



THE CASBARIAN FAMILY, ARNAUD'S OYSTERS STEWED IN CREAM

Those of us who live in New Orleans count oyster soup, with fresh Louisiana oysters poached in simple broth of milk, cream, butter and aromatic seasonings, as one of our blessings. The soup's brightness and clarity of flavor showcases the best of the region's shellfish.

SERVES: 4 to 6

3 1/2 cups	water	1/8 teaspoon	ground red pepper
2 dozen	freshly shucked oysters, drained	1	whole bay leaf
1/2 cup	chopped yellow onion	3/4 cup	heavy cream
1/2 cup	chopped celery	2 cups	whole milk
1/2 cup	chopped green onions	1/2 cup	all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon plus 1/4 cup	unsalted butter	1 teaspoon	kosher or sea salt
1/2 teaspoon	minced garlic	1/4 teaspoon	freshly ground white peppercorns
1/8 teaspoon	dried thyme		

DIRECTIONS

In a medium-size saucepan bring the water to a boil. Add oysters and continue to boil for 3 minutes, until the edges curl.

Remove the oysters with a slotted spoon and reserve 3 cups of the liquid. Set both aside.

In a Dutch oven over medium heat, cook the celery, onion and green onions in 1 tablespoon of the butter, stirring constantly until tender. Stir in 2 1/2 cups of the reserved liquid, and the garlic, thyme, red pepper and bay leaf. Bring to a boil, then stir in the cream. Reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in the milk and return to a simmer. Set aside.

Melt the remaining 1/4 cup butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Add the flour, stirring with a wire whisk until smooth. Cook 4 minutes, stirring constantly, or until smooth. (The mixture will be very thick.)

Gradually add the flour mixture to the milk mixture, stirring until they are blended. Add the oysters, salt and white pepper. Heat the soup thoroughly.

Remove from the heat, discard bay leaf and serve immediately.

Oysters stewed in cream is a dish as rich as the history of Arnaud's, which first opened in 1918. When the dish makes an appearance in the dining room, it is as much a star as the pinpoint of light from crystal chandeliers dancing along an equally glittery wall of etched and beveled glass.

The restaurant began as a family establishment, headed by Arnaud Cazenave, who liked to be called "the count," even though the title had no official connection. In 1978 Archie and Jane Casbarian took a leap of faith and purchased Arnaud's, and then restored the legendary grande dame to its original splendor. Since then, the couple's children, Archie Jr. and Katy, have joined the restaurant's management. The next generation of Casbarians began arriving in 2008 with the birth of Archie Alexander Casbarian.

The restaurant encompasses 13 historic structures, with the original Italian mosaic-tile floor patterns changing from one building to the other.

