

Wednesday, April 13, 2005

latimes.com/food

COOKBOOK WATCH

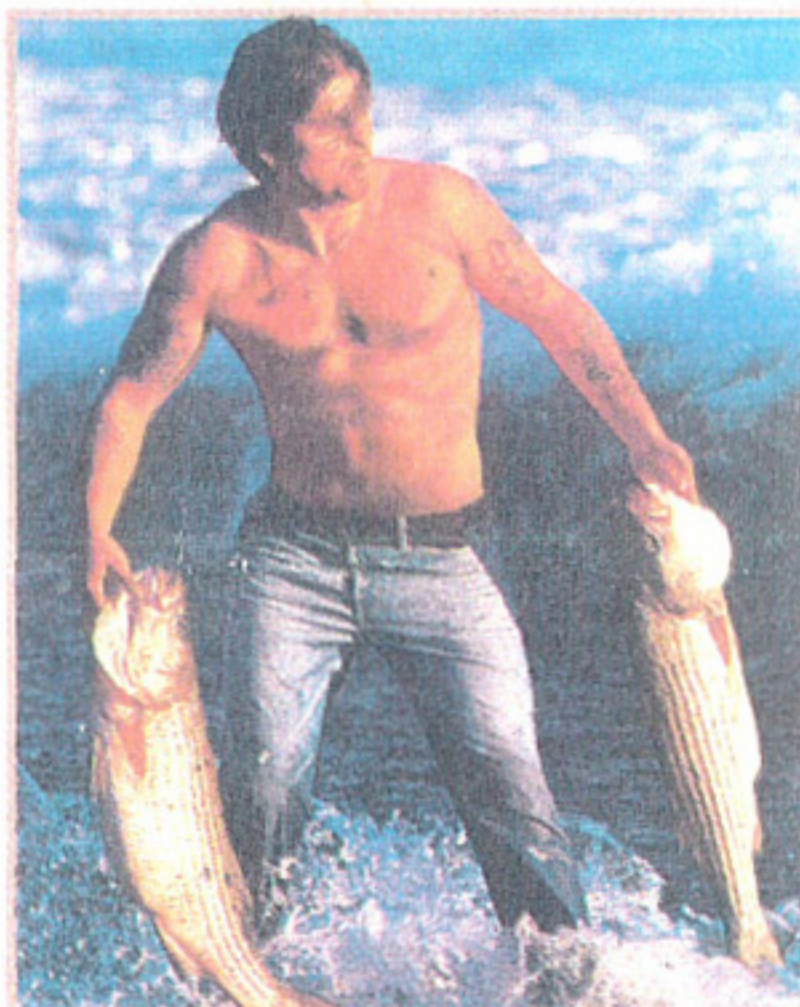
Honest,
we got it for
the recipesBy LESLIE BRENNER
Times Staff Writer

HE'S the guy your girlfriends warned you about. Look at him, emerging from the surf like a chef-Adonis, kelp fairly dangling from his biceps. He caught those big fish with his bare hands!

The guy's gorgeous. *And* he can cook. What could be sexier?

The guy is Ludo Lefebvre, the daring renegade chef of Bastide, on Melrose Place. The book is called "Crave: The Feast of the Five Senses" (Regan Books, \$50). On the jacket photo, Lefebvre, who had hitherto been known professionally by his given name of Ludovic Lefebvre, has slipped out of his whites into something a little more comfortable, as well as slipping into the more familiar "Ludo." He peers at you with an MTV come-hither stare. He's holding, quite tenderly, a papaya filled with pomegranate seeds. But you're not looking for symbolism.

He's beautiful, with his white teeth and downy beard and all those vivid tattoos. The gold earring is set off by a nose stud. Curiously, there's no photographer credited for the book, though in the acknowledgements, Lefebvre thanks Rachel Weill for "making the food look beautiful" and Steve Wayda and his team "for making me look the best I can look." Wayda, in- [See Lefebvre, Page F6]



STEPHEN WAYDA Regan Books

SELLING POINT: Bastide chef Ludo Lefebvre poses with food in "Crave."

Sense appeal

[Lefebvre, from Page F1]
cidentally, is a photographer for Playboy and Penthouse.

Lefebvre (luh-FEH-vruh) is clearly of the Nigella Lawson school of selling cookbooks. He's not the first male chef to bank on sex appeal: Since the late Jean-Louis Palladin broke ground in 1999 by wearing nothing but a Vita-Mix in a blender ad, chefs from Bobby Flay to Rocco DiSpirito to Jamie "The Naked Chef" Oliver have strutted their stuff. But Ludo does it so convincingly.

