



A break from TRADITION

Roast turkey is standard Christmas fare, but for an equally festive alternative, top chefs suggest dressing up the dinner table with these sumptuous meats instead
BY SASHA GONZALES

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BRITTANY LOBSTER IN A SEALED COCOTTE SERVED WITH CHESTNUTS AND BLACK WINTER TRUFFLES

by Lorenz Hoja, chef de cuisine,
L'ATELIER DE JOËL ROBUCHON



Food is one of Hoja's greatest joys. The German native inherited his love for cooking from his grandparents, who were fanatical about fresh produce and would bring the young Hoja to fish and pick mushrooms. In his adult years, Hoja had one of his culinary dreams come true when he met the legendary chef Joël Robuchon and worked for him in the two-Michelin-starred Atelier in London, and later at the two-Michelin-starred French Atelier. Now, at L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon at Resorts World Sentosa, Hoja makes it a point to introduce fine French dining to guests.

For him, Christmas is the perfect time to indulge in sumptuous foods, like caviar, truffles, vintage red wine, champagne, and this lobster, baked *en cocotte* with *beurre de homard* (lobster butter) and a flavourful lobster sauce. "The festive season is a great excuse to make this rich, succulent dish. Many Christmases ago, in Germany, I prepared it for my loved ones and they enjoyed it. My grandparents were especially impressed because I cooked this dish in their wood-fired oven," he shares.

RECIPE (Serves 2) Ingredients

Sealing pastry
370g plain flour
3 whole egg whites
4 whole eggs
A bit of sugar
A bit of salt
1 sprig rosemary

Chestnuts
10 fresh chestnuts
1 litre cottonseed oil, for deep-frying
60g butter
100ml chicken stock
1 bouquet garni

Lobster
2 cups water
1 tbsp salt
1 female Brittany lobster, about 500g
40g truffle
Curry powder
2 tbsp butter
1 tsp olive oil

Lobster stock
2 tbsp olive oil
1 shallot, diced
½ onion, peeled and chopped
½ carrot, peeled and diced
½ celery stalk, washed and diced
½ fennel, washed and diced
1 garlic clove
1 star anise
¼ tsp fennel seeds
¼ tsp black peppercorns
1 bouquet garni

Sauce
2 tbsp olive oil
¼ fennel, diced
Salt and pepper
Pinch of saffron
½ garlic clove
Tomato confit

Garnish
10 basil leaf tips
1 garlic clove
1 star anise
1 sprig rosemary

Method

For the sealing pastry

1. In the bowl of a heavy-duty mixer fitted with a dough hook, combine the flour, egg whites, whole eggs, sugar, salt and rosemary. Mix at a low speed until blended.
2. Scrape down the sides of the bowl and form a ball of dough. Cover the dough and set aside to rest for an hour, so it's easier to work with.

For the chestnuts

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C. In a large oven-proof skillet, melt 4 tablespoons of butter over moderately high heat. When hot, add the chestnuts and cook, about 15 minutes. Watch the chestnuts carefully so they do not burn.
2. Add the chicken stock and the bouquet garni, and bring to boil over high heat. Transfer the skillet with the chestnuts

to the oven, and braise, uncovered, until almost all of the liquid has been absorbed, 15 to 20 minutes.

For the lobster

1. In a small casserole dish, bring water to a rolling boil over a high heat. Add salt.
2. Thoroughly rinse the lobster under cold running water. Cut away the rubber bands or wooden pegs restraining the claws. Holding the body of the lobster with one hand, plunge only the claws into the boiling water. Remove after 30 seconds. Drain.
3. Twist the claw and two articulations off the body of the lobster. Return the claws to the boiling water and simmer for 2 minutes.
4. Once cooked, gently crack the claw shells with a hammer or a nutcracker, trying not to damage the meat. Extract the meat with a seafood fork; it should come out in a single piece. Set claw meat aside, reserving the shells.

