

Fluent In French

BE THAT AS IT MAY,
DIANE FORLEY HAS AN
ALLERGY TO FROUFROU.

DIANE FORLEY, THE CHEF AND OWNER of Verbena in Manhattan, is among the new generation of cooks who came of age, culinarily speaking, after the era of quiche and beef Wellington. Forley, 33, did her apprenticeship in the 1980's, when money and imagination flowed freely, when exuberance was high and when America grew completely enamored of food. The fluency she acquired in such an environment explains the ease and understatement of her cooking.

Certainly, there is none of the hyperbole that usually accompanies the novice, as she weighs a green peppercorn against a pink one. Having been around interesting food most of her life, she has no illusions about finding a new ingredient or hatching a hot combination. The years that her predecessors spent learning to distinguish good food from bad Forley spent learning to listen to her own inner voices.

From her Guatemalan mother, who fed the family couscous and fresh curries (!), she learned that cooking can be fun: "I guess that's what I liked about it in the first place." At Brown, her studies in French and comparative literature afforded her a unique perspective on the excesses of the 80's, which she experienced firsthand in the kitchen of the Palace restaurant in Manhattan, where dinner cost \$100 per person and new heights in garnishing and exotic froufrou were established.

Though she knew from her readings of Balzac and Flaubert that the extravagances of 19th-century France were followed by a period of simplicity in dining, she still guards against pretension. Indeed, if Forley is any indication, her generation of American chefs are more concerned with ease and comfort in cooking than in becoming the I. M. Peis of food.

Of course, the kind of food you eat out is more complicated than the food you would cook at home. However, in the following menu, Forley has tried to create recipes with components that can be prepared ahead or omitted entirely.

The monkfish, for instance, could be served with only the vinaigrette or with the addition of arti-



chokes or, for the truly ambitious, with the artichoke purée. Certainly, the vegetable bouillon can be made ahead, with whatever vegetables are in season. You can offer it unembellished or with the cornucopia of garnishes suggested here. I would hesitate, however, to recommend making changes to the cheese and citrus parfaits. The fromage blanc, subtle and delicious, acts as a natural sponge to sop up the juices of the oranges.

Of course, you could prepare this meal for a gala dinner or parcel it out dish by dish. But whatever you decide, this is food that invokes spring. It celebrates the youth and optimism that are the

Forley, in the dining room of Verbena, where you can get an exquisitely prepared, laid-back meal.

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Vegetable Bouillon

The bouillon:

- 2 medium onions, peeled
- 3 ribs celery
- 2 leeks, white and light green parts only, washed well
- 2 parsnips, peeled
- 2 small carrots, peeled
- 2 small fennel bulbs
- 4 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 plum tomato, diced
- 3 quarts water
- Kosher salt to taste

Suggested garnishes (choose 2 or 3):

- 1 rib celery, thinly sliced on the diagonal
- 1 carrot, peeled and shaved with a vegetable peeler
- ½ cup pea shoots
- 1 small red onion, peeled and thinly sliced
- ¼ cup shelled peas
- ½ fennel bulb, trimmed and finely shaved
- 1 leek, white and light green parts only, washed well and thinly sliced crosswise
- ¼ cup mixed fresh leaves of parsley, tarragon and chervil and fennel fronds.

1. To make the bouillon, cut 1 of the onions, the celery, leeks, parsnips, carrots and fennel into 1-inch dice. Heat 3 teaspoons of olive oil in a large pot over low heat. Add the diced vegetables and sweat, stirring frequently, until soft but not browned, about 20 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, cut the other onion in half crosswise. Heat a small heavy skillet over medium-high heat until smoking. Brush with 1 teaspoon of oil. Place the onion in the skillet cut side down and cook until blackened.

3. Add blackened onion, tomato and water to pot and bring to a boil. Simmer for 1½ hours. Season lightly with salt.

4. Line a strainer with a thin cotton tea towel, place over a bowl and strain the bouillon. Let the vegetables continue to drip at least 1 hour. Discard the vegetables.

5. To serve, bring the bouillon to a boil in a large saucepan. If using celery or carrot, add to the pot and cook for 3 minutes. Add any remaining garnishes except herbs and cook just until warmed through.

6. Using a slotted spoon, divide the

garnishes among 6 bowls. Remove the bouillon from the heat and sprinkle in the herbs. Ladle over the vegetables and serve immediately.

Yield: Six servings.

Roasted Monkfish With Morels, Dandelion And Artichoke Sauce

The sauces:

- 1 head garlic, unpeeled, plus 1 large clove, peeled and chopped
- 1¼ cups plus 5 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 sprigs fresh tarragon
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- 1 cup white wine
- ½ cup Champagne vinegar
- 3 cups chicken broth, homemade or low-sodium canned
- 3 lemons, halved, plus 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 8 black peppercorns, tied in cheesecloth
- 12 baby artichokes, tough outer leaves discarded
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

The fish and vegetables:

- 6 8-ounce pieces of monkfish, bone intact, halved crosswise
- ¼ cup superfine flour, like Wondra
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ pound fresh morels (or 2 ounces dried, rehydrated in hot water and drained), stemmed, and halved if large
- ½ pound dandelion greens.

