

Opinion

Miss eating in restaurants? Make magic when dining at home | Opinion

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By Star-Ledger Guest Columnist

By Lisa Chernick

I couldn't be happier that area restaurants are open for outdoor dining. I have missed this small human pleasure very much. So the other day, with a mix of trepidation and enthusiasm, I jumped in, and dined outside on a Greek salad and iced tea. Quickly. It didn't really feel like old times, but I will keep doing it, so long as everyone follows the rules. We all should do it to support local businesses, and because it's nice to have restaurant food without takeout containers and reheating.

My dining out experience made me realize something else: A lot of what I missed wasn't the food, it was the experience. There's the magical way that a good restaurant pulls together a handful of elements to make being there feel special -- great company, delicious food and drinks, excellent service, crisp linen and nice flatware on a pretty table with great looking dishes and sparkling wine glasses, just to name a few.

Surprisingly (or not), a lot of these magical elements are already in our kitchens and dining rooms, or can be, without much effort. My professional expertise is helping people with the gear, pantry and cooking techniques that make kitchens work well and become the best possible heart of the home. These days, kitchen happiness is more relevant than ever. So now I'd like to suggest that we give ourselves permission to unpack, admire, and use all the beautiful things we've always kept carefully packed away for special occasions. Now is the occasion. Those amazing wine glasses? They're coming out of the cabinet along with the gorgeous linen tablecloth and napkins. I'm pulling out my favorite plates and flatware, too. It's time to dine with the good stuff.

The best kind of dinner to show off these treasures is a low-effort menu for two (that could easily be for four at a long table in the yard or even for more if you have the outdoor space to do it safely and comfortably). The food has to be really nice, but simple, freeing up enough energy to lavish on the look and feel of the meal. For me that means starting with glimmery glasses of chilled rosé and Midnight Moon cheese with my favorite crackers served on the wooden board that I got as a wedding gift and love to look at but rarely use.

I'll also serve *Cerignola* olives in a beautiful ombre glass dish that I had previously deemed too precious to see the light of day. For the main course, ribeye steak and Béarnaise sauce to spoon on top. PSA: I've been making Béarnaise again recently, and it is an easy triumph—more on that later. On the side, roasted potatoes with rosemary, and crisp farmer's market vegetables sliced paper-thin with a mandolin, drizzled with my favorite olive oil and a sprinkle of salt. Dessert? Strawberries and blackberries piled into another rarely seen bowl with fresh whipped cream alongside.

I guarantee that all this beauty will make me the picture of happiness — at least until it's time to clean up. Then, I start planning my next meal out.

Ridiculously Easy Béarnaise Sauce

Adapted from an old favorite in the *New York Times*, the hardest thing about this sauce is the whisking. Make it for anyone on Keto, and they'll love you forever.

1 medium shallot, minced

1 ½ tbsp chopped tarragon

½ tsp black pepper

¼ cup white wine vinegar

1 tbsp water

2 egg yolks

1 ½ sticks unsalted butter, melted

¼ tsp salt

Juice of half a lemon

• Into a small saucepan, place the shallot, pepper, tarragon, and

- into a small saucepan, place the shallot, pepper, tarragon, and vinegar. Set the pan over medium heat and bring to a boil; reduce heat to a simmer and cook, stirring continuously, until only a few tablespoons of liquid remain, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and cool completely.
- Fill another small saucepan an inch or two with water, and set over high heat to boil, then lower to the gentlest possible simmer.
- Transfer the cooled shallot-tarragon mixture to a shallow metal mixing bowl; add the water and egg yolks, and whisk to combine.
- Place the bowl on top of the pan of simmering water, making sure the bowl and the water are not touching. Whisk the yolk mixture until it thickens, about 5 minutes—the volume of the mixture should double.
- Drizzle the butter in slowly, whisking all along to emulsify it with the egg mixture. You may need to pick the bowl up and remove it from the heat now and then to avoid the eggs overheating and scrambling. Whisk in salt. Squeeze in lemon juice a little at a time until you get the level of tartness you like. If you'd like the sauce a little thinner, add a tablespoon of hot water.

Lisa Chernick is the author of the kitchen guide [Your Starter Kitchen](#). Lisa has been a food writer and editor for more than 20 years. She has been a James Beard Book Awards judge since 2006 and a former James Beard Award nominee. Learn more at lisachernick.com.

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