5. Holding the lobster with both hands, separate the head from the tail. With a long sharp knife, cut the lobster tail crosswise into three equal parts. With a small paring knife, remove the long, thin intestinal tract found in a lower segment of the tail meat. Discard.

6. Set the tail pieces aside. Open the head. Remove and discard the lumpy head sac located near the eyes.
7. Remove and reserve the liver or *tomalley*, the brownish liquid found inside the upper area of the head. Remove and reserve the dark green coral that runs parallel to the liver, if present, in the female lobster.

8. Pass the coral and *tomalley* through a fine-mesh sieve and mix with 3 tablespoons of softened butter.
9. Transfer this *beurre de homard* to a small container, cover securely and refrigerate. Using kitchen scissors, cut the lobster head and shell into pieces for stock. Set aside.

10. In a large saucepan, heat 1 tbsp olive oil over high heat until it smokes lightly. Add the lobster shells and sear until coloured, tossing constantly, 1 to 2 minutes.
11. In another saucepan, heat 1 tbsp olive oil over moderate heat and sweat the diced shallot, onion, carrot, celery, fennel, garlic and a pinch of salt, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the star anise, fennel seeds, black peppercorns, and the bouquet garni. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Skim away any impurities that rise

to the surface.
12. Place a fine-mesh sieve in a large bowl. Transfer the lobster pieces and liquid to the sieve, pressing down on the shells to extract the maximum flavour. Discard the shells, reserving the liquid.

13. In a large skillet, heat oil until hot but not smoking. Add 3 slices of fennel. Lightly salt and pepper the slices, add a pinch of saffron and garlic. Cover and sweat, 2 to 3 minutes, without browning. Add the tomato confit and the lobster stock.
14. Cover and cook 15 to 20 minutes, until the fennel is cooked. Pass through a food mill to extract the maximum liquid and flavour.
15. Season the pieces of lobster tail with salt, pepper and curry powder. In a large skillet, heat 1 tbsp olive oil until hot but not smoking. Place the portions of lobster shell side-down. Do not cook the lobster, but simply heat the shell until it turns slightly red, 1 to 2 minutes. (This step is purely an aesthetic one, so that when the lobster is served, it does not appear undercooked.)
16. Remove the pieces of lobster. Add the minced truffle to the skillet. Add the lobster sauce and bring to a boil.

17. Preheat the oven (preferably convection) to 245°C. Note: A convection oven will help the sealing pastry to brown more evenly. Crack an egg into a small bowl and whisk to blend. Set aside.
18. Place the pieces of lobster in a 16cm round clear ovenproof casserole dish fitted with a lid. Arrange the chestnuts around the lobster. Add the garnish (basil, garlic, star anise and rosemary). Spoon the *beurre de homard* on top of the lobster. Add the lobster sauce.
19. Cut the sealing pastry in half and roll each half into a strip 10cm wide, and long enough to wrap halfway around the casserole dish. Place the lid on the casserole and the wrap the dough around the edges, pressing to make a tight seal. With a brush, coat the surface of the pastry with the egg glaze.
20. Place the casserole in the centre of the oven and bake for 12 minutes. Remove from the oven. To serve, break the seal and discard the pastry. Spoon the lobster and other ingredients into two warmed dinner plates, and serve immediately.

21. In a large skillet, heat oil until hot but not smoking. Add 3 slices of fennel. Lightly salt and pepper the slices, add a pinch of saffron and garlic. Cover and sweat, 2 to 3 minutes, without browning. Add the tomato confit and the lobster stock.
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47. Remove the pieces of lobster. Add the minced truffle to the skillet. Add the lobster sauce and bring to a boil.



