
FENNEL AND TOMATO SOUP WITH RICOTTA DUMPLINGS

BY CHRISTOPHER LEE

The warmth and calm of this dish is revelatory. It lies somewhere between winter and spring. The soup can be made with or without tomatoes, but the tomato's brightness ticks it up a notch. Even with the tomato, it is still wine-friendly, and is wonderful with the Vignato Gambellara. Be sure to drain the ricotta a day ahead.

SOUP

1 large bulb fennel, thinly sliced
4 tablespoons fennel fronds from top of bulb, chopped
1 small onion, peeled, cored, thinly sliced
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
4 ounces peeled whole Italian tomatoes, crushed
1 sprig fresh thyme
3 cups chicken stock
1 bay leaf
½ teaspoon sea salt
4 tablespoons Pecorino Romano, grated, for garnishing

DUMPLINGS

½ cup fresh sheep's milk ricotta
1½ tablespoons butter, melted
1 egg yolk
2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, finely grated
Pinch of nutmeg
Pinch of salt
¼ teaspoon lemon zest, grated
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting

Sauté fennel bulb and onion in olive oil without developing color. Add tomatoes and thyme and simmer until tomatoes are concentrated and sauce is slightly broken. Add chicken stock, bay leaf, and salt. Simmer uncovered for 10 minutes. Remove thyme and bay leaf. Stir in fennel fronds. Adjust salt, if needed.

Drain ricotta overnight in a strainer lined with cheesecloth, pressing with a light weight. When drained, break up ricotta in a bowl with a spoon or fork. Stir in melted butter, egg yolk, Parmesan, nutmeg, salt, and lemon zest until just blended. Sprinkle flour over ricotta in teaspoonfuls and mix gently with a wooden spoon until ricotta holds together as a light dough. With a spoon, form ricotta into 1-inch dumplings and toss in flour. Lay dumplings on a floured parchment paper on a sheet pan; refrigerate for 2 hours before cooking. Drop dumplings one by one into gently boiling water. Dumplings will first sink and then float to the surface. Cook dumplings for 3 minutes until firm.

Place both soup and dumplings in a soup tureen. Serve into warm bowls at table, garnishing each bowl with a spoonful of Pecorino Romano.

Serves 4



Christopher Lee is a former head chef of Chez Panisse and Eccolo restaurants in Berkeley and co-founder of Pop-Up General Store in Oakland. Visit his website: oldfashionedbutcher.com.

ADVENTURES



April
2020

2018 GAMBELLARA CLASSICO “EL GIAN” DAVIDE VIGNATO

I told you about a crisp white wine for around \$20 with notes of lime and stones, made from vines planted in soils of igneous rock—made from magma—you might reasonably guess that I’m talking about the masterful Muscadet of Domaine Brégeon, near France’s western coast. In this case, however, I’m referring to a floral, mouthwatering *bianco* made east of Italy’s great lakes, between Verona and Venice, by the rising star Davide Vignato, who is spearheading organic, low-yield farming in the volcanic hills of Gambellara. He fashions his El Gian from the Garganega grape, one of the country’s oldest and most widely enjoyed native varieties, and the star of the Gambellara DOC. This bottling has a little more weight than Brégeon’s classic Muscadet, but perhaps not as much as the Garganegas from its more famous neighbor, Soave. It is perfect if you want to try a new pairing for oysters or other light, fresh seafood. If you have a little time, Chris Lee’s fennel and tomato soup with ricotta dumplings would also be a lovely match.

—TOM WOLF

\$18.00 per bottle **\$194.40** per case



LEFT
Davide Vignato

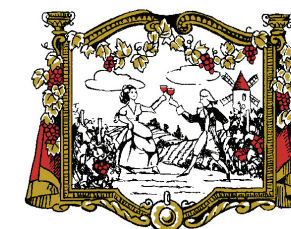
COVER
Bernard Diochon,
1999. © Gail Skoff

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2017 MOULIN-À-VENT “VIEILLES VIGNES” DOMAINE DIOCHON

In a wine landscape in which producers bottle increasingly wider ranges of cuvées, Domaine Diochon has become an outlier, producing one bottling year in and year out, which happens to be the same bottling we have imported for nearly forty years: the old-vine Moulin-à-Vent. In our November 1984 newsletter, Kermit wrote, “There was only one cask of old vines and Diochon was going to blend it in to add substance and character to his other casks. I had to pay a premium to obtain that one cask pure and unblended.” Today, the wine is made from vines planted in 1920, 1950, and the 1960s. Not much else has changed with respect to this *rouge* that hails from Moulin-à-Vent, the Beaujolais *cru* known for producing arguably the region’s most age-worthy wines. Bernard Diochon, who succeeded his father in 1967, once said, “I like tannic wines without heaviness; with fruit and floral aromas. I don’t like weighty wines with hard tannins.” Although Bernard has been succeeded by Thomas Patenôtre, the wine continues to remain true to that sentiment. It contains some tannin—it wouldn’t be young Moulin-à-Vent if it didn’t—but it is beautifully integrated and the wine is ready to drink now if given a little time to breathe. Soulful and savory, with notes of cherries, iron, and smoke, this is *cru* Beaujolais built to last.



—TOM WOLF

\$26.00 per bottle **\$280.80** per case

					
2018 Gambellara Classico “El Gian” <i>Davide Vignato</i>	Garganega	25 year-old- vines, on average Volcanic, basalt soil	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–52° F Do not decant	Citrus, almond, stones Floral, crisp, vibrant	Drink now
2017 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes” <i>Domaine Diochon</i>	Gamay	Vines planted in 1920, 1950, 1960s Pink granite, sandstone, with a manganese- rich subsoil	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant 1–2 hours	Cherries, iron, smoke Soulful, savory, age-worthy	Drink now through 2030