

Cooking through the Collection, Episode 1 - Mastering the Art of French Cooking

Melissa: Hello and welcome to Cooking Through the Collection. My name is Melissa and I'm a librarian and home cook. I do a lot of research in wanting to expand my repertoire with cooking, and so I've challenged myself to walk through the stacks of my library's cookbook collection and grab things I've never tried before.

So let's see what I'm gonna try this week.

So I was a PBS kid growing up, and I have vivid memories of living in our first apartment and sitting on the floor and watching every single food show on PBS. There were so many, but I do remember one distinct voice that I just can't forget. Beef Bourguignon.

Julia Child: French beef stew in red wine. We're going to serve it with braised onions and mushrooms and a wine dark sauce. It's a perfectly delicious dish.

I think all of us have grown up with some part of Julia Child in their life, whether through SNL, Julie and Julia, and The Julia Show from the 2022 series on HBO Max. Now, I hadn't thought about Julia Child in a while, probably since culinary school. Yes, I'm a culinary school dropout. We talked a lot about Julia Child and she passed around the time I was there.

So there was a lot of talk in, uh, memorials to her and all that she did for the culinary world. However, the reason that I had it brought back into my mind was an Instagram story from a drag queen. Their Instagram account is Wigs by Vanity, and they had inspired by a YouTube channel called Anti- Chef, who's been having a playlist of videos called Jamie and Julia.

And the reason I, you'll have to listen.

Wigs by Vanity: I'm frazzled , I'm only, like three steps, four steps in . I've got, um, I've got all the meat, I've got everything browned, a number, the, the, the meat in the, um, in the oven for four minutes to, or eight minutes, really a tossing with flour on it. And then I've gotta start combining everything once that

happens. I, I'm pretty sure that after this happens, Yeah, stir in the wine, the stock, then the, okay, I'm okay.

It's in the oven. . That was stressful. That was really stressful and I'm surprised how much, um, wine used some is a little bit left. I'm gonna, um, I'm gonna finish that. I'm gonna have that now and sit down for a minute. I'm gonna clean up and start the next step.

Melissa: So let's take a look through the cookbook. It is quite a lot.

So this is Julia Child's, "Mastering The Art of French Cooking." and also on the cover is Louise Bertolle and Simone Beck. It is a big copy and this is actually the anniversary edition from 2009, so that's why it's in pristine condition. I looked at my parents' copy, which I think is an original. I do not think they actually ever cooked out of it, though it did have some Quaker Oat printed card recipes, so they must have looked through it at some point.

But there's a whole large section on why and how the book came to be in 1961, which is its original year, acknowledgements. This is a heavy book. This has lots of chapters on different types of things with narration on how to do things like folding egg whites, souffle molds. a lot, and I know when I had read Julie and Julia talked about all these aspics and things like that.

So I know that I'm gonna avoid those sections. I'm not sure I am up for that challenge, at least not right now, and I don't know if my spouse would want to eat it. So the recipe I've chosen is Beef Bourguignon, Beef a la Bourguignon, beef stew and red wine with bacon, onion, and mushrooms. As is the case with most famous dishes, there are more ways than one to arrive at a good Beef Bourguignon. Carefully done and perfectly flavored, it is certainly one of the most delicious beef dishes concocted by man and can be the main course for a buffet dinner. Fortunately, you can prepare it completely ahead even a day in advance, and it only gains flavor when reheated. And there's some vegetable and wine suggestions.

So, yeah, let's go in the kitchen and get started.

Okay. So let's do this. So I'm looking at the recipe Beef a la Bourguignon: beef stew and red wine with bacons onions and mushrooms. So first thing, you always read through the entire recipe and I see that I'm gonna be cutting this recipe in half. So I'm going to need a half pound of quartered fresh mushrooms, sauteed and butter.

Page 513. Look, it's another recipe but it's pretty straightforward, so it's going to use, we're gonna need an enameled skillet. We're going to need. Two tablespoons butter, one tablespoon olive oil. This says a half pound of fresh mushrooms washed, well dried, left whole if small, sliced, or quartered if large.

And there's some optional other stuff, but we're not gonna deal with that. So you heard fresh mushrooms washed, well dried, left whole if small, sliced or quartered if large. Look, when I was in culinary school, my product knowledge chef told us, "You always wash your mushrooms. They are grown in caca." And Alton Brown's also proven that the whole not washing your mushrooms because they'll soak up moisture is a lie.

So let me wash my mushrooms. So place a skillet over high heat with the butter and oil. So we're gonna turn. My stove on and it says a tablespoon of butter and a tablespoon of oil I have, cuz I know that the other recipes calling for olive oil. I'm going to use that. So I need to, what did I say I need?

I need a half tablespoon of oil. We're gonna allow that to heat up. So we need the fresh mushrooms washed, well dried, left whole if small, sliced or quartered if large. Now you can't see these, but they are absolutely gigantic. So I am going to slice them in average slices, cuz this is, this is a honking mushroom, so let's give them some chop and I'm cutting of the

the really big parts of the stem that look kind of tough. We want everything to be consistent. But yeah, so one of the things I did learn at culinary school that I've taken with me is keeping my fingers away from the knife. How to be a little bit more consistent, though I admit I don't use a chef's knife anymore, I use a Santoku because I have little hands.

