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# French lessons

FOR ARIANE DAGUIN AND HER  
DAUGHTER, ALIX, A MUTUAL LOVE  
OF COOKING PROVIDES A RECIPE  
FOR LIVING



Croque Monsieur au  
Jambon de Bayonne


PRODUCED BY STEPHEN EXEL AND JESSICA THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHY BY QUENTIN BACON





"The simplest things are often the best," says Ariane Daguin.  
"A good cheese, a dollop of good jam, and a hearty bread make a sophisticated dessert."





**a.** Ariane Daguin's Manhattan kitchen is rich with food and family tradition. When her 20-year-old daughter Alix is home from Cornell University where she studies hotel administration, food science, architecture, and kitchen design, they indulge in an all-day, long-established ritual of cooking Sunday dinner together.

Ariane is the CEO of D'Artagnan, a pioneer company she founded 24 years ago to encourage American farmers to organically produce foie gras and to raise the beef, pork, and poultry native to Gascony, France, where she grew up. So notable is her contribution to French culinary heritage, the French government awarded her the Légion d'honneur (France's highest honor of merit) in 2006. Nonetheless, Ariane herself often answers a call to D'Artagnan's headquarters.

Alix—charming, savvy, and down-to-earth—has grown up in the world of fine food and restaurants. She first tried oysters

at Union Square Cafe at age 2 and often “helped” her mother at cooking demonstrations as a young girl, quietly bartering servings of foie gras for candy.

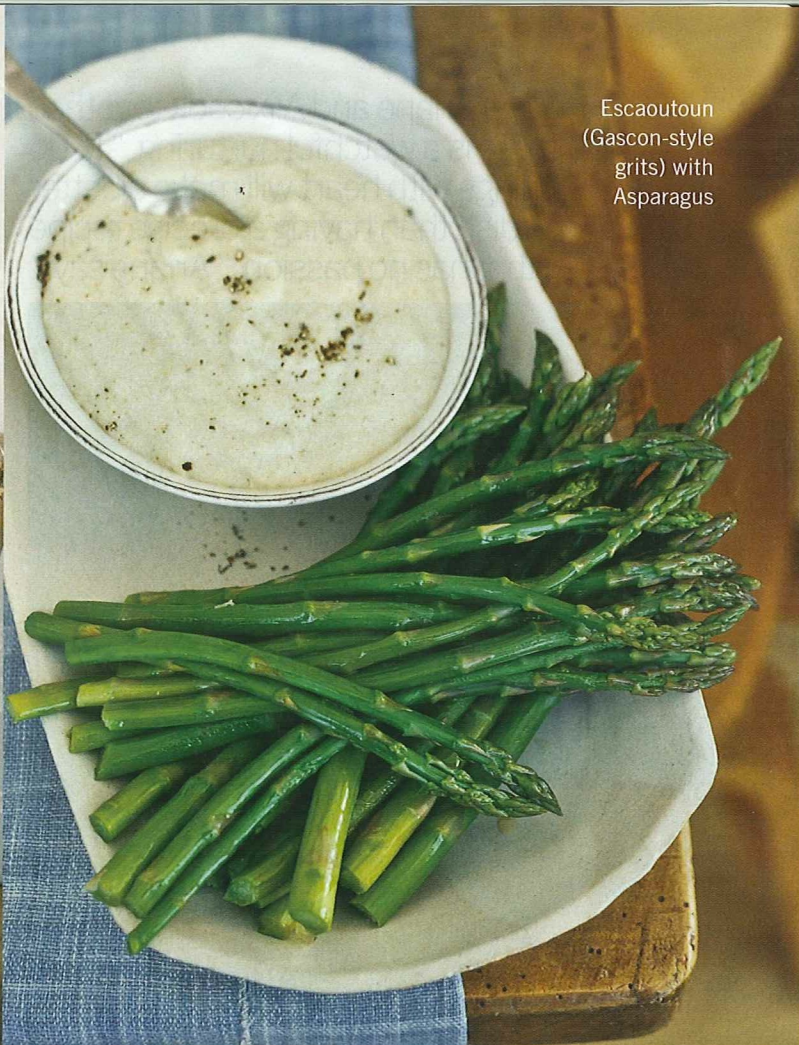
The pair relish their time together preparing the gastronomic specialties of Gascony. Alix's lessons include not just how to bake a tart, but they are also parables for getting on with daily life and enjoying its simple pleasures. “Anything you do together makes you learn together. It is so enriching,” Ariane says.

The Daguin family history includes seven generations of restaurateurs and chefs. Alix's grandfather, André Daguin, was chef/owner of the famed Hôtel de France in Auch, the capital of Gascony. “Food and family are very important in our way of life,” Ariane explains. “Everything evolves from there. Any single mother raising a daughter has very strong ties to family. Alix is culturally involved in her roots.”

Grandfather “Papi” teaches Alix something new every time they are together. “Last winter he taught me three different

Rustic Poule au Pot is a boiled chicken recipe passed from mother to daughter. The chicken broth is served as its own course, a tradition called “chabrot.” The last ladles of broth are slurped directly from the bowl; adults stir in some red wine before drinking. “It’s an ‘elbows-on-the-table’ dish,” says Ariane. “It inspires conviviality.”





Escaoutoun  
(Gascon-style  
grits) with  
Asparagus



Gascon Cherry Clafouti





When Ariane and Alix cook together, there is a watchful nurturing. "To do things with heart will make a better dish than having a precise recipe that has no passion," Ariane says.



