



Welcome to Shop with the Chef Series 2008!

Featuring Chef Chris Howe from Café La Vie, Santa Cruz, CA

Chris hails from Devon, England and has been in the restaurant business for nearly 17 years. Chris explains: "I got my first job as a 'dish pig' just after my 11th birthday and became a trainee chef at 15. I was subsequently battered, shouted at, burnt, and broken down and still believe that I would not trade it for the world! Life as an apprentice chef was very tough and unforgiving as it should be. As the old saying goes, if you can't stand the heat, then stay outta the kitchen! Food is my true love, my passion and my obsession. I love my craft and my job, which is lucky since I spend 11 hours a day 6-7 days a week in the kitchen!"

Chris Howe is head chef at Café La Vie, located at 429 Front Street in downtown Santa Cruz. Café La Vie features organic food with a focus on raw and vegetarian cuisine. For reservations, call 831.429.6746 or see their website at www.lavie.us.

When I created this dish, I knew the flavors would work well together—the feed back I got from people absolutely blew me away! One particular lady (the wife of a salmon fisherman) said she had "eaten salmon every way possible" and that this was "the best she had ever had." So happy was she that she came to the kitchen to tell me this herself. Warmed the cockles of my heart that did, I can tell you. It's the reason why I love doing what I do!

Also don't be afraid to buy a whole side (or whole salmon) for this; you should get 7-8 portions per side and you can cut the belly off for salmon cakes.

Start by slicing all the kumquats and placing them in a container, covering them with about half the bottle of wine, the other half is for you! Yes that's right—YOU; you're not really cookin' till you have a lil' glass of wine with you.

PAN SEARED SALMON WITH KUMQUATS AND FENNEL

4 12 oz. salmon fillets
1/2 lb. kumquats
2 bulbs fennel, with tops
1/2 lb. spring greens lettuce mix*
1 large onion, finely diced
6 cloves of garlic, minced
1 bottle of a fairly nice chardonnay
Salt and pepper
Coconut oil, for frying

*Spinach can work in place or even rocket

PREPARATION

Slice the kumquats, place in a container with a sealable lid and cover with half the bottle of wine and season lightly. Leave over night in the fridge.

Use this wine for the glaze with the salmon (and the kumquats are to die for!).

Next, cut the tops off the fennel, remove some of the fluffy greens at the top and keep these to one side (these will be for garnishing the finished dish). Cut the fennel bulbs in half lengthwise and slice thinly on an angle. Take the long green stems from the top and thinly chop these, add to the rest of the fennel. Dice the onion. Mince the garlic.

Place the salmon on a plate and season both sides with a little salt and pepper.

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

Heat a cast iron skillet and a wok (a medium size deep sauce pan will work if you don't have a wok) and place about 2 tablespoons of coconut oil in each. When nice and hot, put the onion, garlic and fennel in the wok and stir every 90 or so seconds; keep the heat fairly low to make sure that you don't brown the fennel.

As you are doing this, place the salmon pieces skin side down in the skillet (careful not to splash the oil as it will give you one hell of a nasty burn and believe me it hurts!)

When the salmon's color has changed to a lighter pink (this is called the "hue"—it will be just before it gets about half way up) flip over the salmon, then pour the kumquat and wine mixture over the salmon, being very careful at this point as it will flame up because of the alcohol—so stand back. (Invite some friends in at this point and you will look very cool—everyone loves the fire for some reason.)

Cover the pan and turn off the heat. Add the spring greens to the fennel pan and turn the pan off as well; the greens will cook from the heat left in the fennel. Stir in well.

Serve with the greens piled in the center of the plate, salmon on top and the kumquats spooned over. Garnish with the fennel we saved! Nice.