

A GOOD COOK IS ALWAYS LEARNING™

# CHEF TRAINING

& KITCHEN MANAGEMENT

BY CHEF JOE ABUSO

## The Classic Sauces

How to Create and Incorporate Into Your Menu Demi-Glace, Velouté and Béchamel

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The “classic sauces” became classics for good reason. They bring out hidden flavors and nuances of the foods they are served with, have a beautiful texture and appearance, showcase the chef’s mastery of technique and ability to build complex, intriguing flavors and are delicious in their own right. Even chefs who might be apt to deride “heavy French sauces” in a misguided attempt at being painfully contemporary, overly calorie-conscious or simply try to justify a gap in their repertoire probably realize that good examples of these sauces are bound to please their guests and add welcome variety to their menus.

The truth is, although there are many perfectly viable alternatives to these sauces (see “Chef Training,” April 2010 issue) learning to make them and incorporate them into your menus will help you grow as a chef in technique, flavor building, confidence and repertoire. It’s the same as if you play rock guitar in a band for fun, learning a few jazz standards will only improve every aspect of your musicianship, as well as the pool of people who want to work with you.

The gist of this style of sauce making is having on hand a small group of distinct, but fairly neutral, roux-thickened “mother sauces”

that are seldom served as-is, to which various specific flavorings and garnishes are added to create the final, finished “small sauce.” While this method might seem cumbersome and circuitous today, it was originally conceived as a more streamlined, labor-saving way for professionals to cook.

### Sauce History

The great French chef Marie-Antoine Carême (1784-1833) is credited for codifying this system of sauce making and, just as importantly, for championing what was at that time the new concept of thickening sauces with roux instead of simply mixing in raw flour. Roux is the name given to equal amounts of flour and butter, which are slowly cooked together to varying degrees of doneness, depending on the situation. The proper use of roux is central to the identity of these sauces, resulting in their esteemed and characteristic smoothness, succulence and overall “velvety” quality. For a hundred years chefs followed Carême’s lead, the best of whom continued to simplify and refine his concepts. Carême’s 20th-century successor, Auguste Escoffier (1846-1935), presented the ultimate expres-





sion of this era of sauce making, and cooking in general, in his “Guide Culinaire.” Since then, there has been a general move toward lighter, simpler and more regional concepts.

The mother sauces (or “grand sauces”) that are roux-based are demi-glace, velouté and béchamel. Today, hollandaise and tomato are also considered to be mother sauces, but we’ll look at them some other time since they are different basic styles of sauces — hollandaise being an emulsion, and tomato being a coulis. The things to consider when choosing a classic sauce are the same when choosing any sauce.

Decide if you want a sauce that complements the food you put it on by being similar or by contrasting with it. A superrich bordelaise sauce (demi-glace with red wine reduction and poached marrow) over a superrich prime rib is a great combination, but so is a bracing charcutière sauce (demi-glace with mustard, onions and gherkins) over slow-roasted pork. Also consider the overall appearance and color of a sauce and how it will go with the other items on the plate. Another factor to consider is whether you want the sauce to be the main flavor of the dish, or an understated accompaniment. An assertive poivrade sauce (demi-glace with red wine reduction and peppercorns) served with a mild beef filet will be great, but so will a subtle tarragon velouté to bring out the sweetness of seared sea scallops. And don’t forget, always taste your sauce before you serve it, adjusting for salt, spice, sweetness and acid/fat balance.

A great demi-glace requires several steps, some time and some attention to make. Although it may seem like a lot of trouble at first, realize that once your kitchen has the procedure down, it’s easy. Also realize that, once you’ve got a batch of demi-glace made, almost all of the work is already done to be able to create numerous and varied sauces as you need them. Of the three mother sauces we will look at, demi-glace is definitely the most work but, in many circles, is considered the crowning achievement of classic cuisine. It will also be the basic component of the most sublime sauces that will ever come out of your kitchen.

The first step in making demi-glace is to make brown sauce, also know as sauce espagnole.

