



Stefano Masanti

SMOKED

Technique and Recipes

BIBLIOTHECA CULINARIA

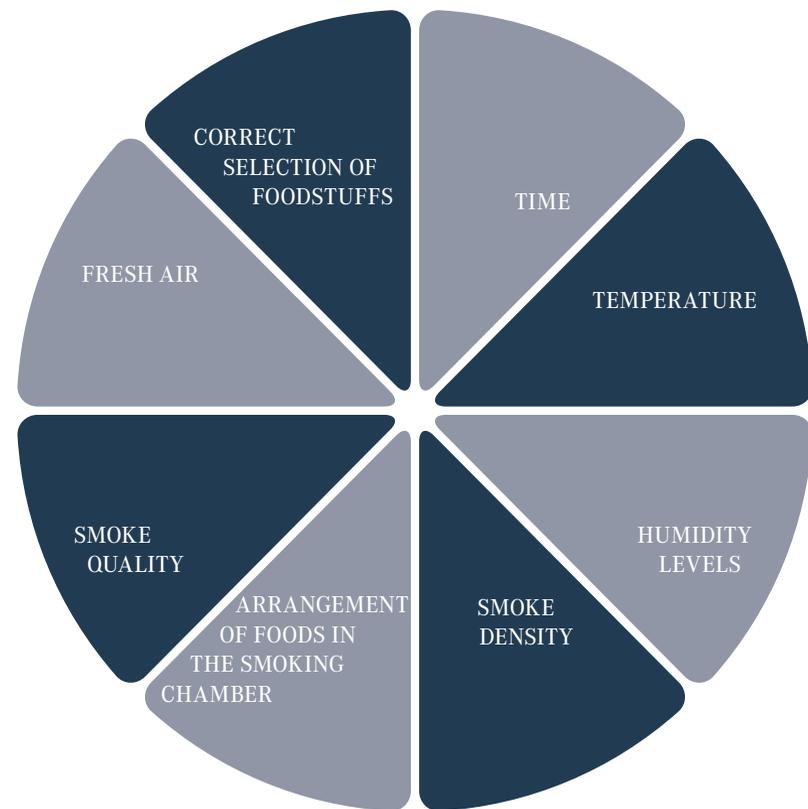


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BALANCING THE VARIABLES TO OBTAIN THE DESIRED EFFECT

Obtaining desired results and replicating them over time may initially seem daunting given the number of variables in play. Precisely for this reason, it is important to take detailed notes when experimenting. With hard data regarding food weights, wood types, smoking times and temperatures, it will be easier to make the micro-adjustments that may have surprisingly important effects. The following diagram depicts the many factors that, taken together, influence the ultimate results of any smoking project.



CORRECT SELECTION OF FOODSTUFFS

Use only quality ingredients. Smoking is not a technique for masking defects. It is essential to remember that the composition of the foodstuffs subjected to smoking will influence the final results. Animal and vegetable proteins react to heat differently with respect to fish proteins, which are more delicate. Many compounds found in smoke are liposoluble: foods with a higher fat content will absorb smoking aromas more easily than those with lower fat levels.

TIME

Smoking times vary based on the weight of the food treated, the size and conformity of individual portions, their arrangement in the smoking chamber and the equipment used.

Cold smoking times are generally long and may range from several hours to multiple days. Semi-hot smoking times are shorter – from a few minutes to a few hours. Hot smoking requires still less time: for example, a couple of hours for larger cuts of meat.

TEMPERATURE

The ideal temperature for foods subjected to smoking is +2 °C (35.6 °F). Beyond any considerations regarding their potential smoke absorption, it is essential to work with foods that have been properly conserved. The three smoking methods (hot, semi-hot and cold) require differing temperature levels of the smoke itself and these, in conjunction with other factors (time, humidity levels, etc.) will result in differing food core temperatures when the smoking process is complete.

COLD SMOKING – smoke temperatures inferior to 25 °C (77 °F)

In this case the smoke *temperature* is less influential than the smoking *time*. This type of smoking notably dehydrates the food subjected to it and prevents the formation of superficial molds. It has an antibacterial effect and is suitable for fish, meats and cheeses destined for ageing.