1. To make the sauces, cut the head of garlic in half crosswise. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large saucepan over low heat. Add the garlic head, tarragon and thyme and sweat for 5 minutes. Raise the heat and stir in the wine and vinegar. Stir in the broth and ¼ cup of oil. Squeeze the juice from 1 halved lemon into the saucepan, then add rind, along with the peppercorns. Simmer slowly for 20 minutes. Set aside.

2. Meanwhile, squeeze the juice from the remaining 2 halved lemons into a wide pot and add the rinds. Stem the artichokes. Place the artichokes in the pot and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil. Place damp paper towels over the artichokes to keep them immersed. Lower the heat and simmer until very tender when pierced with a knife, about 35 minutes. Drain and place in a bowl.

Strain the reserved garlic-herb mixture over the artichokes, stir to coat them well and set aside for 1 hour.

3. Remove artichokes from the liquid and simmer it in a saucepan until reduced to 2 cups. Let cool. Place in a blender and, with the machine running, slowly drizzle in ½ cup of oil. Season the vinaigrette with salt and pepper and set aside.

4. Heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a small skillet over low heat. Add the chopped clove of garlic and sweat just until softened. Pull off and discard all but the innermost leaves of the artichokes and place the artichoke hearts in a food processor with the garlic, 2 tablespoons of lemon juice and 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Purée until smooth. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Place in a medium saucepan and whisk in half of the vinaigrette. Set aside.

5. To make the monkfish, preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Sprinkle the fish very lightly on both sides with flour and season with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil in a large ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat. Place the fish in the skillet top side down and sear on both sides until golden brown (in 2 batches if necessary). Place in the oven and roast until fish is cooked through, about 5 minutes.

6. Meanwhile, warm the artichoke sauce over very low heat. (The sauce will separate if too hot.) Remove the fish from the skillet and keep warm. Deglaze the skillet over medium heat with the remaining vinaigrette. Strain the vinaigrette into another skillet and place over medium heat. Add the butter and the morels and cook for 2 minutes. Add the dandelion greens, stir just until wilted, remove from heat and season with salt and pepper.

7. To serve, spoon the vegetables with their sauce onto the center of 6 plates. Place 1 piece of monkfish on either side of the vegetables. Spoon the artichoke sauce around the vegetables and serve immediately.

Yield: Six servings.

Fromage Blanc Parfaits With Citrus Fruits And Caramel Sauce

The parfaits:

- ½ cup fromage blanc or farmer's cheese
- ¼ cup mascarpone
- 2 tablespoons almond paste
- ¾ cup whole milk
- ¼ cup sugar

- 1½ teaspoons gelatin
- 1 tablespoon water
- 2 tablespoons amaretto
- ½ cup heavy cream

The sauce:

- 8 blood oranges
- 2 navel oranges
- 4 mandarin oranges
- 10 kumquats
- ¾ cup sugar
- ¼ cup water
- Juice from 1 lemon.

1. To make the parfaits, place the fromage blanc, mascarpone, almond paste, milk and sugar in a metal bowl over a pan of gently simmering water. Heat until the sugar and almond paste are dissolved, whisking occasionally.

2. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, sprinkle the gelatin over 1 tablespoon of water. Pass the cheese mixture through a strainer into another bowl. Add the gelatin and place back over the water, whisking just until gelatin dissolves. Let cool. Stir in the amaretto.

3. Refrigerate the mixture until it is chilled and beginning to set; do not let it get firm. Whip the cream to soft peaks. Stir in ⅓ of the cheese mixture, then fold in the rest. Spoon into 6 ½-cup ramekins. Refrigerate for several hours.

4. To make the sauce, squeeze the juice from 4 of the blood oranges and all of the navel oranges. Set aside. Working over a bowl to collect any juice, use a paring knife to remove all the peel and pith from the mandarin oranges and the remaining blood oranges. Cut the sections out from between the membranes. Thinly slice the kumquats crosswise, removing any pits. Set aside.

5. Combine the sugar, water and lemon juice in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Use a pastry brush dipped in water to wash down any sugar on the side of the pan. Cook until the sugar turns a nice caramel color. Quickly remove from heat and carefully add the orange juices. Return the sauce to the heat and simmer until reduced to a syrupy consistency. Remove from heat and stir in the orange sections and kumquats. Set aside.

6. To serve, dip the bottoms of the ramekins briefly in hot water. Run the tip of a small knife around the edge of the parfaits to loosen. Unmold onto 6 dessert plates. Spoon some of the sauce and fruit beside each one and serve immediately.

Yield: Six servings. ■