JUNIPER-ROASTED VENISON FILLET WITH PEAR, CELERIAC & GRAND VENEUR SAUCE

by Julien Royer, chef de cuisine, JAAN

Born to a family of farmers in Auvergne in central France, Royer has a great appreciation for ingredients in their pure and organic state. Growing up, he was taught to value the beauty of seasonal produce, watching firsthand how each animal, vegetable and fruit had its time and place during the year when it was an embodiment of perfection. This philosophy has stayed with him throughout his career. Working at acclaimed restaurants all over the world, including the Michelin-starred Bernard Andrieux in Auvergne and Greenhouse Restaurant in London, Royer had an outlet to promote his belief in seasonal cooking. At Jaan, he remains true to his culinary ideas, sourcing the best products from only the most discerning suppliers, and travelling constantly to sample the finest seasonal products.

This venison dish truly embraces the flavours of the season. "Venison is at its best during winter, making it a great alternative to turkey," he explains. "It's a deliciously tender meat, and is perfect when paired with some of the best winter fruits and vegetables. *Grand veneur* sauce is traditionally finished with blood from the venison meat. However, I have added chocolate as an alternative for a rich and intense sauce."

RECIPE (Serves 10) Ingredients

For the venison

4kg venison saddle, bone-in
100g extra virgin olive oil
2 sprigs fresh rosemary
2 dried juniper berries
1 tbs clarified butter
Fine salt, for seasoning

Prior to serving

50g butter
1 stalk rosemary
1 stalk thyme
1 clove garlic, crushed

For the grand veneur sauce

Reduction

1kg small venison trimmings
250g button mushrooms
200ml red wine vinegar
3 litres red wine
10 juniper berries
20 black peppercorns
1 fresh bay leaf
1 sprig thyme
1 tbs red currant puree

Finishing

50g Guanaja chocolate, shaved
50g salted butter
1 tsp juniper berries, chopped
Fine salt, for seasoning
Freshly ground black pepper, for seasoning

For the poached pears

1kg Conference pears
100g muscovado sugar
2 cinnamon sticks
2g orange zest
8g cloves
1 vanilla pod
7g star anise

For the muscovado amande

100g muscovado sugar
15g almonds

For the juniper berries powder

30g orange skin
60g muscovado amande (recipe above)
2g black pepper
10g juniper berries

For the pickled blood orange

5 blood oranges
50ml port wine
25g sherry vinegar

For the celeriac ruban

Celeriac tube
400g celeriac, peeled and cut into big chunks
300g chicken stock
25g chopped black truffle
3.5g agar

Rubans

1kg celeriac, peeled
Fine salt, for seasoning

Butter emulsion

50g chicken stock
20g butter

To finish

250g Brussels sprouts
Freshly shaved black truffle
Fleur de Sel, for seasoning
Freshly ground black pepper, for seasoning

Method

For the venison

1. Debone and clean the venison saddle. Keep the bones for the *grand veneur* sauce.

2. Marinate the venison in olive oil with crushed juniper berries and chopped rosemary stalks for 12 hours (meat can be kept in this marinade for up to 2 days prior to cooking).
3. Slice the meat into 200g pieces (you should have about 10 portions). Season with salt.
4. Sear the venison in clarified butter.
5. Place the venison on an oven tray and roast in a 160°C oven for 10 to 15 minutes. Remove from oven and let the meat rest for 10 to 15 minutes.
6. Prior to serving, melt butter in a pan and baste the venison in the pan with rosemary, thyme and crushed garlic.

For the grand veneur sauce

1. Melt the butter until it turns a nutty golden brown.
2. Sear the venison bones and trimmings in the brown butter till they are a golden brown. Then add carrots, onions, celery and garlic.
3. Roast again till the mixture turns deep brown.
4. Add the tomato paste and cook till the mixture is a deep brown.
5. Add chicken stock and demi-glaze the pan; cook for 45 minutes.
6. Strain the liquid forcefully through a sieve to extract the liquid. Set aside.

Reduction

1. Sear the small venison trimmings.
2. Sauté the mushrooms and add them to the small venison trimmings.
3. Deglaze the pan with vinegar.
4. Add red wine, red currant puree, spices and herbs. Bring mixture to a boil.
5. Flambé and cool the mixture down to room temperature to form your *grand veneur* reduction.