COLD SMOKING EQUIPMENT

SEMISPHERICAL STAINLESS STEEL BOWLS

EQUIPMENT LIST

- 2 semispherical stainless steel bowls (Ø 36 cm / 15 in)
- 1 drum sieve, the diameter of which allows it to be perfectly inserted approximately half way into one of the bowls
- 1 kitchen torch
- plastic kitchen film
- baking parchment
- aluminum foil (optional)
- crushed ice
- wood chips, sawdust and/or fresh aromatic herbs

USE

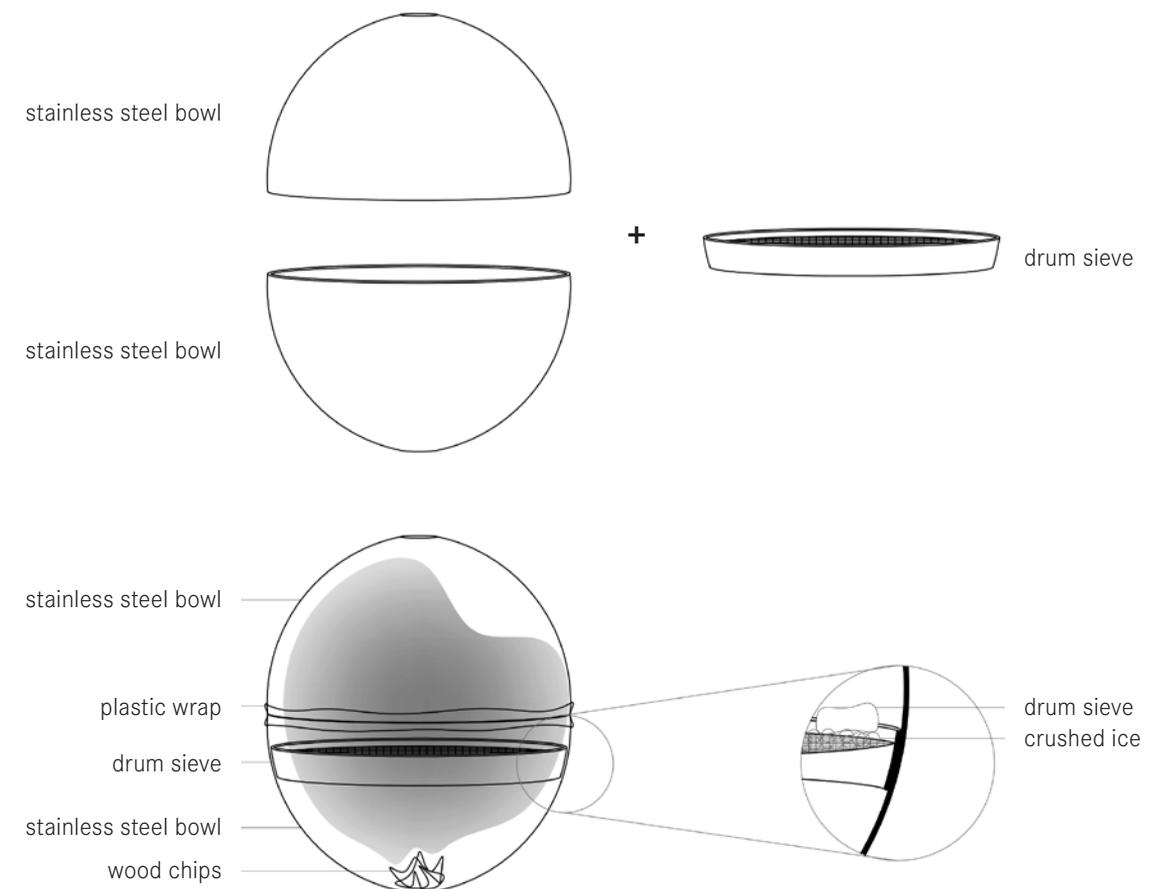
1. Place the wood chips or other combustible material in the bottom of one bowl. (If you wish to protect its surface, leaving it suitable for other uses in the kitchen, line the bottom with aluminum foil).
2. Spread a layer of crushed ice in the sieve.
3. Top the ice with a sheet of dampened kitchen parchment and place the food intended for smoking on the parchment.
4. Ignite the wood chips with a kitchen torch.
5. Set the sieve inside the bowl containing the smoking chips.
6. When the chips are burning evenly, cover with the second inverted bowl.
7. Seal the gap between the two bowls by encircling it with plastic wrap.
8. Keep the chamber sealed for the time necessary to obtain the desired degree of smoky flavor.

