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Cioppino

One of the things that drew me to winemaking and geology, is that they are both inexact sciences. I also take an inexact science approach to my cooking. I rarely follow any receipt and don't actually have any recipes of my creations. I take an idea and try to create a meal with what is available to me. Cioppino is one of the great concoction meals. The winter/spring is the time for crabs on the west coast. Cioppino is essentially a stew made from the seafood available at the time. Crabs are an essential part. I will try to quantify my making of Cioppino as best as I can.

Basic Recipe

- 2 white onions chopped
- one head garlic chopped
- ½ cup olive oil
- 2 cups crushed tomatoes
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups dry to medium-dry white wine (Gewurztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc, light Chardonnay)
- thyme to taste
- oregano to taste
- cilantro to taste
- 2 bay leaves
- one pound clams
- one pound mussels
- one pound firm white fish (shark, cod, halibut)
- two pounds jumbo shrimp shelled
- one pound scallops
- two crabs cracked and cleaned, legs separated from bodies
- salt, pepper, hot sauce as desired

in a large skillet (or large pot) sauté onions and garlic in olive oil until onions are soft. If in skillet, transfer to a large pot and add crushed tomatoes, chicken broth, white wine and all herbs (fresh if possible). Partially cover and simmer 30 - 45 minutes (or until enough wine has been enjoyed that it is time for dinner). Add broth or water as necessary. Add all of the fish and simmer another 10 minutes. Serve in large bowls with lots of garlic bread and lighter styled wine. Gewurztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, and lighter Chardonnays. Rosés work wonderfully with cioppino. Red wines call for young Zinfandel, lighter Pinot Noirs, or any other bright low tannin wine, no Cabernets here.

What I Did The Last Time

Had some time and got a little carried away but it was my best cioppino ever.

Brown (deep golden color) whole garlic cloves in the olive oil over high heat, turning regularly. Remove and set aside.

Caramelize (nice and brown) the onion in the olive oil. Adding olive oil as necessary. Remove and set aside.

In a blender or food processor blend together the browned garlic, caramelized onions with enough chicken broth to make a pourable mixture.

Remove meat from the crab bodies.

Sweat two large sliced shallots and chopped fresh herbs in the olive oil above.

Mix together in a large pot the olive oil, garlic/onion slurry, shallots/herbs, crab meat from the bodies, the rest of the chicken broth, crushed tomatoes and wine. Simmer 45 minutes. Add broth or water as necessary.

Add seafood as above. Serve with lots of garlic bread.

The roasted garlic and caramelized onion take this dish to the next level.

Paul