

# Breaking With Tradition

## Rethinking holiday meals

By Michael Steh, Executive Chef, reds bistro & wine bar

The holidays always bring the anticipation and comfort of that oh so memorable meal.

For many people, this means roast turkey or prime rib with stuffing, mashed potatoes and traditional fixings like cranberry sauce and gravy – you can't forget the gravy! Without a doubt, there is comfort in that approach, especially for the person cooking. Experience is on your side. Preparation times, ingredient lists, and all the aches and pains of preparing a grand meal are minimized by the fact you've done it all before, sometimes even in your sleep!

10 years or so ago, my mom not so willingly handed over to me the torch of cooking our family holiday dinners. It took some courage to move out of the comfort zone of the tried-and-true, to introduce one or two new items to the holiday table, and maybe even a few tricks that mom didn't have up her sleeve.

I gave our dinners a more adventurous approach. I individually plated all the dishes. It's not as hard as it sounds. Not only did this cut down on cost, time in the kitchen, dirty dishes, and leftovers, it also allowed me to show a little artistry in the presentation of the plates. This created a sense of adventure and a new anticipation of what was next to come. A welcome side effect was my family was distracted from the usual holiday feuding. The meal definitely impressed everyone from friends to family, and even the kids.

Good cooking, at home or in the professional kitchen, shares the same secret: the ingredients. In the recipes to follow, all the ingredients are sourced from Ontario. Great markets like St. Lawrence or the Wychwood Barns, and stores like Cumbrea Farms or Cheese Boutique, will be able to provide you with most, if not all of the ingredients you will need to make a great holiday feast.

In my opinion, if you start with ingredients that are amazing, then you will finish with a dish that is amazing; that alone takes a lot of pressure off the chef in the kitchen.

One of my favorite appetizers is a great mushroom soup. Using seasonal root vegetables and great wild and cultivated mushrooms, this one pot wonder will not only showcase the best of what's in season, but leave your guests wanting more. Great recipes for new ways to prepare turkey are easy to find on the many recipe and food websites, such as LeGourmet.tv. One ideal holiday dish that I enjoy making is Turkey Coq Au Vin. This is a twist on the classic French dish prepared with chicken. What makes this a special holiday feast is that the leg meat is marinated in red wine and braised, and the breast is roasted separately and carved. Beyond the succulent, hearty nature of this enduring dish, it allows holiday hosts the opportunity to have fun with the presentation. Not only will you no longer require the 20 pound turkey or be left with a fridge full of leftovers, you will also be able to finally serve a red wine that pairs perfectly with turkey.

To finish the evening, try changing it up by serving some great cheeses from Ontario or around the world before dessert, or even instead of dessert. This allows everyone to have a nice wind down from the meal while enjoying a few sips of dessert wine. Cheese can be a nice change to the usual crippling dessert that you didn't think you had room for.

I'm convinced everyone can cook a simple, impressive dish that is unexpected. Make your holiday meal special and take a chance on making a new dish to remember. It just might become a future family favorite.

Food photography by Daniel Shipp



## Wild Mushroom Soup

Serves 4

### INGREDIENTS:

8 cups or 2 litres	quality chicken stock	1 1/4 cup or 300 g	diced celery
2 cups or 16 oz	white wine	2.2 lbs or 1kg	mixed wild and/or cultivated mushrooms, sliced spoon-size
1/2 cup or 100 ml	olive oil	1 cup or 200g	dried Porcini mushrooms
1/4 cup or 50 g	sliced garlic	4 sprigs	thyme
1 1/4 cup or 300 g	finely diced onions	2	bay leaves
1 1/4 cup or 300 g	sliced baby carrots	To taste	salt, black pepper, Truffle oil
1 cup or 200 g	barley or short noodle		

### METHOD:

1. Sweat off onions and garlic.
2. Add celery, and carrots.
3. Add fresh mushrooms and cook down.
4. Tie herbs in a bundle.
5. Add stock, herb bundle, dried mushrooms, barley, salt and pepper.
6. Cook until barley is soft and remove from heat and serve.

*Michael Steh is executive chef of reds bistro & wine bar in Toronto's financial district. Steh, heralded as one of Toronto's rising young chefs is a committed supporter of local producers and has elevated reds' reputation as an exciting wine and dining destination. He has held prominent posts at some of the city's most acclaimed restaurants including Canoe, Susur and Splendido.*





# Turkey Coq au Vin

Serves 4

## INGREDIENTS:

Half a turkey (leg, wing, and boneless breast)

For the braised leg (to be done the day before):

2 tbsp	vegetable oil
1 each	turkey leg and wing
1 <sup>1/4</sup> cup or 300 ml	red wine
3 tbsp or 50 ml	brandy
1 large	diced onion
2 stalks	diced celery
2 Cloves	garlic
1 Large	diced carrot
2 medium	plum tomatoes
1 <sup>1/4</sup> cup or 300 ml	chicken or turkey stock
To taste	salt, black pepper
1 bunch	Fresh thyme
2	bay leaves

For the final preparation:

1 <sup>1/8</sup> cup or 250 g	pearl onions
1 <sup>1/8</sup> cup or 250 g	diced Pancetta or slab bacon
1/2 cup or 100 g	button mushrooms
1	turkey breast cut into 5 portions
20 pcs	thinly sliced double smoked bacon or regular sliced bacon

## METHOD:

The Night Before Serving:

1. Heat the vegetable oil in a pan large enough to fit the leg and wing without overlap.
2. Pre-heat oven to 325° F.
3. Season the leg and breast with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
4. Sear to a deep golden brown on all sides. Remove the leg and wing from the pan.
5. Add carrot, celery, onion and garlic to the same pan and cook for 5 minutes. Add brandy.
6. Flame the brandy briefly, and then cover to extinguish.
7. Add the red wine and cook until the liquid is reduced by half.
8. Add the leg and wing back into the pan. Add the herbs and turkey stock.
9. Bring the liquid to a boil, then place the pan in the oven.
10. Check the leg after 1<sup>1/2</sup> hours. The large joint should move freely, and the meat should come easily off the bone. If this is not the case, return the pan to the oven, check at 20-minute intervals. When it is done, remove and let cool to room temperature, then refrigerate over night.
11. Cut the turkey breast into 5 equal portions. Wrap each portion with 4 to 5 pieces of overlapping thinly sliced double smoked bacon. Refrigerate overnight.

The Day of Serving:

1. Remove the braise from the refrigerator. Take the turkey from the liquid and pick the meat off the bones and reserve.
2. Pre-heat an oven to 350° F.
3. Put the liquid on the stove. Bring to a boil, then turn down to a simmer and cook until the liquid is reduced by half.
4. Strain the liquid and add the picked turkey meat back in, and reserve.
5. Starting on the seam slowly sear the wrapped turkey breast pieces on all sides until the bacon is crisp and golden brown. Place in the oven to finish cooking.
6. Meanwhile, cook the diced bacon, over a medium heat until crisp all over. Add the pearl onions, and mushrooms. Cook for 5 minutes.
7. Add the reduced braising liquid, and the meat. Bring to a boil. Simmer until a nice sauce consistency is reached, and the onions and mushrooms are cooked through.
8. Remove the turkey breast from the oven. Allow to rest for 5 to 10 minutes before serving. Serve with garlic mashed potatoes and seasonal vegetables.