The entire process may be repeated a second time in order to obtain a more intense smoky aroma.

IDEAL FOR: Small foods e/o cuts such as fish fillets or small servings of meat or vegetables.

ADVANTAGES: Portable, economical and suitable for indoor use, this system requires materials that most cooks already have at hand. Perfect for smoking single servings, it is also quite useful when experimenting.

DISADVANTAGES: Unstable, little temperature control, limited capacity.





RISOTTO WITH SMOKED BUTTER, CABBAGE BROTH, SAFFRON-YOGURT CREAM AND WILD SPINACH

RISOTTO

280 g vialone nano rice
30 ml extra virgin olive oil
80 g smoked butter (see p. 97)
60 g grated Parmigiano Reggiano
cheese

CABBAGE BROTH

1 small head of red cabbage
3 liters water
Juice and zest of 1 organic orange
Salt

SAFFRON-YOGURT CREAM

50 g plain whole-milk yogurt
5 g saffron threads

WILD SPINACH

50 g wild spinach
(*Chenopodium bonus-henricus*)
Extra virgin olive oil
Salt, pepper

Suggested smoking wood:
LAUREL

CABBAGE BROTH

Remove any damaged outer leaves and the core of the cabbage; wash and finely slice it. Transfer to a stock pot with the water and slowly bring to a boil. Lower the heat and allow to simmer for 30 minutes. Filter the broth, salt to taste and add the orange juice and zest. The liquid will be violet in color.

SAFFRON-YOGURT CREAM

Mix the saffron with the yogurt and allow to infuse for 2 hours. Strain.

WILD SPINACH

Carefully wash the spinach in several changes of cold water. Toss half of the leaves in a sauté pan with a little extra virgin olive oil. Salt and pepper to taste and keep warm. Season the remaining spinach leaves with extra virgin olive oil and salt just prior to service.

RISOTTO

Heat the olive oil in a heavy-duty pan. Add the rice and briefly toast it. Add the cabbage broth, a little at a time, allowing it to be absorbed before adding more. Cook for approximately 15 minutes. Salt to taste, remove from the flame and fold in the cooked spinach, smoked butter and grated cheese.

PRESENTATION

Divide the rice among serving plates. Decorate with the saffron-yogurt cream and the seasoned raw spinach leaves.

BAKED BLACK COD, ASPARAGUS AND SMOKED ALMOND CREAM

BLACK COD

4 center-cut black cod fillets
(approx. 150 g each)
Extra virgin olive oil
Salt

ASPARAGUS EMULSION

150 g asparagus stalks, cooked
50 g sunflower seed oil
1 hard boiled egg
Salt

ASPARAGUS RIBBONS

100 g asparagus tips
Extra virgin olive oil
1 g ground cardamom
Salt

SMOKED ALMOND CREAM

375 g whole blanched almonds
180 g granulated sugar
90 ml water
40 g honey
20 g glucose syrup

Suggested smoking wood

ALMOND

BLACK COD

Remove any visible pin bones from the fish fillets. Place them on an oiled baking sheet and salt lightly. Cook in a preheated convection oven at 180 °C (356 °F) for 10 minutes. Turn the oven off and allow the fish to rest inside for 3 minutes.

ASPARAGUS EMULSION

Using an immersion blender, purée all of the ingredients until they achieve a smooth and homogenous consistency. Pass through a sieve and salt to taste. Refrigerate until ready to use.

ASPARAGUS RIBBONS

Slice the asparagus stalks vertically on a mandolin creating ribbons. Sauté them very briefly in a little extra virgin olive oil, salt to taste and sprinkle with the ground cardamom. Keep warm.

SMOKED ALMOND CREAM

Smoke the almonds for 6 hours with your preferred equipment. Allow to rest for 1 hour prior to use.

