

get on the gravy train

THE quality of sauces, salsas and dressings are the tell-tale sign between an average chef and a great chef – a distinguishing feature between the norm and the best, writes CRAIG SQUIRE.

The knowledge behind making great sauces can take many years to acquire, but more importantly is the thought and care that goes into it. Some restaurant sauces are not only complicated to make at home but they can take days to complete.

For example there's the Chinese master stock. This is a poaching liquor for pork and game birds which is then reduced to make the sauce. The trick with this sauce is to use a portion of the previous stock with the next batch of meat to be cooked and so on and so on – so the best of these master stocks can take months to achieve.

The fable goes that there are restaurants in China, known formally as tea houses, where the master stock dates back hundreds of years, sort of like ancient sour dough. This is certainly possible as some restaurants in Beijing did escape the destruction of "decadence" during the cultural revolution.

Even within my restaurant, which has the modern constraints of labour and ingredient costs, we make a traditional game sauce originating from Burgundy in France called sauce poivrade. This takes 20 litres of veal stock, meat trimmings, 7 litres of red wine, 1kg red currant jelly, juniper berries, vegetables, tomato paste and vinegar. After reducing this we produce about 5 litres of sauce. There is no thickening or flour, just natural reduction. Then to create our quandong chilli glaze, this is then reduced with a litre of port, poached quandongs and chilli. Thus a single portion of this sauce costs \$2.40.

The following recipes are about providing the home cook with further knowledge to create their own flavour experiences utilising everyday ingredients that are found in your fridge or pantry. It's a great time of the year for a traditional roast so try this recipe and say good bye to Gravox. You will note that the recipes don't use exact quantities for the ingredients – this makes you cook by taste and experience. A little harder the first time but you will acquire the knowledge to cook with confidence.



Craig Squire is the chef and director of the award-winning Red Ochre Grill in Shields St.

sauces

Whenever I hear that someone uses Gravox or a similar sauce powder, it always makes me cringe, I can't wait to burst out with my own secret to easy-to-make gravy at home.

Roast Jus (Gravy)

Your roast
Onion
Vegemite
Red wine
Water
Tomato sauce or paste
A little flour
Worcestershire sauce
Salt and pepper

When preparing your roast think about the flavour you wish to achieve and add these from the beginning.

All meats can use some halved onions placed underneath, some cracked pepper and salt rubbed on with a little olive oil.

For lamb add rosemary and garlic, for beef rub on some grain mustard. Use a heavy roasting pan that will later become your sauce pan.

Your roast is cooked – you can best check this by placing a skewer into the thickest part of the meat.

When you extract the skewer the juices should run clear for lamb, chicken and pork.

For beef if you like medium rare the juices should still have a little blood, so place the skewer tip to your lip and it should be hot.

When the roast is cooked, place it on another tray and back into the oven and turn the oven down as low as it can go.

Leaving it in the closed warm oven will allow the meat to rest, helping with tenderness and ease of carving, 20 minutes at 60C is ideal.

Tip off any excess fat from the roasting pan. The fat will float on top of any juices, so just tip off gently into the sink or bin.

Retaining a little fat is fine so don't be too fussy.

Place the pan on the stove on a moderate heat.

When lightly sizzling, add a tablespoon of flour to the pan to make the base (roux) for your sauce – stir with a wooden spoon.



Deglaze with red wine and don't be shy, about half your glass is good – you can always pour some more – and stir thru to break up the roux.

Then add several splashes of Worcester, a spoon of Vegemite (the secret ingredient), a good squirt of tomato sauce or a spoon of paste and stir all of this through.

Make sure you break down the Vegemite with the back of your spoon and utilise the bits of roast or onion stuck on the pan by scraping them into your sauce.

By now it should be bubbling away and getting a little thick.

Check the roast in the oven, if any juices have run out on to the second pan, carefully tip them into your sauce. If necessary thin back your sauce with a little water.

Now, importantly, taste it – maybe a little bit more Worcester or some salt and pepper will lift the flavour.

To serve, pour straight from the pan on to the carved roast or if you're feeling fancy strain through a sieve into a serving jug.

Roast lamb goes great with a merlot or tempranillo.

A similar combination of ingredients and concept for the roast jus can be used with success for great sauces to go with steak, like pepper sauce or mushroom sauce.

For best effect cook your steak in a pan so the meat flavour can be deglazed with the wine.

Mushroom cream sauce

Cook steak one notch under your liking in a heavy based fry pan, place in warm oven or to the side to rest. Try not to burn the pan, cook evenly with a good coating of oil on the steak.

Add finely diced onion and sliced mushrooms to the pan, sauté in a little butter and residual pan juices for up to two minutes.

Deglaze pan with red wine, add Worcester sauce and Vegemite as per the roast jus recipe.

Try a little mustard too

Add cream and once again don't be shy, about 200ml is good for a sauce for four people, stir through. Taste it, add a little salt and plenty of fresh ground pepper.

Reduce cream at a low simmer to sauce consistency.

Serve over your rested steak and enjoy with a good shiraz viognier.



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