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In Praise of Braise

The slow cooking technique brings that bistro feeling home

by Rosemay Black - Daily news food editor

Even if you can't sneak away for dinner in a cozy bistro tonight, you can still savor one of the rich, meltingly tender braised dishes for which they're noted. Braising is a wonderful treatment for less tender (and less expensive) cuts of meat, and one of the least labor-intensive methods of cooking.

Once the food is placed in a pot with seasonings and liquid, it goes into the oven (or simmers on top of the stove) and there's no need to disturb it for several hours. The long, slow cooking breaks down the tough fibers in the meat, making it fork-tender. One caveat: Be sure your pot has a tightly fitting lid, so the liquid doesn't evaporate. And in keeping with the down-to-earth fare served in bistros, plan on simple sides for the rest of the meal: bread, salad and wine are perfect, though some chefs prefer potatoes.



Photographed by Tanya Braganti

"The best accompaniments to a braised dish? Potato salad!" says Craig Skiptunis, owner of Bistro Ten 18, where short ribs are braised and then barbecued. "Our chef, James Morgan, also likes to serve the ribs with parsnip apple coleslaw. It adds up to a hearty meal."

Short ribs are one of the most common meats used for braising because the technique is so successful. Often, short ribs are the cut-off ends of the prime rib, although they can also be cut from the plate or flank. Either way, they look like small rectangles of meat with layers of fat, along with pieces of rib bone.

And one of the best things about braises—they're hard to mess up. Small changes in technique or ingredients won't make a big difference in the outcome. Now that's comfort food.

Braised Barbecued Short Ribs

Serves 4

A collaborative effort from Craig Skiptunis, owner, and James Morgan, chef at Bistro Ten 18

Vegetable oil

- 4 short ribs (ask the butcher to cut the ribs along the bone, yielding 4 whole ribs)**
- 2 large yellow onions, peeled and roughly chopped**
- 1 large carrot, peeled and chopped**
- 1 celery stalk, roughly chopped**
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and minced**
- 1 cup tomato puree**
- 2 cups red wine**
- 1 teaspoon ground thyme**
- 2 bay leaves**
- 1 teaspoon peppercorns**
- 8 cups beef stock**
- Barbecue sauce**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large braising pot heat oil (enough to cover the bottom of the pan). Over medium heat, brown the short ribs and set aside. Add the onions, carrots, celery and garlic, and cook until brown. Add the tomato puree and cook for 3-4 minutes. Add wine, reduce the liquid by half and add thyme, bay leaves, pepper corns and short ribs. Pour in stock so that it comes halfway up the ribs. Bring to a simmer. Cover the pot and braise until fork tender (approximately 4-5 hours, but start checking for tenderness occasionally after 2 hours). Turn the ribs occasionally as they braise. When the meat is tender, remove it from the braising liquid, brush a thick layer of barbecue sauce over it, and return to the oven for another 10 minutes.