



The Glories of Spring Skiing & Decadent Mac & Cheese

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My birthday falls in the first few days of March so when we get a big snowstorm in the last week of February, I take it personally. And even more so when the sun returns and shines on all that beautiful new snow. Six inches is lovely, more is wonderful but I don't complain if it is only an inch or two. Fresh snow and sunshine on my birthday are all the proof I need to know that the snow gods are smiling down upon me. I'm not sure what I've done right but I sure hope I continue to do so.

Skiing in New England has always been a bit of catch-as-catch-can; particularly when you compare our slopes to the Alps or the Rockies. We start the season dreaming of a white Christmas. We end it with our fingers crossed and hoping for a white Easter. Sometimes we get both; sometimes, neither. It was even more precarious when I was a kid and few ski areas had snow making equipment.

Imagine my delight when I moved to Switzerland. Skiing in the Alps began well before Christmas in late November or early December. Forget holiday shopping, that's was airport duty free was for. For many years, my family members were regularly treated to chocolate and SWATCHs under the tree. I don't think it took them long to figure out why.



But back to skiing in the Alps; even early in the season, unlike New England, the skiing was pretty good. Instead of a measly few trails, a good portion of the mountain was open. Of course, most of the light was gone by two o'clock but you can't have everything. Then again, I can't imagine I had too many issues with starting the après ski festivities a little early. On the back end, spring skiing continued until the first of May, sometimes later. I remember one spectacular season when I didn't hang up my skis until May 16th. How glorious!

For now, I am looking forward to some glorious spring skiing right here in New Hampshire. The days are getting longer. The sun is brighter and higher in the sky. You can leave the heavy parka and hand and toe warmers at home. Maybe (hopefully) even put them away for the season. Fashion-forward skiers will hit the slopes in bright and shiny miracle fiber jackets. As colorful as a bowl of jelly beans, they'll light up the slopes in tangerine and hot pink. The not-so-fashion-forward will take us back in time and ski retro in ancient Nordic sweaters or faded windbreakers. Sun glasses are mandatory. Hats are not.

Spring skiing is our reward for weathering early winter's blistering cold days as well as the wet and dreary January thaw. It's payback for skiing through hurricane force winds and traversing over the sheets of ice which we shrug off as hard-packed-powder.

It's a joy to be outside and on the mountain. Whether you ski 'til you drop or spend most of the day working on your tan ...

... enjoy the sunshine, bon ski and bon appétit!

Decadent Mac & Cheese

Hungry friends and family will love this rich and cheesy dish. America's favorite comfort food, mac & cheese is a great après ski dinner for adults and kids alike. Enjoy!

Serves 8-12



Butter
8 ounces grated fontina cheese, shredded
8 ounces mozzarella, shredded
4 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
Olive oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 cup Panko bread crumbs
1/2 teaspoon herbs de Provence
1 1/2 tablespoons flour
1 cup warm whole milk or half and half
4 ounces cream cheese at room temperature
1 cup sour cream
1/2 teaspoon or to taste hot sauce
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

1 pound pasta – cavatappi, medium shells, penne or elbow macaroni
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Lightly butter a large casserole.

Put the fontina, mozzarella and about 3/4 of the Parmigiano-Reggiano in a bowl, toss to combine and reserve.

Heat a little olive oil in a skillet over medium heat, add the onion, season with salt and pepper and sauté until translucent. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute more. Remove from the heat and reserve.

Put the breadcrumbs and herbs in a bowl, add 1 tablespoon melted butter and toss to combine. Add the remaining Parmigiano-Reggiano and toss again.

Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour, season with salt and pepper and cooking, whisking, for 1-2 minutes. Whisk in the milk and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, stirring, until the sauce thickens, about 5 minutes.

Put the cream cheese in a large bowl, slowly stir in the warm sauce and continue stirring until smooth. Add the sour cream, hot sauce and nutmeg and stir until smooth. Stir in the onions and garlic. Reserve.

Cook the pasta according to package directions, less 1 minute. Drain the pasta, saving a little of the pasta water.

Add the pasta to the sauce and toss to combine. If the pasta seems dry add a little pasta water. Sprinkle the pasta with the cheese mix and toss again.

Transfer the pasta to the prepared baking dish and sprinkle with the breadcrumb mixture. (*You can make ahead to this point, cover and refrigerate. Remove the dish from the refrigerator about 1 hour before baking.*) Bake the mac & cheese at 375 degrees for 30 minutes or until piping hot and golden.

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