Even without the glamour shots of him, this book would be food porn — the dishes themselves look irresistible. You want it. All of it. You *crave* it.

Red wine-poached beef with star anise, long pepper and cardamom infusion with caramelized Belgian endive with lemon. Chicken *Étouffée* in dried verbena and curry leaves. *Ile flottante* with praline and mocha sauce.

You crave it, but can you have it?

You can't have the chef: He's married. "For Krissy," reads the dedication, all on its own big white page. "I was only a rumor, but you believed in me; Los Angeles was a mirage, but you've made it my home; This book was a fever dream, but you've made it real. I love you."

So that's out.

But the food — at least you can have the food. Right?

Not so fast. Even if you can find long pepper and a piece of caul fat, you would have had to

start preparing the beef recipe three days ago: First make a homemade stock, then let it chill two days before using (there's no explanation why). For the chicken, you'll need curry leaves, fresh porcini and dried verbena leaves. The *ile flottante* calls for pink pralines, preferably French.

I learned this the hard way one recent Sunday, when I pulled out a review copy to try out some recipes. I thought I'd shop in the morning, and test two or three dishes for dinner that night.

I started flipping through the book. Curiously, I couldn't find anything I could cook that afternoon — either one or more components needed to have been prepared at least the day before or exotic ingredients had to have been sought out or mail-ordered.

But I was hooked. I examined every recipe from the start, looking for a starter and a main course.

Cream of broccoli soup called for homemade chicken stock. Moussaka required lamb stock and a homemade curry powder that needed to sit for three weeks for flavors to meld. Other recipes called for foie gras, Kobe beef, licorice root, acacia blossoms.

Finally, I settled on carpaccio of broccoli with saffron oil and salmon *en crouste* with red wine-shallot reduction, potatoes and clams.

The broccoli recipe worked perfectly, though it was a bit fussy (and why "carpaccio"? It was neither raw nor thinly sliced). Crisp-steamed florets are plated in concentric circles and drizzled with a lime-saffron dressing; shaved Parmesan, diced tomato and sliced basil leaves are scattered over. On top of that, a garnish: fried tomato skin and fried basil leaves, then a sprinkling of *fleur de sel*.

The dressing was very tart; the intense lime flavor fought with the Parmesan. Otherwise, it was OK — and gorgeous to look at — but not worth all that effort.

For the main course, salmon fillets were wrapped in layers of filo brushed with clarified butter. Depending on the shape of the fillet, the packages looked trim and appealing or huge and bulbous.

