

# Drink

## cooking with beer



# Cheers for beers

Chef Richard Fox celebrates beer's diversity and cooks a classic ale casserole

Some 5,000 years ago in Egypt, the hieroglyphic symbol for food was a loaf of bread and a pitcher of beer. But while beer was a staple of our ancestors' diet, they certainly did not enjoy the range of tastes, textures and aromas we have today.

You'll notice I use different words. "Ale" is the Anglo Saxon for a fermented malt drink; beer is flavoured with hops or other ingredients; whereas pilsners originally came from Pilsen, in today's Czech Republic. From the rice-based beers of Japan, such as sake – yes, sake is a beer – to ales made to traditional Viking recipes, there is a drink for every taste and occasion. Rich, roasted dark ales; sweet and sour, air-fermented fruit beers; creamy, caramelised stouts; and dry, golden-hued hoppy pilsners are all to be savoured.

Such variety makes beer a versatile flavouring for cooking. Wheat beers such as Hoegaarden make great marinades for fish, and delicious sauces when combined with cream; add to a semifreddo (any of a range of chilled desserts containing sponge cake, cream and fruit) for extra zing or combine with sugar for an aromatic syrup for fruit.

By contrast, tart, fruit-flavoured beers like the Belgian cherry Kriek make as good a salad dressing as you'll find. Staying with the Belgian theme, Abbey or Trappist beers are genuine artisan brews. While the Abbey beers are brewed to traditional recipes devised by monks, the Trappist beers are still brewed by the monasteries themselves. These beers are complex and strong – up to 12% abv. Some of them are vintage-dated like wines. Use in dishes of equal complexity: rich game, red meats, reduced sauces and robust winter stews like this classic Belgian recipe (right) will all benefit.

As for lager, while it has suffered from being associated with the late-night kebab, there is no doubt that crisp, clean strong pilsners are ideal with ethnic dishes.

### Carbonnade flamande

Takes 1½-1¾ hours, not including marinating overnight and 2 hours in the oven. Serves 4 very generously

**Moderately easy** CAN BE FROZEN

**1.25kg/2lb 12oz stewing beef, cut into 4cm cubes**

**400ml/14fl oz Trappist ale such as Chimay or Leffe, or other dark ale**

**3 garlic cloves, lightly crushed**

**2 bay leaves**

**3 tbsp plain flour, seasoned with salt and pepper**

**2-3 tbsp olive oil**

**250g/9oz diced pancetta**

**2 carrots, sliced**

**2 onions, sliced**

**1 leek, sliced**

**1 tbsp tomato purée**

**350ml/12fl oz beef stock**

**1 bouquet garni (a small bunch of thyme, parsley stalks, a bay leaf and about 6 peppercorns tied in muslin)**

**a handful of parsley, chopped**

**1** Marinate the beef overnight in the ale with the garlic and bay leaves. The next day, drain the beef from the marinade, reserving the marinade. Pat the meat dry with kitchen paper and toss it in the seasoned flour until evenly coated. Shake off any excess flour.

**2** Heat 2 tbsp of the olive oil in a large flameproof casserole until hot. Fry the beef in 3-4 batches for about 5 minutes per batch, stirring occasionally, until it is a rich golden brown all over. You may need to add a little more oil between batches but make sure it is hot again before adding the next batch. Remove the meat with a slotted spoon to a plate and set aside. Don't worry if the bottom of the casserole is starting to brown, this all adds to the flavour of the finished dish.

**3** Lower the heat to medium and fry the pancetta in the casserole for 6-8 minutes,

stirring occasionally, until crisp and golden. Scoop the pancetta out with a slotted spoon and set aside with the beef.

**4** Preheat the oven to fan 140C/conventional 160C/gas 3. Tip the carrots, onions and leek into the casserole and fry, stirring occasionally, until they start to brown – this takes about 12 minutes. Spoon in the tomato purée and continue to cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly.

**5** Add the beef and pour in the reserved marinade. Bring to a simmer, scraping any sticky bits off the bottom of the pan, then add all the beef stock and bouquet garni to the casserole. Season with salt and pepper and bring everything to the boil. Remove from the heat. Cover with a lid and cook in the oven for 2 hours, stirring once halfway through. (*The carbonnade may now be left to cool and frozen for up to 1 month. Add 100ml/3½ fl oz more stock to the sauce when reheating.*) When the beef is ready, taste for seasoning and add more salt and pepper if you think it needs it. Scatter the chopped parsley over the top and serve straight from the casserole, with creamy mash or jacket potatoes and buttered greens or cabbage.

PER SERVING 830 calories, protein 86g, carbohydrate 23g, fat 42g, saturated fat 16g, fibre 3g, added sugar none, salt 3.17g

### GOOD FOOD KNOW-HOW

Most **Trappist ales** come in 330ml and 750ml bottles. If you can only find the smaller bottles make up the liquid by adding another 75ml/2½ fl oz of stock.