

FIREHOUSE CAESAR

At some point in my career, I took what Bugs Bunny called “the wrong turn in Albuquerque” and ended up in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for a year and a half. At first I was apprehensive about moving from New York to this small city with my dog, cat, and girlfriend in tow. New Mexico is incredibly beautiful, but it was a hard place to live in, particularly at the end of 2001 when America was going through a very difficult time.

Unfortunately many of my memories are sad: the cat died, the dog stayed when I returned to New York (very hard decision!), and my girlfriend and I broke up. But I did meet and become good friends with a chef, Mark Miller, who inspired me more than most in my career. He taught me about real Mexican cuisine, how to make a good Caesar salad, and how to work with chiles. And he told me about a restaurant in Catalonia run by a very talented chef by the name of Ferran. Somehow I secured an internship there, so in 2003 I was off and away. I hold many dear memories from New Mexico and can still make a nice Caesar salad, thanks to you, MM! My version includes crispy chicken skin and emulsion to add crunch and a creamy texture.

Serves 4 as a main course or 4 to 6 as a starter

INGREDIENTS

for the bread tuiles:

- 1 loaf day-old country or sourdough bread
- Extra virgin olive oil, for brushing
- Salt and pepper

for the caesar dressing:

- 1½ cloves garlic, very thinly sliced with a Microplane or a small, sharp knife
- 5 fillets Ortiz anchovies, or other brand of good-quality anchovy fillets in oil
- 2 free-range egg yolks
- 3½ tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 cup/250 ml grapeseed oil
- 2½ ounces/75 g Parmesan cheese, thinly sliced with a Microplane or mandoline
- Juice of ½ lemon
- ½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 drops Tabasco
- Pinch table salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

for the crispy chicken skin:

- Skin from 1 whole free-range chicken (ask your butcher, or buy 4 chicken breasts with the skin on, remove the skin, and freeze the breasts to use another time)

for the lettuce emulsion:

- 8 ounces/240 g Little Gem lettuce, green leaves only

Table salt
1½ teaspoons Dijon mustard
¾ cup/200 ml grapeseed oil
7 tablespoons/100 ml cold water

4 romaine lettuce hearts, cut into bite-sized pieces
7 ounces/200 g Parmesan cheese, sliced into fine shavings
8 fillets anchovies, halved lengthwise (use Ortiz or another brand of good-quality anchovy fillets in oil)

MAKE THE BREAD TILES

Preheat the oven to 325°F/160°C. Cut 8 to 12 very thin slices of bread from the loaf so you have 2 slices per person. Place on a baking sheet, brush with extra virgin olive oil on both sides, and season with salt and pepper. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes until golden and crispy, then remove from the oven, break into bite-sized pieces, and set aside. Keep the oven on.

MAKE THE CAESAR DRESSING

Place the garlic, anchovies, egg yolks, red wine vinegar, and mustard in a blender or a food processor and blend until smooth. While the motor is still running, slowly drizzle in the grapeseed oil to create an emulsion. Transfer the dressing to a bowl, whisk in the remaining ingredients, check the seasoning, and set aside.

MAKE THE CRISPY CHICKEN SKINS

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Scrape the excess fat from the chicken skin. Place the skin on the parchment, laying it flat over the whole tray in two layers. Place another piece of parchment paper on top, with another baking sheet on top of that. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes until golden and crisp, then remove from the oven, remove the top tray and parchment from the skin, and set aside.

MAKE THE LETTUCE EMULSION

Blanch the lettuce leaves in a saucepan of boiling salted water for 2 seconds, then refresh in a bowl of ice-cold water. Drain well, patting off any excess water with paper towels.

Place the lettuce, a pinch of salt, and the mustard in the bowl of a food processor and blend at high speed until it forms a smooth purée, then reduce the speed and slowly drizzle in the oil and water, a little of each at a time, to create an emulsion. Pass through a fine-mesh sieve into a clean bowl and set aside.

SERVE

Toss the romaine lettuce in the Caesar dressing until the leaves are evenly covered. Spoon a small amount of the lettuce emulsion into the bottom of 4 to 6 serving bowls, enough to cover the bottom of each. Then layer up the dressed leaves, Parmesan shavings, bread tiles, crispy chicken skin, and anchovies so that they are well distributed through the salad. Finish with another layer of all the elements over the top.

Reprinted with permission from [Chiltern Firehouse](#) by Nuno Mendes and André Balazs, copyright 2017 by Chiltern Street Hotel Ltd. Published in the United States by Ten Speed Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. Photographs copyright 2016 by Peden + Munk