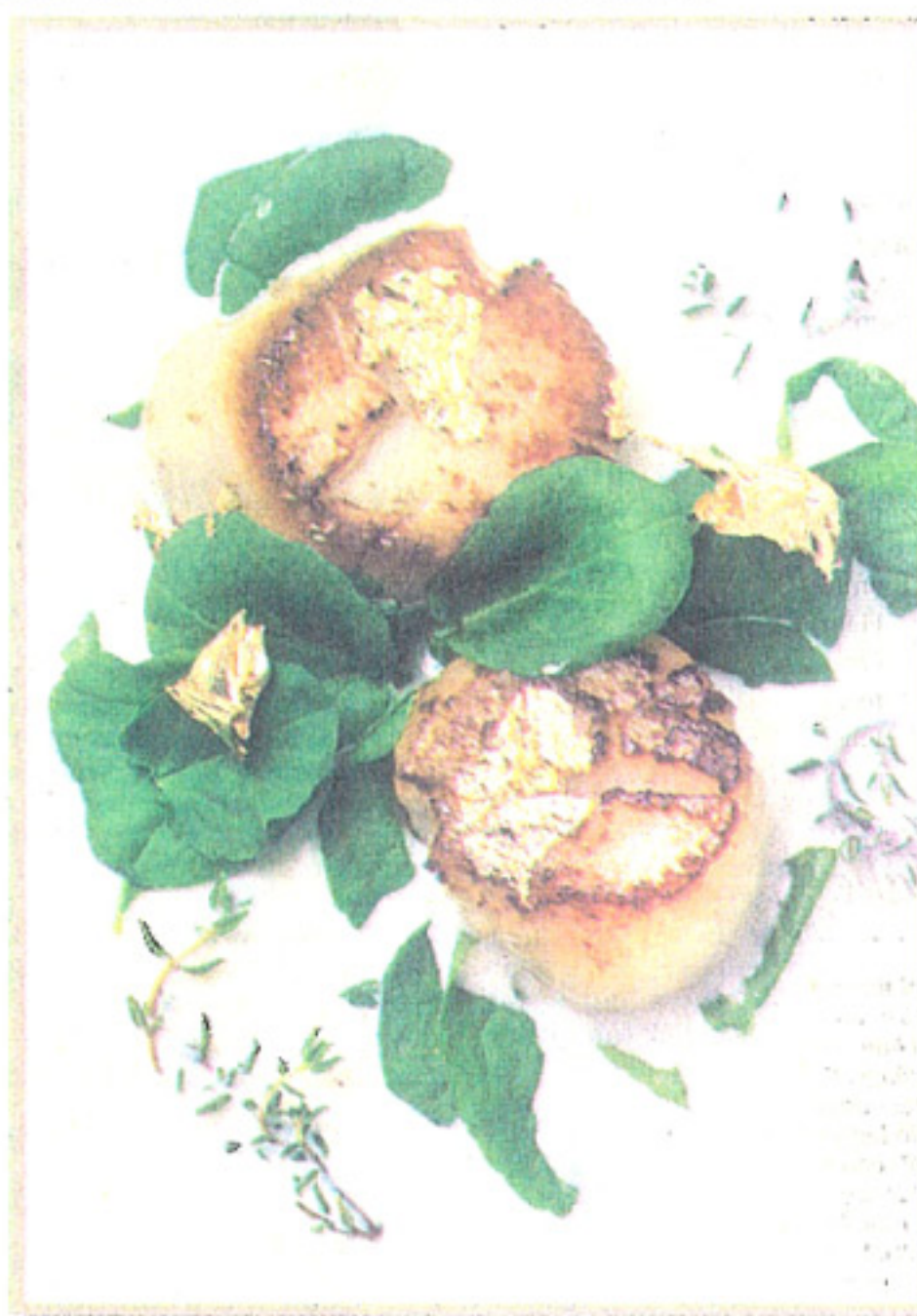
The method was interesting and worked well. The recipe says to heat a sauté pan, then to add the salmon packets. No butter or oil? Seemed highly unlikely. What to do? I used olive oil. No matter. You cook them two minutes per side, then into a 400-degree oven they go to finish while you prepare the plates.

I had already done the prep on the potato and clam accompaniment hours before. (Steam Manila clams, remove them from the shells and boil fingerlings.) After assembling the salmon packets, I chopped parsley, sliced the fingerlings, sautéed them in olive oil, added the clams, seasoned and tossed in the parsley.

The result? I loved the filo-salmon with the red wine-Port sauce, and I loved the potatoes with clams. But together, they were utterly weird, the clams and Port wildly dissonant.

It was all compelling, though, so I kept cooking. In fact, I couldn't stop. Each time I tried a recipe, I craved more.

For a dinner with friends, I made rack of lamb with broth, baby vegetables and caraway seeds. The recipe functioned nicely for entertaining; I was able to prepare much of it in advance. For the broth, homemade lamb stock was simmered with tomatoes, shallots, garlic, thyme and tomato paste. Could Lefebvre really mean two tablespoons of tomato paste? I went ahead and added it, and reduced it as instructed. Hmm. It was very tomatoey, thick and red, not at all



ERIC BOYD Los Angeles Times

FAVE: Garlic soup with scallops, thyme and gold leaf shines.

It was all compelling, so I kept cooking. In fact, I couldn't stop. Each time I tried a recipe, I craved more.

broth-like. The tomato obscured that wonderful lamb stock. I thinned it with more stock.

The baby vegetables — fingerlings, turnips, snow peas, English peas and baby onions — were boiled till "crisp-tender," then shocked in ice water, drained and dried, the potatoes and onions sliced, all of it ready to go.

The cooking method for the lamb was perfect: You brown the racks on top of the stove, then roast them in the oven for about 18 minutes. While they rest, you assemble the plates.

The book's strength and weakness are one in the same: the restaurantiness of the recipes. They're quite well thought-out in terms of do-ahead preparation. Just as in a restaurant, a natural *mise en place* suggests itself, so executing fairly elaborate dishes is actually pretty stress-free. For those who like to entertain, that's a huge plus. Many of the dishes are impressive and gorgeous. On the other hand, a chef who has a battalion of prep cooks and sous-chefs and a network of high-end purveyors at his disposal thinks nothing of calling for hard-to-find ingredients or labor-intensive preparations.

