

MOST WANTED

Marvelous Mussels Ruba Khoury's Palestinian-inflected, chef-driven bar food offers some of the best bites in Paris.

RECIPE FROM
DIRTY LEMON
PARIS

RUBA KHOURY OPENED DIRTY LEMON last year on a boutique-and flower shop-lined street in Paris' 11th arrondissement, the "it" neighborhood for the young and hungry. Khoury, who had worked in the Michelin-starred kitchens of Frenchie, Septime, and Yam'Tcha, knew her cozy bar would appeal to a wide audience looking for photogenic cocktails and great food, but she also hoped to provide something that Paris entirely lacked: a chef-driven queer bar. Khoury has amply succeeded in her vision, serving plates of Palestinian-inflected French cooking, like roasted cauliflower with smoked yogurt and sumac; confit lamb-topped frites; and perfect, fresh Brittany bouchot mussels tossed with creamy walnut harissa and snappy pickled red onions (recipe at right). "Parisians are used to cocktail bars that feel masculine and often pretentious; we're offering something truly new to this city," Khoury says. It may be the best bar food in Paris, gay or otherwise. —MARY-FRANCES HECK



Mussels with Harissa and Basil

ACTIVE 40 MIN; TOTAL 50 MIN
SERVES 4 TO 6

Toasted walnuts are a surprise addition to the creamy, smoky red pepper puree that gets swirled into these harissa-spiked steamed mussels. Anisey Thai basil and salty-sour pickled onions complement the sweet, plump shellfish.

- 2 medium-size red bell peppers (about $\frac{3}{4}$ lb.), halved
- 1 medium-size (7-oz.) white onion, unpeeled, quartered lengthwise
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp. plus 1 tsp. olive oil, divided
- 2 medium garlic cloves, unpeeled
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped toasted walnuts
- 1 small dried Thai chile, stem removed
- 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb. mussels, scrubbed and debearded
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dry white wine

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup harissa (such as Mina)
- 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup roughly torn fresh Thai basil leaves
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Pickled Red Onion Petals (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to broil with oven rack in middle of oven. Rub bell pepper halves and 2 onion quarters with 1 teaspoon olive oil. (Reserve remaining onion quarters for another use.) Arrange bell pepper halves and onion quarters, cut sides down, on a rimmed baking sheet. Broil in preheated oven until bell peppers are well charred, about 15 minutes, adding garlic to baking sheet halfway through broiling. Place bell peppers, onion, and garlic in a bowl, and cover with plastic wrap. Let stand at room temperature until vegetables are cool enough to handle and bell peppers are softened, about 10 minutes. Remove and discard garlic skins and charred skin from bell peppers and onion.

2. Transfer bell pepper mixture to a blender; add walnuts, Thai chile, lemon

juice, salt, and remaining $2\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons oil. Begin processing on low speed, and gradually increase speed to high, processing until smooth, about 45 seconds total. Set bell pepper puree aside.

3. Heat a large heavy-bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven over medium-high until very hot, about 3 minutes. Add mussels, and shake pan to arrange mussels in an even layer. Pour wine into pan, and cover with lid. Cook, shaking pan occasionally, until mussels begin to open, about 5 minutes. Stir in harissa and butter. Cover and cook, shaking pan occasionally, until mussels are completely open, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat, and discard any mussels that did not open. Stir in bell pepper puree. Using a slotted spoon, transfer mussels to deep bowls, and pour sauce from pan evenly over mussels. Sprinkle evenly with Thai basil leaves and pickled red onion petals. —RUBA KHOURY, DIRTY LEMON, PARIS

MAKE AHEAD Bell pepper puree can be prepared up to 3 days ahead and stored in an airtight container in refrigerator.

WINE Dry, mineraly German Riesling: 2017 Weingut Robert Weil Rheingau Riesling Trocken

NOTE Harissa is available in both mild and spicy versions, with varying levels of salt. Taste the harissa before using to adjust the heat in the broth.

Pickled Red Onion Petals

ACTIVE 15 MIN; TOTAL 2 HR 15 MIN
MAKES ABOUT $1\frac{1}{2}$ CUPS

These onion petals are slightly saltier than your average pickled onion, but the brine amps up the mussels, creating a perfect pair.

- 1 medium-size red onion, thinly sliced
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups water
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup rice vinegar
- 3 Tbsp. kosher salt

Place onion slices in a medium-size heat-proof bowl. Bring $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups water, sugar, vinegar, and salt to a boil in a saucepan over high, stirring occasionally to dissolve sugar. Pour vinegar mixture over onions, and place a small plate directly on onions to keep them submerged. Let onion mixture stand at room temperature 2 hours before serving. Drain pickled onions before using. —RUBA KHOURY, DIRTY LEMON, PARIS

MAKE AHEAD Pickled red onion petals may be covered and stored in refrigerator up to 1 week.