Chicken Liver Paté spread on crusty bread and served with tangy condiments is a casual Sunday afternoon snack, exemplifying the soulful, simple approach Ariane and Alix take to cooking. "Good food is one of the easiest pleasures of life," Ariane says.

saucers" she says. "He has also taught me pride, discipline, respect, attitude, and efficiency. He expresses love through teaching things he admires. When you cook, you need all of those qualities plus a respect for yourself and your ingredients. That's important to my mom as well."

Consequently, Alix knows about a chef's authority—she has interned at Daniel, Daniel Boulud's four-star New York restaurant, and at Restaurant Hélène Darroze in Paris. "At Daniel, I was 17 and the only girl in the kitchen," she says. "Papi's lessons about discipline and efficiency taught me a lot."

But let's get back home, to the Manhattan kitchen and those uncomplicated pleasures. Ariane's approach to cooking is a trifle more gentle than that of *grandpère*. "Something wonderful starts with something simple," Ariane advises. For a nibble to enjoy while cooking, she and Alix prepare Chicken Liver Paté.

Luxuriously smooth and rich but humble in its origins, this paté "is a way to create something sophisticated with a maligned

ingredient," Ariane says. "Cooking livers with wine and combining them with lots of butter elevates them to something worthy without complicating them." The velvety paté gets a zesty accent with cornichons, olives, and a sprinkle of peppercorns.

For a spring dinner, the two might prepare Duck Breast with Fava Beans—featuring a sauté of fresh fava beans and *ventrèche*, a cured pork belly similar to bacon. "During a short period of spring in Gascony—about 10 days—new fava beans are so tender and delicate they can be picked and eaten raw, but you have to know the moment," Ariane says.

For something easy, Croque Monsieur au Jambon de Bayonne, a grilled sandwich with the sea-salted smoked ham of the Basque region and Gruyère cheese, might be in order. A dab of mustard and a bit of truffle butter enrich this everyday fare. "The best part of the sandwich is the aroma when it comes out of the oven," insists Ariane. "This sandwich is the sum of its parts. Make sure you experience each of the ingredients." ➤



Ariane has taught Alix to balance risk with caution and go with her instincts, as when they prepare dishes that don't require precise measurements but always yield wonderful results.



Pipérade is simply a mélange of slow-cooked tomatoes, peppers, and salty ham, served with an omelet. The natural sweetness of peppers and the saltiness of ham contrast beautifully. "Contrast can make a wonderfully unexpected combination," Ariane tells Alix.

Ariane has taught Alix to balance risk with caution and to go with her instincts, as when they prepare Gascon Cherry Clafouti, a dish that doesn't require precise measurements but will always yield wonderful results. "You have to trust yourself when you cook, allow yourself to make a mistake, knowing you can fix it, and get on with it," Alix says.

"I didn't realize how much I'm like my mom until recently," she notes. "Of course, I don't want to admit it. But I have that itch to create and be my own boss," she adds, echoing her mother's sentiments at nearly the same age. "D'Artagnan is like my sister in many ways. I grew up with the company. But I need to achieve something on my own before I work there—not by default, but because I have the skills to be there."

Ariane is quiet but clearly proud. "I have tried to give Alix a choice, to recognize that she has different directions. She has all the tools. But it will make me tremendously happy the day she says she wants to work at D'Artagnan."

## PIPÉRADE

- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 6 Roma tomatoes, cut into thin wedges
- 3 medium green and/or red sweet peppers, cut into bite-size strips
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt, sea salt, or salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 8 ounces jambon de Bayonne, or other cooked ham, cut ¼-inch thick
- 1 recipe Omelets
- Roasted garlic cloves\*

In large skillet cook onion and garlic in hot oil over medium heat about 5 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Add tomatoes to skillet; bring to simmer. Simmer, uncovered, 10 minutes. Add sweet peppers, salt, and pepper. Cook and stir 5 minutes or until peppers are tender and liquid is evaporated.

Meanwhile, cut ham (jambon de Bayonne is available at [dartagnan.com](http://dartagnan.com)) into serving-size pieces; cook in skillet over medium-high heat about 5 minutes or until browned. Remove from skillet; drain on paper towel. Cover to keep warm.

Prepare Omelets, and serve alongside ham and sweet pepper mixture, and roasted garlic cloves. Makes 4 servings.

**OMELETS** Just before serving, prepare omelets. In medium bowl combine 4 eggs, 1 tablespoon water, dash salt, and dash ground black pepper. Beat with fork until combined but not frothy. Heat 8-inch nonstick skillet with flared sides over medium-high heat until skillet is hot. Add 1 teaspoon butter to skillet. When butter has melted, add one-fourth egg mixture to skillet; lower heat to medium. Immediately begin stirring eggs gently but continuously with wooden spoon or plastic spatula until mixture resembles small pieces of cooked egg surrounded by liquid egg. Stop stirring. Cook 20 to 30 seconds more or until egg is set but shiny. Remove from heat. With spatula, lift and fold omelet into desired shape. Place on serving plate. Prepare 3 more omelets with remaining egg mixture, adding 1 teaspoon of butter to skillet before cooking each omelet.

\*To roast garlic cloves: Preheat oven to 425°F. Peel away dry outer layers of skin from 2 heads of garlic, leaving inner skins and cloves intact. Cut off pointed tops (about ¼-inch), leaving bulb intact but exposing individual cloves. Place garlic heads, cut side up, in 10-ounce custard cups. Drizzle each with 1 tablespoon olive oil. Cover with foil. Bake 25 to 35 minutes or until cloves feel soft when pressed. Separate cloves to serve. ■

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