Too often for the home cook though, the added effort and expense of making the stock or procuring the exotic ingredients just isn't reflected in the final dish. And because the instructions aren't always thorough (and sometimes the recipes are flawed), they're best attempted by a fairly experienced home cook.

A cake of apple confit was pretty fabulous: 20 thin layers of apples, scattered with citrus zest confit and slow-baked. It was intensely appley (it's a brilliant use of Granny Smiths), with an amazing texture, and a light, tart caramel sauce. A *crème fraîche* garnish played beautifully off those bright flavors. So what if it took 2½ hours to prep, plus 5 hours to bake?

My other favorite was young garlic soup with thyme, scallops and gold leaf: basically young garlic and ginger simmered in milk, puréed to frothiness and poured around seared scallops over tender watercress. The gold leaf is optional, but it makes the dish look spectacular. This was extremely easy to prepare, and the subtle green garlic and ginger flavors were marvelous.

But there were quite a few disappointments. A caramel soufflé fell before it was even out of the oven — on three consecutive attempts. This I found odd, because soufflés are usually much sturdier and easier to execute than their reputation allows. The curd for a Meyer lemon tart was so thin that it never properly set up; the crust was so hard it was difficult to cut.

That's Ludo: absolutely alluring, but frequently infuriating.

Green lentils with cinnamon kept beckoning from the page. It called for Ceylon cinnamon, which, as it turns out, is locally available only at Le Sanctuaire in Santa Monica. We bought it mail-order from Penzey's Spices (www.penzey.com). I was miffed at having to jump through hoops to find it, but what a discovery: The cinnamon is arresting and delicate, with a lovely floral aroma. I was eager to cook with it.

The lentils are simmered in Evian water, with onion, clove, carrot, celery, a bouquet garni and the Ceylon cinnamon. The cinnamon and lentils harmonized beautifully. A big chunk of butter is stirred in at the end, really too much, I thought; it drowned out the cinnamon. Finally, blanched diagonal-cut quarter-inch slices of cucumber are stirred in and simmered briefly in the lentils. Here, I think, Lefebvre took a really good idea and then went off the deep end. The slimy surfboards of cucumber are just weird with the lentils; they don't add anything to the dish. And Evian? Please.

Still, there are so many interesting ideas here that I intend to keep cooking.

There's an awful lot of text, most of it nicely written (with Martin Booe, a frequent contributor to the L.A. Times Magazine). The most interesting parts are those in which Lefebvre discusses ingredients and cooking methods.

The chef is known for his fascination with spices, but there's not much insight here into how he thinks about them. ("Saffron is truly unique" he writes, "there's really nothing else you can compare it to." And "vanilla is one of the most primary spices, yet it is incredibly difficult to describe.") He uses spices much more like a French chef than an Indian one; he doesn't believe in toasting them and, rather than cooking with them, he prefers dusting them over finished food.

The recipes are divided into "See," "Touch," "Smell," "Hear" and "Taste," an opportunity for Lefebvre to wax poetic about cooking and eating in each chapter opening.

More importantly, we're treated to more pictures of him, double spreads each time: looking at a strawberry; pressing his hand into bread dough (nice jewelry and tattoo details in that shot); smelling a glass of wine; listening to a phallic-looking piece of ice in a woman's mouth while modeling a diamond-studded earring; lifting a creamy-looking oyster suggestively from its shell.

Silly? Perhaps. But what a page-turner.

Young garlic soup with thyme, scallops and gold leaf

Total time: 50 minutes

Servings: 6, as an appetizer

Note: From "Crave" by Ludo Lefebvre

- 4 cups whole milk
- 4 young garlic bulbs (about 7 ounces total), cloves separated and peeled
- 2 teaspoons minced peeled fresh ginger
- 1 small bunch fresh thyme
- Fleur de sel
- Freshly ground pepper
- 2 teaspoons unsalted butter
- 2 teaspoons extra virgin

- olive oil
- 12 large sea scallops
- 1 small bunch fresh pepper cress leaves or small watercress leaves
- 3 (3 3/4-inch-square) sheets of edible gold leaf (optional)

1. Combine the milk, garlic cloves and ginger in a heavy medium saucepan. Tie all but 12 small, tender sprigs of the thyme into a bundle with kitchen twine. Add the thyme bundle to the milk mixture. Bring to a simmer. Simmer gently, uncovered, over low heat until the garlic is very tender and the liquid is reduced by one-fourth, stirring

occasionally, about 23 minutes. Discard the thyme bundle.
2. Working in batches, purée the milk mixture in a blender until smooth. Return the soup to the saucepan. If necessary, simmer the soup over low heat until it is reduced to 3 1/2 cups. Season the soup to taste with fleur de sel and pepper. (At this point the soup can be prepared up to 8 hours ahead. Cover and refrigerate. Rewarm before serving.)
3. Melt the butter and oil in a heavy, large sauté pan over high heat. Sprinkle the scallops with fleur de sel and pepper. Working in batches, add the scallops to the pan and sear until golden brown and just cooked through, about 2

minutes per side.

