

Poulet au Vin Jaune et aux Morilles

(Chicken with Cream, Morels, and Vin Jaune)

Chicken, cream, morels, and *vin jaune* form one of the great flavor combinations. The dish comes from the Jura Mountains in the Franche-Comté region of eastern France, and yet it doesn't appear in Pierre Dupin's classic *franc-comtois* cookbook of 1927, which offers only a recipe for morels in cream sauce, containing "the most perfumed white wine you have," served on croûtons. Being a native of the region, possibly he meant *vin jaune*, the great, curious wine of the Jura that is matured *sous-voile*, "under a veil" of yeast, like sherry, and, loosely speaking, recalls sherry's flavor. Chefs in the region don't use the best *vin jaune*, because it's costly and its finest flavors are lost in cooking. However old the combination may or may not be, by 1961 *poulet* (or *chapon* or *coq*) *au vin jaune* was well-enough established that the Michelin red guide named it as a specialty of all three of the starred restaurants in Arbois, the most important town in the wine region. The dish was perhaps not invented by, but was given a push by, the great Arbois chef of the period, André Jeunet. Dried morels, outside the season, have always been used in place of fresh, but not all morels are equal — not from the same species of *Morchella*, not from the same soil or kind of tree. (Very good, if expensive, dried French morels from the French dealer Plantin are sold by Joie de Vivre in Modesto, California.) Because the intensity of mushroom flavor varies, and even ardent gatherers don't agree on dried-to-fresh equivalents — proposing anywhere from 1:4 to 1:10, by weight — no simple formula is possible, and the amount I call for is little more than a guess. Any quantity of good morels, fresh or dried, however few, is a luxury. Even without them, the trio of cream, chicken, and *vin jaune* is excellent. "Why do you flour meat?" a chef asked me, thinking it might be an improvement to eliminate the flour here. He may be right. In my view, the flour protects the surface of meat during the initial cooking in fat (in this recipe, the cooking is so gentle that that hardly matters); at the same time the flour itself cooks, losing some of its raw taste; and afterward it helps to thicken the sauce. (Too much browning in fat takes enough thickening power from the flour that it won't do the trick.) If you like, you can omit the flour below, reducing the sauce further but accepting a thinner result. The acidity from the final squeeze of lemon juice counters the richness of the sauce. Serve the dish with rice.

¼ pound (100 gr) dried morels or 1¼ pounds (500 gr) fresh ones

salt and black pepper

all-purpose flour

a chicken, weighing 4 to 5 pounds (about 2 kg), cut into 8 pieces: 4 sections of breast roughly equal in size (including the wings attached to 2 of them) plus 2 thighs and 2 drumsticks

¼ cup (50 gr) unsalted butter

1 cup (250 ml) white wine, preferably from the Jura

2 cups (500 ml) chicken stock

¼ to ⅜ cup (65 to 100 ml) *vin jaune*, or a less expensive Jura *sous-voile* white wine

2 cups (500 ml) heavy cream or *crème fraîche*, or a combination a lemon, for juice

Dried morels may be clean or slightly gritty; brush them with a dry brush and feel whether any of the dark particles that come off include grit. If so, decide whether you can brush all the grit away or you need to rinse it away under running water, knowing that some flavor will be lost along with the dirt. Afterward, soak the dried morels in warm water for at least 20 minutes, then drain, reserving that liquid to add later to the pot. Clean fresh morels by first brushing away dirt with a dry brush and then immersing them in water, stirring vigorously and changing the water repeatedly, until there is no sign of grit.

Lightly salt and pepper and lightly flour the pieces of chicken. In a wide, heavy-bottomed pot with a lid,

cook the pieces gently in the butter without coloring. Add the cup of wine, the stock, and the liquid from

soaking the dried morels, if you are using them. Cook, covered, over low heat, turning from time to time, and as the pieces become tender remove them to a warm, covered platter. The breast of a young bird may take 15 minutes (more for the piece with the wing), and the legs about 10 minutes longer.

Skim the fat carefully from the surface of the liquid in the pot, and reduce the liquid almost to a glaze, add ¼ cup (65 ml) of *vin jaune*, the cream, and the morels. Cook several minutes to get rid of the raw-wine taste, and, if necessary, reduce the combination slightly, so the sauce is just thick enough to coat the wooden spoon you may be stirring with. (If the sauce must wait, it may lose enough moisture that it will need a little water.) Add the chicken and heat. Just before serving, stir in a little more *vin jaune*, bringing the sauce momentarily to a boil. Taste the sauce, and, as needed, season it with salt and pepper and add a squeeze of lemon juice. *Serves 4.*