Baked Macaroni and Cheese

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The Hot Stove Society

Food:

1 pound elbow macaroni

3 tablespoons butter
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
3 cups whole milk (cold)
1/8 tsp ground nutmeg
4 cups mixed cheeses, grated (i.e. cheddar, mozzarella, gouda, fontina, provolone)
2 strips bacon
½ onion
1 clove garlic, minced
¼ cup Breadcrumbs (fresh is great, but panko is a-ok too)
¼ cup Peas (fresh if in season, frozen if not)
2 tablespoons melted butter

Equipment:

Pot of salted water
Colander
Saucepan – 3-4 qt size
Measuring cups
Measuring spoons
Wooden spoon
Whisk
Box Grater
Mixing bowl

Method:

For the Pasta:

- Taste your water and make sure it's not too salty. When the water is at a rolling boil, add your pasta and set a 7 minute timer. Let the water come back to a boil, and then turn down to a good simmer – about 200F.
- When the pasta is finished cooking (Carefully pull a noodle out and taste it. It should still have just a little bit of bite when you bite through it) drain in your colander and rinse quickly in cold water. Drain thoroughly and set aside.

For the Sauce

- Heat a saucepan to medium warm and add your butter.
- When the butter is melted, add your flour and stir to combine. Cook for 3-4 minutes over medium-medium low heat. You're looking to make what's called a "blonde roux" which will act as the thickening agent in your sauce. Blonde roux have a ton of thickening power but not a lot of flavor, which is ideal. If you keep cooking, you'll have a dark roux which adds lots of flavor but isn't as effective at thickening sauces.
- When your roux is ready, remove your pan from the heat and add 1/3 of your milk and whisk in thoroughly. When the mixture is uniform and not clumpy, return to the burner and bring to a gentle simmer. Your cheese sauce will thicken as you heat it, so add the remaining milk about ½ cup at a time, allowing to thicken before you add any more milk. This will allow you to control the final viscosity of your sauce.
- When you've got your sauce to the consistency that you're looking for, add your cheeses and nutmeg and stir them to combine. Add salt and fresh black pepper to your liking.

For the Caramelized Onion

- Heat a pan to medium hot.
- Slice your bacon and add it to your pan with a little bit of cooking oil. Turn heat down to medium.
- Cook bacon, stirring often, until a little crispy but not overdone. Remove from the pan and add your onions into the bacon fat.
- Cook over medium -medium high heat allowing the onions to caramelize in the pan. Stir often to avoid burning. When they're cooked to your liking, add your garlic and cook for another minute or two.

Bring it all Together

- Combine your sauce, noodles, onion, bacon and peas and stir gently.
- Combine melted butter and breadcrumbs in mixing bowl and stir well.
- Pour mixture into an oven safe dish and top with breadcrumbs.
- Bake at 400F for 15-20 minutes, or until golden brown and bubbly.
- Let rest for a few minutes before serving.