

A Subtlety of Snow

Æthelmearc Twelfth Night

Anno Societatis XLIII

A Subtlety of Snow

For this competition, I wanted to present a subtlety that is approachable to the average cook. This subtlety is inspired by a 16th century German recipe found in the manuscript *Das Kochbuck der Sabina Welserin* (c. 1553). This simple recipe describes beating cream until it creates a foam and serving it over slices of toast sprinkled with sugar.

Original Recipe (transliterated by Thomas Gloning, Universität Marburg):

55 Ain schne zú machen

*Nitz ain milchram vnnd thú den jn den haffen/ vnnd nim
ain klúxen vnd rier jn dúrchainander, bis es ain schne oben
gewint/ vnnd bee ain semel vnnd legs jn ain schissel vnd see
daraúff ain zúcker vnnd thú den schom aúff das brot, so jst
es bereit.*

English Translation (translated by Valoise Armstrong):

55 To make snow

Dilute cream and put it in a pot. And take an eggbeater and stir it thoroughly, until it forms snowy foam on top. And toast a Semmel and lay it in a bowl and sprinkle sugar over it and put the foam on the bread, then it is ready.

There were certain logistics I needed to take into consideration in cooking and transporting this subtlety. I knew I would not have any kitchen space in order to toast the bread. I would

be travelling over 5 hours early in the morning with limited space in the vehicle I was riding in. I did not want to pre-slice the bread the night before, only to have it become stale. I had recently tried a simple Italian flat bread recipe and thought that a flat bread would best suit the complexities of travel. Instead of having sliced bread toasted, the whipped cream would be served on a whole flat bread.

Thinking further about the bread, I wanted the bread to be a little more special than a plain flat bread. In *Flavours of Byzantium* by Andrew Dalby there is a recipe for a spiced white bread called *Artos Katharos*.

English Translation (translated by Andrew Dalby)

White Bread made from wheat is the best and most nutritious of all foods. Particularly if white, with a moderate use of yeast and salt, the dough kneaded midway between dryness and rawness, and with a little anise, fennel seed and mastic, it is very fine indeed. One with a hot constitution should include sesame in the dough. If wishing to add more moistness to the bread, knead in some almond oil.

I decided I would base my Subtlety on these two recipes, with slight modifications to provide a light and bright dish that will be appealing at the end of a feast. In particular I want to highlight the flavor of anise which I find to be a bright flavor that works well with both sweet and savory dishes. The flatbread is sprinkled with sugar prior to the baking process since the bread will not be toasted as in the original recipe. The quantities for the ingredients for the bread are based upon a modern Italian Flatbread recipe. I am also adding sugar to the whipped cream since its absence may not appeal to many.

My Interpretation

For the bread:

2 ½ to 3 cups bread flour	1 cup warm water
2 tsp. sugar	½ cup Almond oil
¼ tsp. salt	1 package active dry yeast
2 tbsp. sugar	1 tbsp. anise seeds

For the topping

1 cup heavy cream	1 tsp. Anise extract
2 tbsp. sugar	garnish (optional)

Mix 1 cup of the flour, the sugar, salt, yeast and anise seeds in large bowl. Add ¼ cup almond oil and the warm water (between 110°F to 120°F) until all ingredients are well combined. Stir in enough remaining flour until the dough is soft and leaves the side of the bowl.

Turn dough onto lightly floured surface and knead 5 to 10 minutes until the dough is smooth and elastic. Place in bowl greased with some of the remaining almond oil (about 1 tbsp.); turn greased side up. Cover and let rise in warm place 1 to 1½ hours or until double in size.

Heat oven to 425°F. Grease a cookie sheet with some of the remaining almond oil (about 1 tbsp.). Punch down dough and flatten onto cookie sheet. Cover and let rise in warm place for 20 minutes. Prick dough with fork 1 inch in from the edge. Brush with remaining almond oil and sprinkle with sugar. Bake 12 to 15 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool.

Place heavy cream in large bowl that has been chilled. Beat cream until it starts to form soft peaks. Add anise extract and while beating the cream slowly add in sugar. Continue beating until firm peaks are formed. Spread whipped cream on top of cooled flatbread.

I wanted to give a garnish that would better speak of the context of this subtlety, so I've place a spray of rosemary on it and splattered some of the whipped cream in order to represent snow that has fallen on a branch. I also wanted to add to the spirit of the conspicuous consumption by dusting this subtlety with edible gold and silver flakes. Yes, it is real gold and real silver!

References:

Welserin Sabina Das Kochbuch der Sabina Welserin [Book]/ ed. Stopp Hugo.- Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1553.- 1980: p. 173.- A Transliteration and translation of the 16th century German cooking manuscript..- ISBN 3-533-02905-0.

Dalby Andrew Flavours of Byzantium [Book].- Totnes: Prospect Books, 2003.- p. 268.- A study on the food habits of the Eastern Roman Empire during the Middle Ages including a translation of four byzantine manuscripts on food.

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