Duck Breast with Cherry Sauce

Serves 2

One Valentine's Day long, long ago we had dinner at a wonderful old-school French restaurant that is unfortunately no longer in business. There were six of us and out of the six, two ordered an appetizer of foie gras with cherry sauce. It was SO good! So good in fact, that at the end of dinner we ordered it again for dessert. I'm not kidding. That dish has stuck with me for years. Since foie gras is not available to me here in California, I thought duck breast might be a good alternative. While not rich enough to qualify for dessert, it made a pretty fine main dish. I hope you will try it!

2 duck breast halves
Kosher salt and pepper to season
1 small shallot (16g) minced finely
1 tsp. butter
1 c. chicken bone broth
1/2 c. red wine (I used cabernet sauvignon, but pinot would be good too)
1 T. honey
1 c. pitted cherries (I used frozen, since it is January....)
2 T. more butter (salted)
pinch of fine sea salt + more salt to finish
2 T. cherry preserves (I used Bonne Maman)
1 T. balsamic vinegar (I used Lucero - it is good and syrupy)
springs of fresh thyme to garnish

Score the skin of the duck breasts in a diamond pattern with a sharp knife, being careful to cut only the skin and not the flesh of the duck. Sprinkle generously with salt and pepper (be generous, you will remove some later and you want to do sort of a quick dry brine). Let sit uncovered in the refrigerator for an hour or two.

In a small saucepan sauté the shallot in 1 tsp. butter with a pinch of salt over medium/low flame until softened. Add red wine, increase heat and reduce by half. Add bone broth and reduce again. Add cherry preserves, cherries, honey, balsamic vinegar and simmer until syrupy. Whisk in butter. Taste for salt and add some if needed.

Take the duck out of the refrigerator and put on a double thickness of paper towel top and bottom to dry and remove some of the salt.

Heat a frying pan over low heat. Put duck breasts skin side down and don't move for 10 minutes. Turn over and cook another 6-8 minutes or until desired temperature. (I went to 135 internal temp and it rose to 140+ for medium.) The skin should be brown and crispy.

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Let rest for 10 minutes under a foil tent. Slice against the grain and serve with cherry sauce and a sprig of thyme.

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