

FRENCH ONION MACARONI AND CHEESE

Prepared by: Laura Lutz, December 2019

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Kosher salt

4 T unsalted butter, plus more for greasing the pan

2 lbs yellow or Vidalia onions, peeled, thinly sliced

5 sprigs fresh thyme, plus more for garnish

1 fresh or dried bay leaf (optional)

Black pepper

1 lb cavatappi or elbow pasta

1 baguette, cut into ½ inch slices

1 garlic clove

2 t. sherry vinegar, red vinegar or white wine vinegar

3 T flour

4 c whole milk

16 oz Gruyere, grated (about 5 cups)

12 oz white Cheddar (grated 4 cups)

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. (If you're planning to bake the mac and cheese in a baking dish instead of a skillet, butter 9x13 baking dish or 3 qt casserole.)

In a deep large ovenproof skillet, melt 2 T butter over medium heat. Add onions, thyme, and bay leaf, if using, and season with salt and pepper. Cover, stirring once or twice until onions are softened, 3-5 minutes.

Uncover and continue to cook on medium-high, stirring occasionally, until deep golden brown, 20-25 minutes. If the onions look dry, add a few tablespoons of water to prevent them from burning, scraping any browned bits that are stuck to the bottom of the skillet.

While the onions are cooking, heat the oven to 450. Cook pasta in boiling water until 2 minutes shy of al dente, drain and set aside. Rub one side of each baguette with a slice of garlic.

When onions are deep golden brown, discard thyme sprigs and bay leaf and deglaze the skillet with the vinegar until evaporated, scraping up browned bits as you go. Add the remaining 2 T butter. When melted, add the flour and cook, stirring until flour begins to stick to the bottom of the pan and has turned a light golden brown, about 3 minutes. Slowly whisk in the milk and season with salt and pepper. Bringing to a simmer, whisking often.

Reserve one cup of the Gruyere. Carefully add the remaining Gruyere and all the Cheddar to the caramelized onion mixture and carefully stir until melted. If the pan is big enough, add the cooked pasta and stir to combine, or combine the sauce and pasta in the prepared dish.

Spread pasta mixture in an even layer in the prepared dish, then top with the baguette slices, garlic-side up. Sprinkle the toast with the reserved one cup Gruyere and season with pepper.

Place the skillet or dish on a sheet pan and bake until bubbly and brown in spots, 10-15 minutes. If you like a crispier top, broil a few minutes. Let cool slightly, then garnish with fresh thyme leaves.

