

Private Chef, Catering & Cooking Classes

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Join Me Around the Table for an Eat Well-Do Good Dinner!

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Right on the heels of the 4th of July comes Bastille Day. Quatorze Juillet or the 14th of July commemorates the storming of la Bastille, a legendary Paris prison. Like the Boston Tea Party for America's patriots, la Bastille was the tipping point for the French Revolution. La Bastille became an icon of the French Republic, a symbol of French freedom.

Ironically, the high cost of helping the Americans win their War of Independence played a big role in the financial woes which led to France's revolution. The French monarchy placed the heaviest tax burden on the poor and middle class. They let the rich stay rich (or get richer) while everyone else got poorer. By the summer of 1789 the French bourgeois had had enough and went to work on a new constitution. A new republic was quickly formed and King Louis the XVI and his wife Marie "let them eat cake" Antoinette lost their heads.

Like the 4th of July, Bastille Day is a wonderful time to enjoy outdoor festivities. For many years I lived in Geneva, Switzerland, within earshot of Bastille Day fireworks. On more than one occasion, I enjoyed a little of the fun and frivolity. One particularly night stands out. A small group of us got together in the tiny medieval village of Yvoire for a lakeside dinner and fireworks.

Nestled on the shore of Lake Geneva (Lac Léman if you prefer), Yvoire is the perfect place to spend a summer evening. Narrow cobblestone streets wind through the town, leading to a picturesque village square and down to the lake. The little fishing port is known for its beautiful old chateau, lovely gardens and charming cafés.

We started the evening on a lakefront terrace, sipping the local white wine, watching the boats and sunset. We continued with filet de perche and a little more white wine. We thanked goodness it was Friday and were not in any hurry. We lingered over a luscious mousse and coffee, hoping to keep our table to watch the fireworks. Contrary to common French practice, we were unceremoniously shooed away. It was a holiday and a long line of people were not-so-patiently waiting for our table.

While we had been enjoying the view and dinner, the port had been filling up. The square was filled with local families, a few expatriates and lots of tourists. As soon as it was dark, fireworks were launched off the pier. It wasn't one of those big extravagant displays like you might find in Paris. There was no patriotic music, no deafening finale. If we'd been even a few minutes late, well, we would have missed the whole shebang. It was just what you would expect and want in a little country town.

As soon as the last fiery rocket fell into the lake, tightly-wound and exhausted children were dragged or carried home. Anyone thirty- or forty-something or older made a hasty retreat. But we soon learned the festivities were far from over. As we stood dithering over our next move, a DJ arrived. Within minutes scratchy music filled the night air and the square was packed with teenagers.

Rather than take the end of the fireworks as our cue to leave gracefully, we took it as our cue to stay and act foolishly. By far, the oldest dancers in the square we attracted more than a few pointed stares. Not to worry, it was Friday night, the air was warm and the sky was clear. We saw no reason to mix age with wisdom. We stayed far too late and danced to French rock and roll far into the wee hours of the morning. I hope that you find many opportunities dance in the moonlight.

Enjoy all that summer has to offer and bon appétit!



Mousse Citron (Lemon Mousse)

Smooth and creamy, Mousse Citron is a lovely finish to a spring or summer dinner. To keep it light, I like a little mousse with my berries rather than the other way around!

Serves 8

- 6 large egg yolks
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice (3-4 lemons)
- Pinch salt
- Grated zest of 2 lemons
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cold, cut into pieces
- 1 cup very cold heavy cream
- Garnish: lots of fresh strawberries, raspberries or blueberries

Prepare an ice bath fitted with a medium bowl.

Whisk the yolks, juice and sugar together in a small saucepan. Set over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon for 5 to 7 minutes or until it registers 170 degrees on a thermometer.

Remove the pan from heat. Add the butter, 1 piece at a time, stirring until incorporated. Pass through a fine mesh sieve into the bowl in the ice bath. Add the zest. Stirring frequently, let stand until cool. Refrigerate the lemon curd until firm and very cold, at least a few hours. (The lemon curd can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 2 days.)

Whip 1 cup of heavy cream until it forms very stiff peaks. Whisk one quarter of the whipped cream into the lemon curd; gently fold in the remaining whipped cream.

Pour into a large bowl and chill for at least 4 hours. When ready to serve, whip the remaining cream until soft peaks form. Dollop a spoonful of mousse on each plate and top with lots of berries.



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