



ANSON MILLS

Carolina Shrimp Bisque

Yield

6 first course portions

Time

About 45 minutes

Cooking Remarks

Winter is long and a fine warming bisque need not be put off by the end of shrimp season. We found exceptional individually quick frozen (IQF) shrimp sold in 2-pound bags at Browne Trading Company in Maine. It is available by post, at a moment's notice, to you anywhere in the U.S. In fact, everything Browne sells is exceptional. The bisque couldn't tell the shrimp had been frozen and, we're guessing, neither will you.

You'll notice this recipe calls for a homemade fish stock. Yes, that's kind of a nuisance and yes, you could dump the comparable amount of bottled clam juice into the pot. (Have you tasted bottled clam juice lately?)

The chinois we recommend in a few recipes and pictured here is a conical strainer with mesh as fine as a double layer of cheesecloth—without cheesecloth's messy, wet-gauze character. The chinois screens liquids you want to be clear as a consommé or smooth as a bisque.

Like bisque, tarragon, too, has known the sting of rebuke. When I first started cooking, dried tarragon showed up in everything from chicken salad to poached salmon. Sometimes it crossed the border at sauce béarnaise without warning and splashed down in a pot of Bolognese. After a while everyone was sick of it, and dried tarragon went away for good. Today, no one seems to know what to do with tarragon, even when it's fresh. And even when it's fresh, it is often not true French tarragon—a delicate, nuanced herb with a faint, haunting near licorice flavor—but a coarser Russian variety with longer leaves and a grassy, overbearing finish. Don't let the big Russian trounce your delicate bisque. If you can't find fresh French tarragon—and you probably can't unless you grow it yourself—use chervil. Or go with some nice fresh chives.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a pair of kitchen shears, a medium bowl, a large skillet (preferably nonstick), a food processor, a 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven, a wooden spoon, a chinois, a large bowl, and a ladle.

Ingredients

2 pounds 21/25 shell-on shrimp, fresh or thawed frozen

2 tablespoons good olive oil

1/3 cup brandy or cognac, warmed

3 tablespoons (1.5 ounces) unsalted butter

3 large shallots, minced (1/2 cup)
1 carrot, finely chopped (1/4 cup)
1 celery rib, finely chopped (1/4 cup)
1 garlic clove, minced
2 tablespoons (1 ounce) tomato paste
2 ounces (about 1/3 cup) Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice Flour
1 cup decent dry white wine
1 quart Aromatic Fish Stock, simmering
1 big sprig fresh French tarragon or, if it is unavailable, fresh chervil
1 cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon juice from 1 large, juicy lemon
Pinch of cayenne pepper
2 tablespoons Sercial Madeira or dry sherry
Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions

1. Weigh out 12 ounces of the shrimp. Peel and devein them, reserving the shells. Snip the peeled shrimp into 3 or 4 pieces each (depending on the size of each shrimp) with a pair of kitchen shears. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use. Dry the remaining shell-on shrimp and reserved shells with paper towels. Turn the shrimp into a medium bowl, drizzle with the olive oil, and toss to coat.

2. Heat a large skillet—nonstick is good—over high heat for 3 minutes. Lay half of the shell-on shrimp and half of the reserved shells in the skillet in a single layer; sear the shrimp until they blush deeply and their shells begin to color, about 1 minute. Turn the shrimp and sear the other sides. Pour half of the warm cognac or brandy over the shrimp and wave a lit match across the top of the skillet until the spirit ignites. Shake the pan to perfume the shrimp with brandy. Transfer the shrimp to a food processor bowl. Allow the skillet to come back to heat, and then sear and flambé the remaining shrimp and shells and add them to the food processor bowl. Process the shrimp and shells to a fine meal, about 30 seconds.

3. Melt the butter in a 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven over medium heat until it foams. Add the shallots, carrot, celery, garlic, and tomato paste. Cover and cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are soft and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Uncover the pot and stir in the rice flour. Cook, stirring constantly, for 2 or 3 minutes. Add the wine and fish stock, scraping the bottom of the Dutch oven with a wooden spoon to loosen any browned bits. Stir in the ground shrimp. Increase the heat to medium-high and bring to a simmer, and then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer gently, stirring frequently, until the flavors meld, 20 to 30 minutes.

4. Strain the bisque through a chinois into a large bowl, pressing on the solids with the back of a ladle to extract all the flavor and liquid. Wash and dry the Dutch oven and pour the strained bisque back into it. Bring to a simmer over medium heat. Add the reserved peeled shrimp and the tarragon or chervil, and simmer very gently until the shrimp are firm but tender, about 1 minute. Stir in the cream, lemon juice, and cayenne and simmer very briefly. Stir in the Madeira or sherry. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve bright hot.