In a small saucepan bring the water to a boil with the sugar, honey and glucose syrup. Purée the almonds in a blender or food processor and carefully add the boiling syrup. Blend well until smooth and homogenous. Knead the resulting paste for a few minutes. Refrigerate.

PRESENTATION

Gently heat the smoked almond paste over a double boiler returning it to a creamy consistency. Nap the serving plates with the almond cream, top with the fish, drizzle with the asparagus emulsion and finish with the asparagus ribbons.



MANGO FLAN WITH SMOKED CHOCOLATE AND RUM ICE CREAM

MANGO FLAN

400 g mango pulp
50 g granulated sugar
Juice of ½ lemon
4 g agar agar

SMOKED CHOCOLATE

100 g high quality dark chocolate
(70% cocoa solids)
+ a little extra for decorating

RUM ICE CREAM

1.5 liters whole milk
150 g demerera sugar
70 reserve rum

CHOCOLATE TILES

100 g egg whites
100 g cake flour
100 g granulated sugar
100 g softened, unsalted butter
20 g cocoa powder

Suggested smoking wood

LEMON

MANGO FLAN

Heat 100 g of the mango pulp with the sugar and agar agar. Bring to a boil and cook for 5 minutes, stirring continuously. Add the remaining mango pulp and lemon juice. Mix well and divide among eight 50 ml single portion molds. Cool.

SMOKED CHOCOLATE AND RUM ICE CREAM

Smoke the chocolate for 8 hours with your preferred equipment (see p. 99 for technique). Allow to rest for 1 hour prior to use. It is necessary to melt the chocolate over a double boiler prior to adding it to the ice cream base.

Combine the milk and sugar in a saucepan, place over low heat and reduce by half. Remove from heat, add the rum and cool. Place the mixture in a closed container and allow it to “mature” in the refrigerator for 12 hours prior to churning in an ice cream machine along with the melted chocolate (set aside a small quantity for decorating the plates). Freeze the ice cream until ready to use.

CHOCOLATE TILES

Blend all of the ingredients and spread the batter in a very thin layer on a parchment-lined baking sheet creating small rectangles. Bake in a 180 °C (356 °F) oven until evenly colored. Remove the tiles from the oven and, if you wish, you can give them a curved shape by carefully draping them over a rolling pin while still hot. This must be done quickly as they become extremely brittle as soon as they cool.

PRESENTATION

Unmold two mango flans and position them at either end of a long rectangular plate. Top each with a tuile. Add a tiny amount of grated chocolate to the center of the plate and top with a quenelle of the prepared ice cream. Finish with a few streaks of melted smoked chocolate.



At a time when cooking approaches science and the kitchen looks more and more like a laboratory, the technique of smoking food seems to retain an air of mystery. Even when they are used with great discretion, the taste and aroma of smoked foods are profoundly evocative, reminding us of more atavistic notions of nourishment.

Can this singular flavor be achieved without a smoke house or a large barbecue? Stefano Masanti proves that there is more than one way to go about the task and examines a range of different techniques and equipment for hot, cold and semi-hot smoking. From the most basic do-it-yourself system, employing common kitchen tools, to semi-professional systems requiring dedicated equipment, he has found a method for every level of expertise and budget. In addition to supplying sound advice about choosing wood and the delicate balance between time and temperature, Masanti takes a look at the science of smoking and confronts the controversy regarding the safety of smoked foods.

Preparatory techniques such as salting, brining, marinating and rubbing, which heighten flavor and combat the desiccating effects of smoking, are treated at length. Interesting ways of combining cold smoking with traditional and modern cooking techniques are examined as well with an eye to creating surprising special effects. With recipes that range from appetizers to desserts, this chef demonstrates how the most ethereal of substances can present the palate with complex and stratified organoleptic sensations which remain, vaguely and comfortingly familiar.

Stefano Masanti

A globe-trotting chef with his head in the clouds, Stefano Masanti can be found during the winter months in the kitchen of his restaurant, Il Cantinone, in Madesimo in the Italian Alps. In the summer season, he's at the helm of gastronomic events at the VSattui Winery in St. Helena, California.

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