## Brown Sauce (Sauce Espagnole)

**Yield: 2 gallons**

Onions, rough chopped .....	2 pounds
Carrots, rough chopped.....	1 pound
Celery, rough chopped.....	1 pound
Safflower oil.....	6 ounces
Tomato paste .....	8 ounces
Brown stock .....	2.5 gallons
Butter.....	14 ounces
Flour .....	14 ounces
Bay leaf .....	4 each
Parsley stems.....	12 each
Thyme sprig.....	4 each

1. Brown the onions in the oil. Add the carrots and celery, and continue to brown till medium brown (the onions, carrots and celery, combined, are called “mirepoix.”)
2. Add the tomato paste and continue to brown until caramelized.
3. Add the brown stock (see Chef Training, February 2009 issue) and bring to simmer.
4. In a separate pan, melt the butter, add the flour and cook slowly, stirring, until it becomes a light, golden straw color and has a nutty aroma. This is called a blond roux. Whip this roux into the simmering stock. Alternately, the roux can be made ahead, chilled and added to the caramelized mirepoix and heated before adding the stock and bringing to a simmer.
5. Add the herbs. Simmer three hours, skimming as needed. The secret to achieving the desired, velvety result from these sauces is to totally “cook out” any trace of starch or graininess from the flour.
6. Strain through cheesecloth or a fine metal strainer. Chill, and store marked, covered and refrigerated until needed. It will keep several days.

## Demi-glacé

**Yield: 1 gallon**

Brown veal stock..... 1 gallon

Brown sauce..... 1 gallon

1. In a heavy pot, combine the brown veal stock and brown sauce. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a slow simmer.
2. Pull the pot off to the side of the burner to encourage impurities to collect in one place on the surface so that you can more easily skim them off. Reduce by half, skimming as necessary, rotating the pot, and also possibly changing to smaller pots, especially if making larger batches. This will take several hours. Don't underestimate the importance of skimming to achieve a great sauce.
3. Strain through cheesecloth.
4. Chill, and store marked, covered and refrigerated until needed.

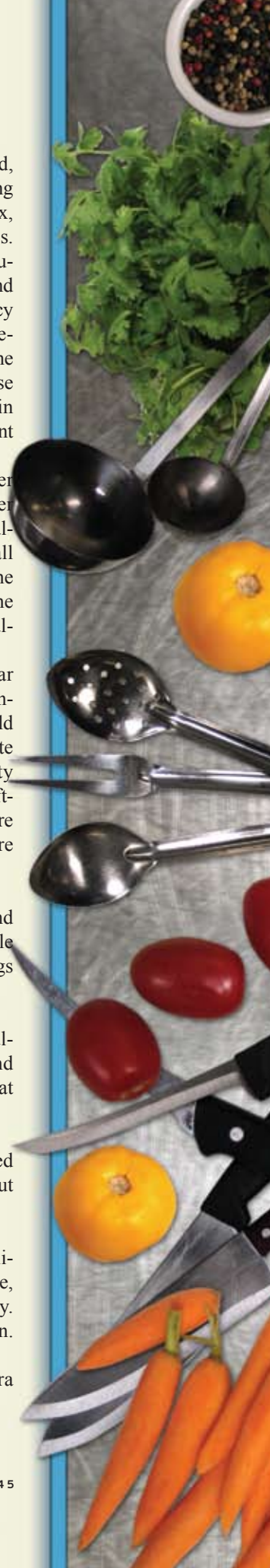


A good demi-glacé will have a rich, round, complex depth of flavor, with roasted veal being predominant and the aromatics of the mirepoix, herbs and tomato paste playing supporting roles. The color should be dark brown, but still translucent and very glossy. The body should be full, and like velvet; never sticky or tacky. Its consistency should just barely cover the back of a spoon. Remember that the sauce will only get thicker by the time the guest sees it, so serving it a little loose will prevent it from having a tarlike consistency in the dining room. Its aroma should be reminiscent of roasting, caramelized bones.

As good as it is, demi-glacé, being a mother sauce, is seldom served without adding other ingredients to make a finished sauce. Typically, these small sauces would be made in small batches, as needed, from portions taken from the kitchen's supply of demi-glacé. When adding the extra ingredients, always think in terms of balance of flavors.

When adding onions, garlic, shallots or similar ingredients, sweat them first. High-moisture ingredients, like tomatoes and mushrooms, should be cooked first to reduce moisture and concentrate their flavors. As long as there is sufficient acidity in the sauce, it's a nice idea to swirl a little softened butter (*monté au beurre*) into it just before serving to add smoothness and sheen. Here are but a few examples of possible options:

- ✓ **Bigarade sauce.** Demi-glacé with orange and lemon peel, orange and lemon juice, a little sugar, balsamic vinegar and pan drippings from roasted ducks. Often served with duck.
- ✓ **Bordelaise sauce.** Demi-glacé with shallots, red wine, thyme, chopped parsley and poached veal marrow. This sauce is great with filet mignon.
- ✓ **Mushroom sauce.** Demi-glacé with sautéed mushrooms. This sauce is great with just about everything.
- ✓ **Chasseur sauce (Hunter's sauce).** Demi-glacé with mushrooms, shallots, white wine, Madeira, tomato sauce and chopped parsley. Try this on grilled steaks and sautéed chicken.
- ✓ **Madeira sauce.** Demi-glacé with Madeira wine; excellent with ham.