Finishing

1. To 1 litre of *grand veneur* base, add 250g of *grand veneur* reduction in a pot and whisk. Bring this to a simmer.
2. Take the mixture off the heat and finish the sauce with a knob of salted butter, chocolate and chopped juniper berries. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

For the poached pears

1. Cut vanilla pod in half. Run a knife along the insides to extract their seeds and place the seeds in the wine with the pod.
2. Heat the wine and add the sugar and spices.
3. Bring the wine mixture to a boil before turning it down to a slow simmer.
4. Peel the pears, cut them into quarters and core them.
5. Fully submerge the pears into the simmering wine and leave to simmer for 10 minutes or until tender. Take care not to overcook the pears otherwise they will become too soft and will not hold their shape.

For the muscovado amande

1. Dry the sugar and almonds overnight in a 60°C oven.

2. Blend them in a food processor till fine.

For the juniper berries powder

1. With the exception of the muscovado amande, dry all the ingredients on separate sheet pans overnight in a 60°C oven.
2. Process each ingredient separately one after the other (including the muscovado amande) till all ingredients are combined and you get a fine powder.
3. Once the powder is of the desired fineness, pass it through a sieve. Reserve for seasoning prior to serving.

For the pickled blood orange

1. Segment the oranges.
2. Put them in a pot with the port wine and sherry vinegar and leave to stand overnight.

For the celeriac ruban

1. Place chicken stock in a pot with chopped truffles.
2. Cook celeriac in the chicken stock till soft.
3. Strain the celeriac and reserve the liquid.
4. Blend 350g of the cooked celeriac with 250g of the cooking liquid and the agar. Return the mixture to the pan and boil.
5. Place the mixture into metal tubes, measuring 8cm by 2.5cm. You should be able to make about 30 celeriac tubes. Set aside for one hour in the fridge to set.

Rubans

1. Slice the whole celeriac thinly with a Japanese Mandolin.
2. Gently blanch the celeriac slices in salted boiling water before plunging into cold water.
3. Remove the celeriac tubes from their metal moulds. They should come out easily when pushed with your finger.
4. Roll each celeriac tube with a slice of celeriac ruban. Season with salt.

Butter emulsion

1. Heat 50g of chicken stock till it reduces by half. Take the chicken stock off the heat and add butter to form an emulsion.
2. Just prior to serving, steam the celeriac tubes for 2 to 3 minutes to warm through, and brush with the butter emulsion.

To finish

1. Blanch Brussels sprouts in salted boiling water and plunge immediately into cold water.
2. Brush with butter emulsion.

To assemble

1. Arrange Brussels sprouts, 3 celeriac tubes, and pickled orange segments on the plate.
2. Place a pear quarter on the side of the plate.
3. Slice the venison into 2 portions and arrange neatly in the centre of the plate. Season venison with fleur de sel and ground black pepper. Sprinkle venison with juniper berry powder.
4. Spoon grand veneur sauce around the venison.
5. Top celeriac tubes with freshly shaved black truffle and serve.





GUINEA HEN CROSTONE WITH CHICKEN, PANCETTA & CAPER SAUCE

by David Almany, executive chef, OSTERIA MOZZA



Right after finishing culinary school in Santa Barbara, California, Almany had the privilege to cook at Tierra Sur and later, Zuni Café in San Francisco. When Mario Batali opened Osteria Mozza in Los Angeles, Almany was given the opportunity to work as a sauté chef under the culinary maestro. While there, he helped the restaurant earn a Michelin star and numerous media acclaims, including three stars from *The Los Angeles Times*. These days, chef Almany heads the kitchen at Batali's famed restaurant at Marina Bay Sands, where he prepares widely imaginative and

delicious Italian cuisine, from heavenly pastas to grilled meats.

