

Mark Hix

West Country Fish Soup Serves 4

Bones and shells are too good for the bin. At home I would strongly recommend freezing excess shellfish shells, fish bones and heads, and making them into a good hearty soup when you have enough. A good fish restaurant should always have a fresh fish soup of some description on the menu. It's no secret that in restaurants – as in the home – nothing should go to waste, and you also help out the local fishermen by taking irregular-sized fish and excess catch to freeze for the future. You can also garnish it with left over bits of fish and shellfish, up to you.

This would traditionally be served with a rouille which is a kind of garlicky, saffron mayonnaise with a toasted bread croute and grated gruyere cheese so I've cheated a bit and added some wild garlic to mayonnaise and grated some black cow cheddar on top.

1kg fish and/or shellfish shells, chopped into small chunks, head, tails, scales and all bony bits included
1 medium onion, peeled and roughly chopped
1 small fennel bulb, trimmed and roughly chopped or a few sprigs of fennel
6 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped
1 medium potato, peeled and roughly chopped 2tbsp of olive oil
A good pinch of saffron (optional)
1 bay leaf
A few sprigs of thyme
1 tsp black peppercorns
3 juniper berries
1 tbsp tomato purée
1 x 230g tin of chopped tomatoes
1 glass of red or white wine
4 litres fish stock or the equivalent amount of liquid from a good-quality fish stock cube
Salt and pepper

In a large pot heat the oil and gently fry the fish and shellfish shells, vegetables, spices and herbs for about 10 minutes. Add the tomato purée, chopped tomatoes, red wine and fish stock.

Bring to the boil, season with salt and pepper and simmer for 50 minutes. Blend about one-third of the soup in a liquidiser (bones and all) and return it to the pot and simmer gently for another 20 minutes.

Strain the soup through a sieve or conical strainer and re-season if necessary.