## Velouté

**Yield: 1 gallon**

Velouté is basically white stock made from either fish, chicken or veal, thickened with blond roux and simmered until all traces of any starchy flavor or graininess of the flour is cooked out. Like demi-glace, it is used as the basis for many sauces.

White stock (fish, chicken or veal) .....	1 gallon
Butter.....	12 ounces
Flour .....	12 ounces
Bay leaf .....	2 each
Parsley stems .....	6 each
Thyme sprig.....	2 each

1. Bring the stock to a boil.
2. In a separate pan, melt the butter, add the flour and cook slowly, stirring until it becomes a light, golden straw color and has a nutty aroma. Whip this blond roux into the simmering stock.
3. Add the herbs.
4. Simmer for 45 minutes, skimming as necessary. Strain through cheesecloth or a fine metal strainer.
5. Chill, and store marked, covered and refrigerated until needed.

- ✓ **Lyonnais sauce.** Demi-glace with onions and white wine. This goes with almost anything.

Velouté means “velvet,” and a velvety quality is one of the hallmarks of this sauce. Like a good demi-glace it should also have a smooth, round flavor of the type of stock it was made from, whether fish, chicken or veal, be translucent and just barely coat the back of a spoon. The color should be a lustrous, glossy ivory, and it should be perfectly smooth, with no hint of graininess.

The same guidelines that govern the addition of ingredients for demi-glace also apply with velouté. Here are some classic velouté-based sauces:

- ✓ **Aurore sauce.** Velouté with tomato paste added to achieve a color as similar as possible to a rose-colored dawn. (Aurore is Latin for dawn.) This sauce is frequently served with poached chicken or eggs.
- ✓ **Chivry sauce.** Velouté with added chopped parsley, chervil, tarragon, thyme and chives. This is equally as good with roast leg of lamb as it is with a vegetarian omelet.
- ✓ **Suprême sauce.** Velouté reduced with heavy cream and mushroom essence. It is often used as a base for other sauces. It’s also a great sauce in which to coat poached chicken and vegetables when making a potpie.

## Béchamel

**Yield: 1 gallon**

Béchamel is a mother sauce made by thickening milk with a white roux and simmering it with onions. When made extra-thick and garnished with browned breakfast sausage, it’s like cream gravy that’s been to college.

Safflower oil	2 ounces
Onions, finely chopped	8 ounces
Milk	1 gallon
Butter	12 ounces
Flour	12 ounces
Bay leaf	2 each
Thyme sprig	2 each

1. Sweat the onions in the oil. Add the milk and bring to simmer.
2. In a separate pan, melt the butter, add the flour and cook slowly, stirring, stopping just short of any browning occurring. Whip this white roux into the simmering milk.
3. Add the herbs.
4. Simmer for 30 minutes, skimming as necessary. Strain through cheesecloth or a fine metal strainer.
5. Chill, and store marked, covered and refrigerated until needed.

✓ **Bercy sauce.** Fish velouté with added white wine, shallots and parsley. This is great with either sautéed fish or broiled oysters.

A properly made béchamel will taste creamy, with some aromatic interest imparted by the onions and herbs. It will be the color of heavy cream, have no graininess or starchiness, will be opaque and just barely coat the back of a spoon. Here are some classic sauces derived from béchamel:

✓ **Mornay sauce.** Béchamel with added cheese and cream. This is the classic sauce for coating fish, chicken or vegetables before they go under the broiler.

✓ **Soubise sauce.** Béchamel with onions and cream is a standard with roast veal.

✓ **Nantua sauce.** Béchamel with crawfish and cream. Besides being perfect over broiled fish, it's often served with poached or sautéed chicken.

## Growing Your Repertoire, Pleasing Your Guests

Incorporating some of these classic sauces in your dishes will help you grow as a chef, while giving your guests the chance to enjoy some of the best examples of the great culinary heights from a regrettably often forgotten era of cookery.

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