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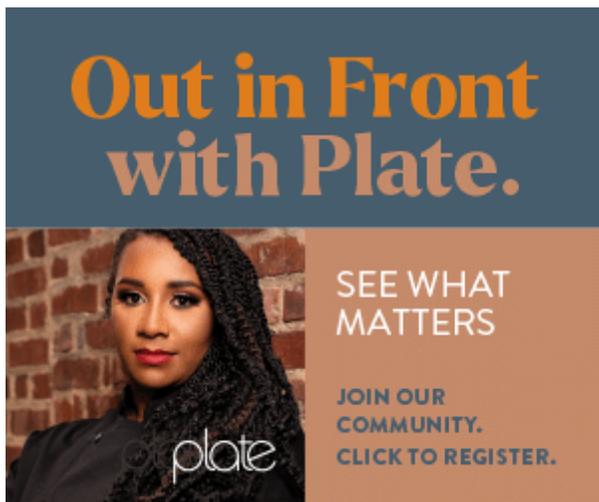
## Mother Sauces Endure in French Cuisine

by Carly Fisher — NOVEMBER 17, 2016 9:13AM



hey are the foundation of French cuisine and every culinary student's introduction to sauce making: mother sauces, the five *roux*-based sauces intricately documented by **Auguste Escoffier** at the turn of the 20th century. Despite a pushback from 1970s *nouvelle cuisine* that never quite caught up with evolving tastes, most chefs remain at least somewhat familiar with béchamel, *velouté*, *espagnole*, sauce *tomat* and hollandaise. But to what purpose?

Aside from documenting tastes of the time, mother sauces served as the pragmatic bases birthing innumerable derivatives—known as daughter sauces and grand sauces—including *Mornay* and *demi-glace*. For the large-scale operations that once dominated fine dining, this foundation was essential.



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**T** “In the 1900s, fine dining only existed within hotel restaurants. They had these massive menus with so many things that there was a need to devise this system of mother sauces,” notes **James Briscione**, Director of Culinary Development at the Institute of Culinary Education (ICE) in New York City. “You could make a giant pot of *espagnole* and have five or six sauces built off this one sauce. There was a need for that. Now, we see menus are different and more focused.”

As contemporary restaurant menus continue to experiment with heat, acidity, niche ingredients and vegetable-driven dishes, it begs the question: Are these rich, traditional mother sauces still relevant to the modern chef? Yes and no.

Vegetable-driven, globalized menus have pushed the boundaries of experimental sauce making. Béchamel and hollandaise remain kitchen staples, Briscione says, while *espagnole* has teetered off in favor of meat *jus* with little to no *roux*. *Veloutés* often have modified thickeners like xanthan gum or a reduction thickened with butter, vegetable purée or cream instead of a *roux*. Even ground nuts and pastes can work as thickeners. Meanwhile, ingredients like tahini, yogurt, hoisin and coconut milk are becoming the base of contemporary sauce making.

“Can we call tahini a mother sauce? Sure. If you look at the definition of a mother sauce, it’s that base you can build things off of,” Briscione says, adding that even the classic mother sauces are subject to debate (consider the debate over whether mayonnaise is the sixth mother sauce). “We see a lot of these lines blurring traditional cuisines. Everybody wants more interesting, exciting flavors, which often means brighter, fresher. Which is why you see the *roux* going away, outside of the béchamel, where it’s essential.”

Yet, amid evolving tastes, Briscione says the mother sauces have worthy applications. He continues to teach students all five at ICE. *Roux* might be losing popularity, but “there’s no substitute for a good béchamel often,” he says. The thickeners might be changing, but in spirit they’re the same.

“With all of that said, chefs still need to learn the process. Knowing that history, why they were first made, how they are organized and what was the point of them,” he continues. “Even if they’re going to be less commonplace in kitchens today, there’s some important lessons you can take out of there and translate into your own cooking.”

*Carly Fisher is pretty sure nothing beats steak au poivre or a really, really good buttery croissant.*

## COMMENTS

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