always think of this dish incorporating fish and seafood, but the flavors worked perfectly with chicken and I found it to be delicious. I also opted to make the homemade tomato coulis, which was really easy and fun."

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 free-range chicken, cut into pieces, or 4 free-range chicken legs, each cut in half
- 2 big pinches saffron threads
- 1/3 cup pastis (or other anise-flavored alcohol) (80 ml)
- 1/3 cup white wine (80 ml)
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. fennel seeds, crushed
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 red onion
- 1 fennel bulb
- 1 3/4 cups tomato coulis, homemade\* or store bought
- Bouquet garni of fresh fennel leaves (optional), a few sprigs flat-leaf parsley and a strip of orange peel, tied together
- Rouille (see recipe below)

### DIRECTIONS

Skin the chicken if you like, or score the skin so that the flesh absorbs the marinade. In a separate bowl, stir together the saffron, pastis, white wine, fennel seeds, salt and pepper. Set aside for a few minutes (or longer) so that the saffron releases its color. Pour the marinade over the chicken. Turn the chicken with your hands to thoroughly coat, cover with plastic wrap, and put in the refrigerator to marinate for 12 – 24 hours. Turn the chicken at least once as it marinates. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Dry the chicken pieces on paper towels, reserving the marinade. Heat the olive oil in a heavy skillet. When the oil is hot but not smoking, add the drained chicken pieces and brown carefully on all sides, about 10 minutes total. Meanwhile, cut the peeled onion and fennel in half, removing the core of the fennel, and slice thinly. Remove the chicken to a Dutch oven and reduce heat under the skillet. Pour away any excess fat, keeping about 2 tablespoons. Add the onion and fennel slices to the frying pan along with a large pinch of salt. Sauté until softened and pale gold. Pour the reserve marinade over the onion and fennel, turning the heat to high. Once it has reduced until almost syrupy, add the tomato coulis and cook for a few minutes. Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper. Bury the bouquet garni among the chicken pieces and carefully pour the tomato sauce over the chicken. Season to taste and cover with the lid. Bake (or simmer on the stove) for about 45 minutes, until the chicken is just cooked through. Avoid cooking too long as this makes for dry chicken. Serve with rouille, a spicy garlic mayonnaise (see recipe).

\* To make your own tomato coulis, cut ripe, fresh tomatoes into quarters and place in a saucepan with a pinch each of salt and sugar. Bring to a boil, lower the heat to a gentle bubble and reduce until thickened. Strain through a food mill.

### Rouille

(Makes about 1 cup)

Recipe Courtesy of Rosa Jackson, Les Petits Farcis, Nice France  
This spicy garlic mayonnaise is traditionally served with fish soup, but it also accompanies Rosa's chicken "bouillabaisse." Rosa says to spread it on toasted slices of baguette, sprinkled with grated gruyere and float in the soup. I spooned it over the chicken bouillabaisse, and also used it as the dipping sauce for the artichokes I served with the bouillabaisse.

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 garlic cloves
- Coarse sea salt
- 1 fresh chili pepper, 1 teaspoon chili paste or 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 slice dry bread soaked in milk or water
- 3/4 cup olive oil (200 ml)
- 1/2 lemon
- 1 pinch saffron, crushed and soaked in a little warm water
- Freshly ground pepper

### DIRECTIONS

Crush the garlic with the sea salt and chili pepper in a mortar. Add the egg yolk and the bread after squeezing out the excess milk. Add the olive oil drop by drop, always turning the pestle in the same direction. The mixture should thicken like mayonnaise. Squeeze in a little lemon juice to taste, add the saffron and adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper.

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## Thoughtful Food

# Orinda's Travelling Epicurean

By Susie Iventosch



Tuscany, Italy, April 2016: Group photo taken in Greve in Chianti, Italy, at Panzano and the butcher shop of Dario Cecchini. From left, Wendy Cecchini (wife of shop owner – actually from Walnut Creek), Catherine Soso (Orinda), Karen Billeci (Brentwood), Dario Cecchini (shop owner), Judi Nishimine (Orinda), Dawn Dailey, Erin Setzer (Greensboro, North Carolina), Willy Brown (San Jose), Ron Peters (Tigard, Oregon), Charlie Vollmar (tour leader, Orinda)  
Photos provided by Charlie Vollmar



Chicken Bouillabaisse with Rouille

Imagine a vacation where you bask in the sights, scents and colors of a foreign farmers' market, visit the local butcher or cheese maker, taste regional wines, hunt for truffles with dogs in tow and learn the secrets of cooking local fare, all in a faraway destination, like Tuscany, Provence or even New Orleans.

Perhaps you might visit Julia Child's home, "La Pitchoune" in Provence, or Dario Cecchini, the famous butcher from Panzano, Italy. What could be more fun than traveling with the pure goal of learning new cuisines and new recipes from around the globe? I am pretty sure, nothing beats this idea for me. And, this is exactly what Charlie Vollmar of Orinda is doing with his Epicurean Exchange Culinary School.

