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Dry-Aged Whole Roasted Duck

BY EMILY YUEN | @CHEFEMILYYUEN

In French kitchens, dry-aging duck is the gold standard for concentrating flavor and getting that really crisp skin. In Cantonese roast meat shops, hanging ducks to air dry is a craft that's been perfected over generations. This dish lives right in the middle of those two traditions, combining classic European technique with my memories of seeing roast ducks hanging in Chinatown windows. Growing up, I always remember holiday roasts being served with something fruity alongside them, like cranberry sauce. In this version, I use dark cherries with Shaoxing rice wine, warm Chinese spices, and a hit of acidity to make a gastrique that cuts through the richness and fat of the duck. Instead of serving it with mashed potatoes or grains, I went with a savory sticky rice seasoned with dark soy, oyster sauce, and chicken bouillon, folded with lap cheong, shiitake mushrooms, and salted duck egg yolk. It still feels like a traditional holiday dinner, but the flavors are inspired by the Chinese food and memories I grew up with.

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SERVES: 4-6

INGREDIENTS

Duck Spice Blend

1 ½ tbsp coriander seeds
1 tbsp Szechuan peppercorns
¾ tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp smoked tea leaves (such as Lapsang Souchong)

Dry-Aged Whole Duck

1 whole Peking or Moulard duck (4-5 lbs)
1 tbsp kosher salt
1½ tbsp Duck Spice Blend
1 tbsp maltose or honey
1 tbsp Shaoxing rice wine
2 star anise pods
1 cinnamon stick

Salted Duck Egg & Lap Cheong Sticky Rice Stuffing

1 lb glutinous rice, soaked in cold water for at least 4 hours or overnight, then drained
2 links lap cheong (Chinese sweet sausage), finely diced
4 dried shiitake mushrooms, rehydrated in hot water, stems removed, caps finely diced
3 cooked salted duck egg yolks, crumbled or roughly chopped
2 scallions, thinly sliced
1 tbsp vegetable oil
1 tbsp dark soy sauce
2 tsp toasted sesame oil
2 tsp oyster sauce
1½ tsp low-sodium soy sauce
1 tsp chicken bouillon powder
¾ tsp granulated sugar
¼ tsp ground white pepper

Ingredients and recipe continue...

INSTRUCTIONS

01 For the Duck Spice Blend

1. In a small dry skillet over medium-low heat, toast the coriander seeds, Szechuan peppercorns, and cumin seeds until fragrant and lightly popping (about 2 minutes).
2. Remove from heat and toss in the smoked tea leaves to warm through slightly.
3. Transfer the mixture to a spice grinder or mortar and pestle and grind into a fine powder.
4. Set aside ½ teaspoon for the gastrique, reserve ¼ teaspoon for finishing, and use the rest for the cavity rub.

02 For the Dry-Aged Whole Duck

1. Pat the duck dry inside and out with paper towels.
2. In a small bowl, combine the kosher salt, 1½ tablespoons of the Duck Spice Blend, maltose (or honey), and Shaoxing wine. Rub this seasoning paste thoroughly inside the cavity, then insert the star anise pods and cinnamon stick.
3. Leave the exterior skin completely bare. Place the duck on a wire rack set over a sheet pan and refrigerate uncovered for 3 to 7 days to thoroughly dry out the skin.

03 For the Salted Duck Egg & Lap Cheong Sticky Rice Stuffing

1. Line a steamer basket with cheesecloth or parchment paper. Spread the soaked, drained glutinous rice in an even layer and steam over high heat for 20 to 25 minutes, until translucent and tender.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the dark soy sauce, sesame oil, oyster sauce, low-sodium soy sauce, chicken bouillon, sugar, and white pepper.
3. Heat the vegetable oil in a wok or large skillet over medium heat. Add the diced lap cheong and render for 3 minutes until crisp. Add the diced shiitake mushrooms and sauté for another 2 minutes until fragrant.
4. Reduce heat to low, add the steamed sticky rice, and pour in the seasoning blend. Toss continuously to break up any clumps until the rice is evenly coated in a rich mahogany color.

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Spiced Cherry-Shaoxing Gastrique

1 cup sweet dark cherries, pitted and halved
½ cup Shaoxing rice wine
¼ cup Chinese red vinegar
3 tbsp brown sugar
½ cup duck stock (or chicken stock)
1 star anise pod
½ tsp Duck Spice Blend
2 slices fresh ginger (¼-inch thick)
1 tbsp unsalted butter, cold and cubed

5. Fold in the sliced scallions and crumbled salted duck egg yolks. Remove from heat and let cool to room temperature.

04 For the Spiced Cherry-Shaoxing Gastrique

1. In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine the brown sugar and Chinese red vinegar. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes until the sugar melts and begins to bubble into a light caramel.
2. Carefully deglaze with the Shaoxing wine, scraping up any caramelized sugar. Add the cherries, duck stock, star anise, ½ teaspoon Duck Spice Blend, and ginger slices.
3. Simmer over medium-low heat for 10 to 12 minutes until reduced to a glossy, spoon-coating syrup.
4. Strain through a fine mesh sieve to remove the ginger and star anise. Off the heat, whisk in the cold cubed butter until fully incorporated and velvety.

05 Roast the Duck

1. Preheat your oven to 425°F (220°C).
2. Using a cake tester or skewer, lightly prick the duck skin all over at an angle, being careful to pierce only the fat and not the meat underneath.
3. Place the duck on a rack set inside a roasting pan. Roast for 20 minutes, then reduce oven temperature to 350°F (175°C). Continue roasting for 45 to 50 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through, until the skin is deep mahogany and crisp, and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the deepest part of the breast registers 135°F-140°F (57°C-60°C) for medium rare/medium.
4. Transfer the duck to a carving board and let rest for 15 to 20 minutes before carving.

06 Plate & Serve

1. Separate the duck legs and thighs, then carve the breasts into thin slices.
2. Spoon a generous mound of the warm salted duck egg & lap cheong sticky rice stuffing onto the serving plate.
3. Arrange the carved duck over top, drizzle the warm cherry-Shaoxing gastrique over the skin, and finish with a sprinkling of the reserved Duck Spice Blend lightly dusted over the sliced duck breast.