

Canard à la Royale

LE GERS, FRANCE

Everyone has heard of – and maybe even tasted – Lièvre à la Royale, a hare entrée. But when my best friend and gourmet partner, Henry, said to me, "Nico, tonight we are going to have Canard à la Royale," I became unbelievably excited! The idea of offering a fat duck a final moment of glory around its most exquisite part was, for me, both ironic and romantic.

More than a recipe, this unique food fantasy is the quintessential representation of the Middle Ages. The French tradition of excess is reflected in the region of Le Gers – the home of foie gras. In 2010, this exercise in culinary style seems outrageous – a pure forbidden pleasure. Each and every moment spent creating this unique duck delight is magical, from the first 20 minutes of preparation to the final bite of its *dégustation*.

Canard à la Royale needs quality ingredients: a fat duck (boned), a foie gras (ideally the duck's own!), some Folle Blanche (a liqueur from the Armagnac region in Gascony, southwest France), a lot of love and patience...and maybe dieting the previous day! The secret – and beauty – of this delight lies in its extravagant cooking; we've had to experience it four times to get the full emotional benefits.

After preparing the duck and placing it in a very hot oven for an intense moment, we flambéed it with Folle Blanche until it burned off and then let it roast slowly in a low-heat oven. This long preparation created a festive atmosphere – in Grand Siècle turn-of-the-century style – with all of the aromas generously filling our home, so much so, that gourmand aspirations found easy inspiration.

Our lovely duck was finally ready to savour, its caramelized, crispy skin shimmering glamorously with the luxury of fat. The first cut unveiled a palette of autumn colours, from shades of brown to caramel to pink. The overall picture looked simply gorgeous. And then came the craziness of the tasting. That first bite was an infinite and beautiful moment, as the textures mixed together in harmony

The white wine served with this Canard à la Royale was unforgettable and unexpected. A 100% Chardonnay from Domaine Tarquet, it enhanced this eternal moment of pleasure.
