

Sauce Gribiche – lessons in technique

The cookbook writers and TV presenters that I really admire are those that always explain a cooking methodology – they manage to slip in a little gem of wisdom along with the pinch of salt without too much fuss. Too often writers or presenters will insist one must do this or that but never explain why and it is the why that tends to stick in my mind, not the detailed instruction. Omitting the explanation can lead to less than satisfactory results and the likelihood that you won't cook the recipe again or investigate why it failed. Probably more is said about cooking an egg than anything else in the culinary repertoire but sometimes the suggested little tricks get in the way of the facts. A question most asked by home cooks is how to poach an egg without the whites breaking into messy strands and chefs will swear by using vinegar, swirling the hot water or fussing with sieves and cling wrap but the simple fact is that you need to use fresh eggs. A fresh egg has a very tight, globular white which, when it hits the simmering water, will keep its integrity. Older eggs, with runny whites, are fine for beating egg whites into meringue or softer peaks for cakes and souffles, the looser structure of the whites makes whisking by hand much easier. And yes, the pinch of salt helps to stabilise the whipped whites. Now let's talk about egg emulsions. Egg yolks have a great capacity to absorb oil and this is the basis of a mayonnaise. This wonderful chemistry works so long as the oil is initially introduced gradually to allow dispersal of the oil droplets, giving them a chance to form bonds with the water in the yolks. While I'm good at making a mayonnaise without recourse to recipes or instructions I was caught out by my self confidence the other day when making a sauce gribiche. This sauce is effectively a mayonnaise made with hard boiled egg

yolks. Easy I thought and proceeded to beat my yolks, vinegar and mustard while drizzling in the peanut oil. The mixture split, the egg yolks did not form an emulsion with the oil as usually happens in a raw egg mayonnaise and it looked terrible. □ I quickly checked the internet for recipes and could see lots of awful pictures of sauce gribiche that looked like runny mixtures that had clearly split but were “rescued” with the addition of the other ingredients of sauce gribiche, chopped egg white, herbs, cornichons and capers. I then reached for *Mastering The Art of French Cooking* by Julia Child*. According to Julia, for a hard yolk mayonnaise one should pound and mash the egg yolks in a mixing bowl with the mustard and salt until you have a very smooth paste. Unless the yolks are smooth and free from lumps, they will not absorb the oil. That last sentence is a pure gem of wisdom from someone who was the consummate teacher. I started again, according to MAFC, and with great success. My sauce gribiche had a firm, creamy base which was then lightened up by the addition of the rest of the ingredients. Perfect. I feel this lesson will not be forgotten because I not only have the memory of my failure but also the simple explanation for how to avoid it. Sometimes it is best to forget the internet and go back to the great classic cookbooks; while devoid of glossy pictures of artfully presented food they consisted instead of clear writing that taught basic technique.

Note. Some recipes on the internet say to mix all the ingredients together and do not not say to make a mayonnaise-like emulsion first which could explain the awful looking oily sauces I saw in photos. Just for the record, *Wikipedia* says sauce gribiche is a mayonnaise-style cold egg sauce in French cuisine, made by **emulsifying** hard-boiled egg yolks and mustard with a neutral oil ...

Sauce Gribiche

- 2 large eggs
- 1 tbs white wine vinegar
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 100 ml light vegetable oil
- salt
- white pepper
- 2 tbs chopped capers
- 2 tbs chopped cornichons
- handful chopped herbs such as tarragon, chervil or parsley

Boil the eggs for 8 minutes. Drain, then cool under running water. Whisk mustard and vinegar in a small bowl. Season well. Shell the eggs, separate the yolks from the whites. Mash the yolks with the mustard and vinegar, pounding it to a paste so it is free of any lumps, then beat in the light oil gradually until emulsified. Season with salt and pepper. Chop the herbs and stir into the sauce along with the capers and cornichons. Chop the egg whites finely and mix it through. Loosen with a splash of water if required. Serve with smoked or cured salmon or grilled fish.

* Julia Child and Simone Beck. Louise Bertholle was involved in the first volume of MAFC. The Americans only notice their daughter, Julia, and not her French collaborators.