His recommended main dish for Christmas is guinea hen with an Italian twist. Of this creation, from *The Mozza Cookbook* by celebrity chef and co-owner of Osteria Mozza Nancy Silverton, Almany says: "It's the perfect alternative because it's a poultry dish, and second, it comes with its own gravy and bread-like stuffing. In this sense, it's similar to turkey but we've prepared it Italian-style, with *pancetta*, rosemary, capers and *ciabatta*."

RECIPE (Serves 4) Ingredients

For curing the hens

4 whole guinea hens (about 1.5kg each)
4 tsp kosher salt
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper

For braising the thighs

All-purpose flour, for dredging
½ cup extra virgin olive oil, plus more for oiling the pan
340g *pancetta*, diced
2 large yellow Spanish onions, diced
12 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced
3 tbsp chopped fresh sage leaves
2 tbsp chopped fresh rosemary needles
Freshly ground black pepper
450g chicken livers, veins removed and livers roughly chopped
750ml dry white wine
Juice from 2 lemons, plus more if needed
1 tbsp capers, soaked for 15 minutes if salt-packed, rinsed and drained
1 tbsp white wine vinegar
5 cups fresh chicken stock, plus more as needed
4 long 1.5cm-thick slices of *ciabatta*

For the garnish

¾ cup whole Fresh Italian parsley leaves
¾ cup celery leaves (only the pale green leaves from the heart)
Zested strips of 3 lemons
1 tbsp finishing-quality extra virgin olive oil
Flaky sea salt

Method

Preparing the hens

1. Rinse the hens and pat them dry with paper towels.
2. Cut the legs from the thighs at the joint.
3. Place the thighs in a baking dish. Season with the salt and pepper, cover the dish with plastic wrap, and refrigerate overnight to cure, or at least several hours.
4. To braise the guinea thighs, pour the flour on a plate. Dredge the thighs in the flour, patting off any excess. Heat ¼ cup of the olive oil in a high-sided sauté pan large enough to hold the thighs in a single layer over medium-high heat, until the oil is almost smoking, 2 to 3 minutes.
5. Place the guinea thighs, skin side-down in the pan and cook until golden brown, about 5 minutes per side, taking care not to rip the skin when you turn them.
6. Remove the thighs to a plate and wipe out the pan.
7. Add the remaining ¼ cup of oil and heat it for 1 minute, until the oil is almost smoking. Add the *pancetta* and cook to render the fat but not brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the onions and garlic, and cook until the onions are tender and translucent, about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent the onions and garlic from browning.
8. Add the sage and rosemary, and season with black pepper.

Cook for 1 minute, stirring often, to soften the herbs.

9. Add the livers, wine, lemon juice, capers, vinegar, and 4 cups of the stock to the pan.

10. Return the guinea thighs to the pan skin side-up, and add any juices that have collected on the plate on which they were resting. If there is not enough liquid to liberally cover the thighs, add more chicken stock if needed.

11. Bring the liquid to a simmer over high heat. Reduce the heat and simmer the thighs, uncovered, until they are fork-tender and the meat pulls away from the bone easily, 1 to 1½ hours.

12. Remove the pan from the heat and carefully remove the thighs to a plate. When the thighs are cool enough to handle, remove the bone from each thigh, taking care to keep the thighs intact. Discard the bones.

13. Transfer the thighs to separate airtight containers and refrigerate until you are ready to serve.

14. Remove and discard the fat from the top of the braising liquid. Transfer it to a medium saucepan and proceed with the recipe.

For the gravy

1. Return the pan to high heat and bring the liquid to a boil. Boil the sauce, stirring occasionally to prevent it from sticking to the bottom of the pan, until it has reduced by half and is the consistency of thin gravy, 10 to 20 minutes.

2. Pour 2 cups of the sauce into a blender. Blend carefully to prevent the hot liquid from exploding. Puree the sauce until it is smooth. Return the pureed sauce to the pan and stir to incorporate. Turn off the heat, taste for seasoning.