4. Mound the cress in the center of each of the 6 wide shallow soup bowls. Place 2 scallops atop the cress in each bowl. Surround the cress with the reserved small thyme sprigs. Tear the gold leaf, if using, into large nonuniform strips and arrange it around the scallops; the gold leaf is delicate and will tear easily. Ladle enough soup into the bowls to come halfway up the sides of the scallops.

Each serving: 194 calories; 13 grams protein; 18 grams carbohydrates; 1 gram fiber; 8 grams fat; 4 grams saturated fat; 30 mg. cholesterol; 126 mg. sodium.

Cake of apple confit

Total time: About 7 1/2 hours (including 5 hours baking time), plus several hours chilling time

Servings: 12

Note: Adapted from "Crave" by Ludo Lefebvre. Best made using an apple corer. Three-quart charlotte molds are available from Ambassador Fine Foods in Van Nuys, (818) 787-2000; www.culinary-direct.com; and www.bridgekitchenware.com.

Zest confit

- 2 oranges
- 2 lemons
- 1 ruby red grapefruit
- 1 1/4 cups water
- 1/2 cup sugar

1. Using a vegetable peeler, remove the peel and white pith from the oranges, lemons and grapefruit. Using a small, sharp knife, trim away all the pith from the peel. Cut the peel into julienne strips (makes about 1 1/2 cups total). Place them in a small saucepan of water.

2. Bring the water to a boil. Drain. Rinse the peel under cold water. Repeat this process once.

3. Combine the peel, the 1 1/4 cups of water and sugar in the same pan. Simmer gently over medium-low heat until the juices evaporate and the strips become translucent, about 45 minutes. Set aside.

Apple cake

- Oil
- 2 cups sugar, divided
- 3 tablespoons water
- 15 Granny Smith apples (about 8 1/2 pounds), peeled and cored
- Zest confit
- Crème fraîche

1. Heat the oven to 250 degrees. Oil a 3-quart (8-by-4 1/2-inch) charlotte mold.

2. Combine 1 cup of the sugar and the water in a heavy small saucepan. Stir over medium-high heat until the sugar dissolves. Boil without stirring, over medium heat, until the syrup turns a deep amber brown and just begins to smoke, occasionally brushing down the sides of the pan with a wet pastry brush and swirling the pan, about 8 minutes.



Regan Books

3. Carefully pour the caramel into the charlotte mold. Using oven mitts, swirl the mold to coat the interior completely with the caramel (the caramel will stick to the pan as it cools). Refrigerate until the caramel is cold and set.

4. Using a mandoline, cut the apples crosswise into 1/8-inch-thick slices. Arrange enough apple slices to cover the bottom of the charlotte mold, overlapping slightly and in concentric circles, to create 1 layer. Sprinkle 2 teaspoons sugar and 1 tablespoon zest confit over the layer of apples. Repeat layering all of the apple

slices with the sugar and zest confit, alternating the direction of the concentric circles to increase the stability of the cake, pressing to compact the layers, and creating about 20 layers. Cover with aluminum foil.

5. Place the charlotte mold in a deep roasting pan. Fill the pan with enough hot water to come halfway up the sides of the mold. Bake until a skewer inserted near the center of the apples does not meet resistance, about 5 hours. Refrigerate until cold, several hours or overnight.

6. Remove the foil. Place the mold in a sauté pan of simmering water to melt the caramel coating slightly

and help loosen the apple cake, about 3 minutes. Place a platter on top of the mold. Holding the mold with one hand and the platter with the other, invert the mold onto the platter. Remove the mold.

7. Cut the apple cake into 12 wedges and transfer to dessert plates. Drizzle with juices from the cake and serve with crème fraîche.

Each serving (without crème fraîche): 300 calories; 1 gram protein; 79 grams carbohydrates; 5 grams fiber; 0.4 grams fat; 0 grams saturated fat; 0 mg. cholesterol; 1 mg. sodium.