I find this more manageable. It also seems to stay sharper longer, but yeah. So I'm gonna cut up these mushrooms and I'll be right back. Okay? And I'm back. Let's see what the next instruction is. As soon as you see the butter foam has begun to subside, indicating that it is hot enough, add the mushrooms, toss and shake the pan for four to five minutes.

Okay, so I do see some bubbling, so I am going to adjust a little bit. And let's see. Do we get a sizzle? I'll put one in first. See, because it said til bubbling.

Yeah. So we want them to release their moisture and then they'll brown. So yeah. I'm gonna consider that done. It says remove it from the heat, so, and turn the heat off. So we, we have mushrooms, so we're good on that. And so we'll go

back to the recipe. So there's gonna be bacon, lean stewing beef, carrot, onion, salt, pepper, flour for this first bit.

Okay. So I am trying to not destroy my kitchen and have 500 pots and pans for my spouse to clean up. So I'm gonna do my best here to work in order that meats go last. So I need one half sliced carrot and one half sliced onion. Just saying sliced is a little, a little random for me. So I'm gonna take a smaller carrot.

And. These were picked and organic with the stems on it. So I am gonna give 'em a little bit of rinse. You don't always have to, especially when you can tell it's been, you know, those processed carrot nubs, you know, I mean the biteable carrots, so that doesn't matter. Going to get an onion. Okay, so it said sliced, so I'm gonna go with rings, right?

So carrot and then it said one sliced onion. Well these are jumbo white onions, so I even think like a half an onion's gonna be a lot. So, I think, I don't know what onion sizes were typical when this recipe was written. I feel like everything's bigger, but I'm gonna do the half onion. So it says slice, so I've cut it on its meridians, not meridians

longways, so I have a root on one end and the next step of the recipe. So here we go for the, remember, I'm cutting this recipe in half, but it would be a six-ounce chunk of bacon. Remove the rind and cut the bacon into lardons, which is sticks a quarter inch thick by half inch long. Simmer, the rind and bacon for 10 minutes. Drain and dry. This is the thing. So I went to the Amish market cuz I had the best chance of getting the best beef, the best deli stuff, and I could not find a chunk of bacon. Sometimes they have like bacon ends, so I don't have that, but I'm gonna follow the recipe. I'm gonna do what it says. So,

Let's give it a shot. I'll be back in a little bit after this is done simmering, and I'm back. Everything's been simmered and drained, so my, it says, preheat the oven to 450 degrees, so sauté the bacon in the oil, over moderate heat for two to three minutes to brown lightly. As I mentioned, I'm using the same pan that I had before, so it says one tablespoon olive oil.

I also, I want to add another half tablespoon of olive oil.

So the meat is out, and now it says in the same fat brown, the sliced vegetables, pour out the sautéing fat. Well, there is a lot of fat in here, so let's just put the veggies in. And this was the half a sliced onion and the half the carrot. But I used a small carrot. The carrots were a little small.

Does it say how much brown? Sometimes the terms in this cookbook are a little vague, but I'm gonna go for a little bit of color. Gonna wash my hands again.

Okay, so let's clean the decks and we'll get on to the next part of the recipe.

I am giving it a bit of a stir to break up the onion slices. You don't want to, as I said before, move it too much cuz browning happens more when there's direct contact with the pan. But so this will probably take a few minutes. Now you may be wondering why I chose Beef Bourguignon out of the hundreds of recipes that were options.

I had watched Wigs by Vanity make this, but I also saw them make the French onion soup, which is one of my favorite things. And also cheese souffle, which looked interesting. But my spouse doesn't eat cheese. Yes, my spouse does not eat cheese. So it really narrowed down a lot of what I was able to make. So I decided on Beef Bourguignon.

I remember having it when I studied abroad and we did a weekend in Normandy for our history class. It was a tourist trappy place. I don't even remember it, which means it probably wasn't very good, but yeah, it kind of floated to the top of being the recipe to try. As I might not have mentioned before, my husband and I are not wine drinkers.

My husband drinks bourbon. I very rarely drink, and when I do, it's something like hard cider, so don't have a lot of fancy wines around the house. So, uh, what I do have left over from a party is Hayes Ranch, California Red Wine Blend, and we're gonna need a cup and a half of it.

Okay, that's a cup and a half and I should probably taste it, huh? Cuz, it doesn't have to be super fancy. I wouldn't put something ridiculously fancy in here. I, I don't have the budget for that, so let's give it a sip. So it's pretty mild. It's definitely blended, it's smooth. It's not really tannin-y tannin-y? What Julia suggested is a full-bodied young red wine, such as one of the suggested for serving or a Chianti, Beaujolais, Côtes du Rhône, Bordeaux Saint-Émilion or Burgundy. Well, we're almost in the final countdown. So the step after this, which I'm not gonna be able to talk while I'm holding this thing cause it's so heavy, remove the casserole and turn oven down to 325. We can do that. So in 5, 4, 3, two, one [timer beep]. Okay. So I'm immediately, even before I'm taking it out, I'm turning it down to 325.

