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Steamed Asparagus with Béarnaise Sauce

Serves 4

Nothing says “spring” like fresh asparagus, and it definitely belongs on any spring dinner menu. And while we’re all familiar with Asparagus with Hollandaise Sauce, less common is this recipe featuring Béarnaise Sauce. Similar to Hollandaise Sauce, Béarnaise Sauce is an egg and butter emulsified sauce that substitutes white wine vinegar for lemon, adds aromatic shallots, and features the wonderful herb, tarragon. The herby sauce brings out the best in simple, steamed asparagus.

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 medium shallot, finely minced
1/3 cup Champagne vinegar (or white wine vinegar)
1 tablespoon tarragon leaves, chopped, divided
2 egg yolks
16 tablespoons (2 sticks) unsalted butter
 cut into tablespoon-sized pieces
Kosher salt
1-2 bunches (about 24 stalks) asparagus
Sea salt for the cooking water

Directions:

1. In a small saucier-style pan, melt 1 tablespoon of butter. Sauté the chopped shallots until tender and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the vinegar and all but 1 teaspoon of the chopped tarragon leaves. Allow the liquid to simmer and reduce slowly by about two-thirds. It will become nicely syrupy and full of concentrated flavor. Allow to cool to room temperature. (This step may be done ahead time.)
2. Add two egg yolks to the cooled reduced liquid and whisk until evenly combined. Add 8 tablespoon-sized chunks to the pan. Place the saucier over low heat. Whisking continuously, gradually warm the mixture until all of the butter has melted and becomes incorporated. Add the remaining butter, two or three pieces at a time, continually whisking until melted and combined into a smooth, silky sauce.
3. Remove from the heat source. Taste and add a sprinkle of Kosher salt if desired. An extra splash of vinegar can also be added at this stage. The sauce may be held at room temperature for up to an hour.
4. Trim the ends of the asparagus stalks. (Peel the stem ends, if desired, or if the stalks are on the thick side) Steam the stalks over salted, boiling water until just tender. The stalks should be bright green still, yet tender to the tip of a knife.
5. To serve, lay the stalks on a serving platter, ladle the sauce over the top. Sprinkle the remaining minced tarragon over the dish. Serve hot.