

Episode 5

To prep the cauliflower

Break off the thick leaves and slice off the stem so that the bottom of cauliflower is flat and stable on the cutting board. This technique is useful for safely cutting through any large-scale wobbly veggies like winter squash. Slicing into thick “steaks” ensures that the cauliflower does not break down into florets while cooking and slicing into equal sizes allows for even cooking—a rule that works across the board with all veggies and proteins.

Brown the butter in the pan and baste the cauliflower steaks with it just like you would a rib eye. Paul refers to the browned butter by its French name, “beurre noisette,” which translates to hazelnut butter. The nutty flavor of the milk solids in the gently cooked butter is how it got its name. Paul plates this dish so that it evokes a feeling of being in a garden. While plating throughout the class, think not only about how a dish looks, but how presentation can transport people to a different place or mood.

Prep

All the vegetables in this dish can be cleaned and cut up to three days ahead. Cover tightly with plastic wrap or store in airtight plastic containers.

Green olives discolor within a day when cut unless held in olive oil. The pistou can be made ahead of time and stored in glass jars and refrigerated for up to a month.

The cauliflower steaks can be marinated in olive oil, harissa, and seasoning a day ahead and stored in zip lock bags.

Harissa is a North African blend of spices and chilis. Paul uses the dried version and it further toasts as it hits the pan. It is common to find it in a paste, or you can make your own. It can vary from place to place with some versions using smoked chilis, sun-dried tomatoes, or even rose petals. If you used the paste instead of the powder, spread a light layer over the cauliflower steaks after the initial searing or right before it goes into the oven to prevent it from burning.

Shiitake mushrooms have the same meaty, umami flavor and are more affordable. King trumpet mushrooms are another good substitute for their similar size and texture to porcinis and are also more affordable.

Meyer lemons have a unique perfumed, floral aroma but regular lemons are fine.

Pan roasted Cauliflower Steak with Olive Pistou and Porcini Mushrooms

Serves 4 as a main, 8 as an appetizer

2 medium heads of cauliflower (each should be large enough to produce 2 “steaks”)

olive oil 5½ ounces (or 11 tablespoons)

4 tablespoons harissa powder

1 lemon for juice and zest 4 tablespoons

unsalted butter, cubed

½ cup vegetable stock

Preheat oven to 325°F. Peel the leaves off the cauliflower and cut the stem leaving 1 inch or enough for the florets to stay intact. This will leave the base flat and stable on the cutting board and make it easier to cut into the cauliflower evenly. Wet your chef's knife liberally before cutting the steaks to make the knife slick and nonstick when making contact with the vegetable. Cut 1 inch off the left and right edges of the cauliflower leaving about 2 inches of the center intact. Then slice the remaining portion in half, resulting in two 1-inch steaks from each head of cauliflower. The more even the steaks, the more evenly they will cook.

Drizzle a sheet tray or glass baking pan with 4 ounces (or 8 tablespoons) of olive oil. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons harissa powder and 2 pinches of Maldon salt over the oil. Rub one side of the steaks in the olive oil/harissa mix and pour 1 ounce of olive oil and the remaining harissa powder over the other sides. Finish with another 2 pinches of Maldon salt.

Heat two large cast-iron skillets on medium-high heat with 1 tablespoon of olive oil in each. Once the pans are smoking, place the steaks in the hot pan and let brown on one side for 90 seconds or until the edges begin to char. Turn the steaks over gently, add 2 tablespoons of butter to each pan, melt, and brown to give the steaks a nutty flavor. Baste the steaks with the browned butter. When the butter is frothy, split vegetable stock into the pans and let it come to a boil. Remove from the stovetop and place side by side on the middle rack of the oven. Roast for 8 to 10 minutes. Use a paring knife to test the doneness of the cauliflower. If you feel resistance, continue cooking; if it pushes into the flesh easily, it is finished cooking. Transfer to a platter to rest.

Olive Pistou

In a medium bowl mix the quartered olives with olive oil, orange juice, orange zest, lemon juice, lemon zest, and parsley. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

1 navel orange for juice and zest

1 lemon for juice and zest

1 cup Castelvetrano green olives, pitted and quartered

1 cup Niçoise olives or Kalamata olives, pitted and quartered

2 tablespoons flat leaf parsley, rough chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

Mushroom topping

King Oyster porcini mushrooms

4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

2 shallots

4 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

Zest of 1 lemon

8 mint leaves

3 tablespoons capers

Maldon salt or kosher salt

cracked black pepper to taste

Preparation

Heat a large sauté pan on medium-high heat with 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Cut the porcinis in ¼-inch slices lengthwise and move to the side of the cutting board. Cut the shallots in half lengthwise then turn them onto the cut side for stability to thinly slice.

Add the porcinis to the pan and cook for 3 to 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Add the shallots and garlic into the pan and continue to cook, stirring occasionally for 5 minutes, or until the shallots and garlic are translucent. Zest lemon into the pan and add the olive pistou. Stir together.

Lower the heat to medium-low. Chiffonade the mint and sprinkle over the mushrooms. Add the capers and stir in to incorporate. Turn off heat and season to taste with more salt and pepper if needed.

Plate 2 steaks with the cores facing each other. Spoon the olive pistou/mushroom mixture over the steaks. Finish with a drizzle olive oil, lemon zest, and lemon juice and tuck the garlic or chive blossoms into the mixture atop the steaks. Plate cauliflower steaks individually if serving as a main.

Take It Further

Paul never wastes a scrap in his kitchen and mentions that the leftover cauliflower can be made into a soup or salad. Try his recipes for cauliflower soup and cauliflower salad on the following pages.

Paul uses red harissa in this dish, but you can use any harissa variation. Make green harissa using Gordon's recipe on the following page and note how it changes the dish.