Cuz once I turn my back to this. I might forget,

I'm leaving the oven door open for a little bit extra is good, it will help lower the temp of the oven. I'll do that again please. Just to make sure. So now it says, stir in the wine and enough stock or bouillon that the meat is barely covered. Okay, so we talked about the wine already.

So then enough beef or stock so that the barely covered, so these aren't quite layered yet. I'm gonna try to make these one, like one layer. It said barely cover, so I'm going to use some beef broth. I couldn't find any of that fancy bone broth or anything. So this pan's a little bigger, so I'm guessing it might take a little bit more stock than the recipe calls for.

Okay. I would consider that. I consider that barely covered. Add the tomato paste, two cloves of mashed garlic. I crush the garlic, so we push it, you know, peel it, obviously we push it between the blade and the cutting board. I'm gonna break it up a little bit more. Some people will here also add salt to mash it again to make it paste.

So I'm gonna do it. This was a thing at culinary school too. But I'm always worried about adding too much salt. At culinary school, everything had salt in it, like obscene amounts of salt. And I grew up with very little salt. So I try to be a little bit more mindful. Don't tell the chefs. Add that to the pot.

Half a teaspoon of thyme, so quarter teaspoon dried thyme. A crumbled Bay leaf. Break it up a little bit, right? Add the tomato paste, herbs, garlic, and bacon rind. Bring to the simmer on top of the stove. Okay, I didn't realize I had to bring it back up to a simmer on top of the stove again. Come on, simmer. Go, go gadget, simmer.

If I had known that, I would've turned the stove back on. Oh. Oh. Well, It shouldn't take that long. This pan's, you know, been in a 425-degree oven, right? Shouldn't take that long.

So it says cover and place in the lower third of the oven.

I told you it's very heavy. Let me close the door. How long did it say regulate heat? So liquid simmers very slowly for two and a half, three hours. So we'll put it in for a little bit of time, check on it, and then we'll come back.

So after everything has simmered in the oven, we're gonna strain it out. We're gonna keep the sauce and we're gonna keep the beef and bacon and we're gonna mix that all together. And it says, prepare the onions and mushrooms, which,

you know, we did the mushrooms, but, okay, I'm gonna admit it now for the small white onions braised in stock.

Page 43. I didn't even look. Now here's the reason. I have peeled pearl onions before. , it requires boiling them. You know, they're, they're like the diameter of a quarter. It takes a lot of time. And so I bought frozen ones. I know not true to Julia Child, but I had to do it there there was just no way I was going to peel that many pearl onions and cook them in stock.

So I did defrost them sieved everything out, returned the beef, distributed the cooked onions and mushrooms over the meat. And then while Julia recommends boiled potatoes as the traditional side dish, I decided to use egg noodles. The No Yolk Dumpling ones specifically, they're the really fat, lovely ones. So I decided to use those cuz it said butter noodles or steamed rice may be substituted.

You can also serve it with buttered peas, but I, I don't know about that. So let's plate it up and see what I think and what my spouse thinks. Okay, so, alright. What we are having is Beef Bourguignon from Julia Child's, "Mastering the Art of French Cooking."

Husband: Oooh.

Melissa: So let me know what you think. I have some opinions, but as you know, I'm hard on myself. So go ahead.

Husband: You are too hard on yourself. Usually you are one of the best cooks and you don't treat yourself that way. So

Melissa: There might be bits of Bay Leaf. So heads up on that.

Husband: Hmm. This is very tasty. Beef is so tender, but the flavors are all very, very tasty. The noodles are a good addition with the beef and the mushrooms. Liking this a lot, this is very tasty.

Melissa: Do you think there should be more sauce? It seems a little dry, little saucier?

Husband: I could use more sauce. I mean, sauce is delicious. Let's be real. I mean, the mushrooms, the beef. I haven't had an onion yet. Let me try some of that with the onion.

Melissa: You might need to stab it.

Husband: Mmm mmm..

Melissa: Okay. So should I add this recipe to our repertoire?

Husband: Yes. But I can also understand where this might not be a weekday recipe for the most part. This might be a weekend recipe, just because I do know it took you quite a while to prepare it today.

Melissa: Okay, another satisfied customer,

So here are my final thoughts and review on Beef Bourguignon and "Mastering the Art of French Cooking" by Julia Child. It is an absolutely delicious recipe. However, I would not make it on a weeknight. It's a lot of steps and a lot of time commitment. Maybe looking for something in an Instant Pot or in a slow cooker might be a little bit better for a weeknight.

Ingredients weren't too hard to find. So that was good, and it was delicious. So I would definitely make this recipe again. I would try out some other recipes in the book. Is this a book that I would buy or should I just borrow it from my library? Well, since my parents have a copy and my library has a copy, I borrowed it and it's such a big book and it's really kind of a research book in some ways.

So unless you really want to deep dive into French cuisine, I would borrow it. And you know, maybe you have someone in your family who has a well-loved copy. Thank you for listening to this episode of Cooking Through the Collection. If you enjoyed it, please consider subscribing on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, or wherever you're listening to this episode.

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