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## In Your Kitchen: Bread and Fish Soup

Wednesday, November 3, 2010  
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By SUSAN LEIGH SHERRILL  
 RECORD COLUMNIST

*Judging by the number*

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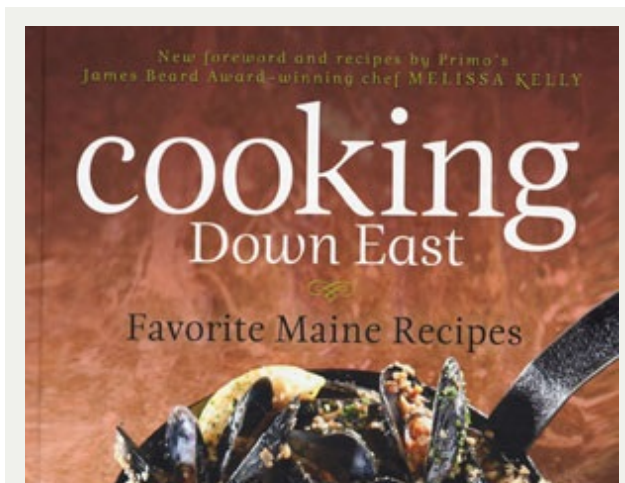
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Judging by the number of cookbooks delivered to my desk every week, it is clear that people are hungry for recipes and stories about food and cooking. For this weekly column I make one or more of the recipes in my home kitchen - from the most intriguing of these cookbooks - and offer my take on both the book and the recipes.

Anyone who knows me also knows I have a big place in my heart for the state of Maine - its craggy coastline, its resilient people and of course, its food. But while their far-reaching reputation is well-deserved, good Maine food is more than lobster, blueberries and baked beans. The locavore movement, connecting fishermen, farmers, cheese-makers, beekeepers and brewers with cooks and restaurants, has long flourished in this artisan-rich state.



Maine food and spirits were on display last month at the third annual Harvest on the Harbor festival in Portland (dubbed "America's foodiest small town" by Bon Appetit). At the festival, I picked up a copy of "Cooking Down East," the new edition of a classic cookbook originally released in 1968 by the publishing arm of Down East magazine.

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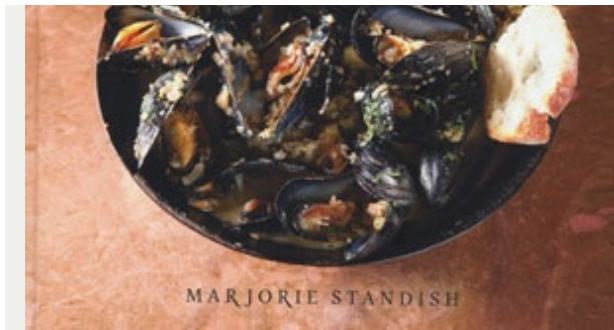
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**"Cooking Down East," by Marjorie Standish**  
(Down East Books) \$27.95

The author and recipe compiler of the first edition was Marjorie Standish, who for years wrote a column by the same name for the Maine Sunday Telegram. Traditional Maine recipes for shrimp casserole, New England boiled dinner, venison mincemeat, "whoopsie" pies, and candies called Needhams, made with mashed potatoes, are all featured. What makes the

book especially appealing for the modern cook, however, are additional recipes and commentary from Melissa Kelly, the James Beard Award-winning chef of Primo in Rockland, Maine.



TED AXELROD/SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

At her restaurant, Kelly has successfully melded what she calls "the old ways" with a contemporary style of cooking, inspiring Anthony Bourdain, who visited Primo for an episode of his TV show, "No Reservations," to say she is "arguably the best chef in Maine." The bread and fish soup she served to Bourdain is a menu staple at her restaurant and will now be at my house, as well.

**\* BREAD AND FISH SOUP**

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, peeled and roughly chopped

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- 2 stalks celery, roughly chopped
- 2 carrots, roughly chopped
- 1 large leek, dice the white part and roughly chop the green
- 3 cloves garlic, smashed
- 1/2 teaspoon saffron
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 6 Roma (plum) tomatoes, roughly chopped
- 3 tablespoons tomato purée
- 2 cups white wine (chardonnay or chenin blanc are suggested)
- 1 1/2 quarts fish stock (can substitute vegetable stock or water)
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 pound fish (white fish, bass, halibut and/or snapper – you can use just one type or a mixture) cut into 1-inch cubes
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- Torn-up pieces of crusty bread
- Fresh oregano or parsley, chopped (optional)

**In a large stockpot**, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onions, celery, carrots and leek greens and cook, stirring, for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 3 more minutes. Add the saffron, crushing with the tips of your fingers, then add the bay leaves and crushed red pepper flakes, and cook for 2 minutes more. Add the tomatoes and tomato purée and cook for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the wine, stir well and cook until the liquid is reduced by half.

**Add the fish stock** and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer uncovered for 30 minutes. Cool slightly and strain stock through a mesh strainer.

**Meanwhile, in another large pot**, heat the butter and add the leek whites. Cook for 2 minutes, then add the cubed fish and the strained broth. Bring to a boil. Swirl 4 heaping tablespoons of rouille (recipe follows) into the hot soup and adjust seasonings with salt and pepper.

**To serve**, place pieces of crusty bread in a serving bowl. Ladle the soup over the bread. Garnish with chopped oregano or parsley if desired.

**Serves:** 4 to 6.

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***Susan's tips:***

- \* Either before you start or while the broth is cooking, make the rouille.
- \* The only cans of tomato purée I found in my supermarket were large; since I needed only 3 tablespoons I used organic tomato sauce, which comes in a small can, instead.
- \* For the fish, I used cod; haddock or any other meaty fish would be good too, but avoid using a flat fish like flounder; it will break up too easily.
- \* Use the same pot for the entire process instead of dirtying a second one. And I did not cool the stock before I strained it; it cooled slightly while I was cooking the fish.
- \* Make the stock and the rouille a day in advance, but be sure to heat the stock before you use it; otherwise it will take too long to come to a boil and the fish will overcook.

**\* *ROUILLE***

- 2 red (sweet) peppers
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and roughly chopped
- 6 cloves garlic
- 1/2 cup bread crumbs
- Extra-virgin olive oil to taste
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

**Char red peppers** over an open flame until black. While hot, place the peppers in a bowl and cover tightly with plastic wrap. Let steam for 1/2 hour, then uncover and peel peppers. The skins should slide right off. Remove the stem and seeds.

**In a food processor**, add the peeled peppers, chopped jalapeno, garlic and bread crumbs and purée. Continue to purée while slowly adding the oil, then the lemon juice. Purée until smooth. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

**Makes:** 2 cups.

***Susan's tips:***

- \* To save time, buy jarred roasted peppers; just make sure to drain them.

\* I used about 2/3 cup olive oil.

\* The rouille is quite spicy, and combined with the crushed hot pepper in the broth, results in a soup that was a bit too hot for my taste. Next time, I will use only half the jalapeno, and perhaps even cut back on the crushed pepper, but if you like fiery food, go for it.

\* The extra rouille can be used as a pasta sauce or a dip for vegetables.

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