For the crostone

1. Adjust the oven rack to the middle position and preheat the oven to 175°C.

2. Grease a baking dish with olive oil and arrange the bread slices in a single layer. Ladle the remaining 1 cup stock evenly over the bread. Bake the bread until the bottom is golden brown and crisp, about 15 minutes.

For the garnish

1. Combine the parsley, celery leaves and lemon zest in a medium bowl. Drizzle over the olive oil, sprinkling with sea salt, and toss to gently coat with the seasonings.

To assemble

1. Remove the toasts from the oven and carefully remove them from the baking dish.
2. Place each piece of toast bottom side-up on a dinner plate and rest two guinea thighs on each piece of toast.
3. Ladle a generous ½ cup of the sauce over each thigh so it runs off onto the crostone.
4. Pile the garnish on each serving, dividing it evenly, and serve with remaining gravy.



GOOSE BREAST SMOKED IN HAY

by Galvin Lim, executive chef, LES AMIS

Lim has come a long way since his days as a student at Shatec. Over the years, he has trained with some of the world's most respected chefs, in top restaurants like Lameloise in Burgundy, Le Gavroche in London, L'Auberge des Cimes in St. Bonnets les Froids Rangis Maçon, and Les Elysées du Vernet in Paris under Alain Soliverès. When creating new menus, Lim takes inspiration from a variety of tastes and textures. His culinary style is all about balancing these to come up with exquisite and tantalising dishes.

Lim's Christmas goose dish, with silky breast meat and crunchy skin, is the perfect example of contrasting textures. The flavour comes from smoking the meat in premium hay imported from Alsace, France. "Instead of roasting the goose, we smoke the bird in this special hay for 10 to 20 minutes. This gives the meat a distinct smoky-sweet note. The hay is unique: We get it from our cheese supplier who actually uses it to feed his cows to produce quality cheese," he says.



RECIPE (Serves 4) Ingredients

2 goose breasts (from a whole goose), skin on
8 chestnuts
1 goose carcass, chopped into small pieces
50g carrots, diced
50g shallots, diced
50g button mushrooms, diced
3 bay leaves
8 dried juniper berries
1 litre concentrated chicken stock
3 cloves garlic, sliced
5 thyme sprigs
Hay (this can be purchased from pet stores)
100g unsalted butter
12 Brussels sprout leaves
Salt and pepper, to taste

Method

1. Remove the skin from the breasts and rough-cut them into small pieces.
2. Transfer the skin to a pan and render them down until they turn crispy and golden brown. Finely chop the crispy skin and season to taste. Reserve the fat in the pan.
3. Steam the chestnuts until cooked, about 25 to 30 minutes. Peel off the skin, brush with butter, and set aside in a warm place.
4. Brown the goose carcass pieces in a roasting pan over medium heat. Add the carrot pieces, lightly brown them, add the shallots, stir until brown, and then add the mushrooms, bay leaves and juniper berries. Remove excess fat.
5. Add the chicken stock, bring the contents to a boil and skim off the surface scum. Simmer for 20 minutes. Strain the sauce through a fine sieve. Discard the vegetables and carcass pieces. Check sauce for taste and adjust seasoning if necessary. Set sauce aside until ready to serve.
6. Season the goose breasts with salt, pepper, garlic and thyme. *Sous-vide* together with the duck fat in a water bath for 15 to 20 minutes at 62°C.
7. Remove the goose from the bag and drain the fat. Arrange a heatproof casserole dish with hay, set over the stove and heat until the smoke rises. Place the goose breasts on a wire rack over the hay and smoke them for 10 to 20 minutes. Set aside to rest.
8. Heat a little chicken stock and butter in a sauté pan. Toss in the Brussels sprout leaves, cook and season to taste.
9. To assemble the dish, heat up the sauce. Slice the goose breasts and place on a warm plate. Garnish with the chestnuts and Brussels sprout leaves. Spoon the crispy goose skin around the edge of the goose slices. Drizzle hot sauce over and serve immediately.