For the past 20 years, Vollmar has taught cooking classes at his Orinda kitchen, from Thai and Spanish cuisine to Winter Risotto and Essential Knife Skills and Techniques, but it's just been the last couple of years since he started his culinary adventure tours. He plans these trips for six to 10 people and customizes the journey for each group by setting up tours, cooking classes, both restaurant and home cooked meals, excursions and cultural sidelights with local chefs and merchants. The table is beautifully set for a true foodie adventure!

"These trips are designed to be entertaining, while providing both a learning and relaxing experience," Vollmar said. "It's an all-inclusive vacation, except each traveler books their own airfare, so they can add on to the trip, or arrive early, if they choose, but everything else is planned and provided as part of the trip. I like to make it all affordable and well-balanced, but not exhausting. We want it to be cultural and a culinary education, with plenty of free time to visit museums or to take bike tours and such."

The accommodations may be a charming hotel or perhaps a villa, where the group shops in town and then cooks meals at home for themselves as well as local characters.

Dave Kravitz of Lafayette began his Epicurean Exchange experience by taking many of Vollmar's local cooking classes. He jumped at the chance to sign up for the culinary vacations and has since been on several of these Epicurean Exchange adventures.

"Charlie is a real charmer and his classes are so much fun," Kravitz championed. "And, you get to eat what you make. Charlie has great connections with locals on the ground, so the food experience is a terrific combination of the top restaurants as well as our own hands-on cooking. It's like running our own restaurant on these trips, which is so much fun!"

He said that these trips are the perfect blend of geography, culture, history and food. A real "360-type" experience.

In addition to European excursions, Kravitz also participated in a New Orleans culinary trip. He said that was the most fun trip he'd been on in 100 years. (He did not sound that old when I spoke with him, but you get the gist.) On this trip, the group participated in a crawfish race on the sidewalk, before their jambalaya lesson. You pick your crawfish, put a number on it, and watch it go.

Kravitz, in addition to being a foodie, has been a longtime wine collector. He recalls two very memorable excursions involving tours of the epic wine cellars at two famous restaurants, Commander's Palace in the New Orleans French Quarter and La Ciau del Tornavento in Treiso, Italy, in the Piemonte region.

"It's so much fun to see and touch bottles that are otherwise untouchable, since some of them



Wine Cellar of Restaurant La Ciau del Tornavento Treiso, Italy

cost more than \$20,000!" Kravitz exclaimed.

Another indelible moment was the sneak peek into Julia Child's world when visiting her home and kitchen in Provence.

"I had goosebumps in there," Kravitz said. "That's the kind of thing you get when you go on one of Charlie's trips. You see places you could never imagine!"

Willy Brown, a resident of San Jose and an avid cook, toured with Epicurean Exchange to Tuscany. She loved everything about the trip which was made all the more fun, because she went with her younger brother, whom she doesn't get to see too often.

"The entire trip was incredible, but the thing that stands out the most was making pasta dough with the famous Anna Bini, an 84-year old restaurateur, who has recently started her own cooking school," Brown said.

They made raviolis and fettuccini, all by hand – no machines!

Learning the technique of olive oil tasting was a brand new experience for Brown, as was the trip to visit Dario Cecchini's butcher shop in Panzano, Italy. After the tour, they enjoyed a meal which was entirely focused on meat and were all surprised when the waitress started singing opera for them.

"What I really love about Epicurean Exchange is how Charlie promotes community and sharing food together," Brown said.

Dawn Daily of had taken quite a few Epicurean Exchange classes prior to joining any of the international excursions. She's now been on trips to Spain, France and Italy and is already signed up for another trip this year.

She said that one of the most unusual ingredients she's encountered was in Spain when they made a dish with eels, which seemed to wiggle a lot both before and after cutting them into pieces!

Even for Vollmar, there is always a new experience to be entertained. When I asked him what his most amazing experience has been so far, he said that it was the tour of the Caterpillar Contrada, with its 600 years of costume and pageantry surrounding the annual Palio Horse Race in Siena. Each summer the 17 remaining contrade (there were more than 50 of these quarters or districts at one time) gear up for a victory. The race is held in the Piazza del Campo on July 2 and Aug. 16, and though the actual race lasts but a minute, the results are emblazoned in the hearts and souls of the contrade members for the entire year.

Epicurean Exchange has several trips planned for 2017 and 2018, including New Orleans, Tuscany, Provence, Goa and New Dehli, India and more. For more information on Epicurean Exchange excursions or local classes, visit [www.epicureanexchange.com](http://www.epicureanexchange.com). To Reach Charlie Vollmar and Epicurean Exchange by email or phone: [info@epicureanexchange.com](mailto:info@epicureanexchange.com), (925) 368-4181