

Pesto Mac and Cheese

BY RICHARD MAHLE

BOX MAC AND CHEESE is a hard staple in my pantry. What's nice is how box Mac and cheese is cheap and easy to find, Comet's Cupboard usually has boxes of these for the taking. My favorite boxed Mac and cheese would have to be Annie's white cheddar shells because of how easy it is to spice it up. One of the absolute best ways to upgrade your standard box of Mac and cheese is pesto.

Pesto is a traditional pasta topping in Italy that originated from Genoa, Italy around the 16th century. Genoa is a port city within the coastal region of Italy known as Liguria. Ligurian cuisine is deemed some of the best within Italy

because of the master craftsmanship combined with amazing ingredients. Ligurian cuisine is known for its seafood, olive oils, world renown basils, Genovese pesto, Genovese Ragu, the amazing Focaccia bread, and some other great healthy dishes. Pesto is made from basil, extra-virgin olive oil, Parmesan cheese, pecorino cheese, pine nuts, garlic, and salt. The process of creating fresh pesto involves a food processor or ceramic/marble mortar. According to *La Cucina Italiana*: "The most authentic way to make pesto is with a mortar

and pestle, although a blender or food processor is often used to speed things up. The original version of this sauce begins with pulverizing a clove of garlic in a mortar. When the garlic is smooth, the basil leaves are added with a pinch of coarse salt. The basil should be crushed against the walls of the mortar,

rotating the pestle from left to right while simultaneously turning the mortar the opposite way (from right to left). This continues until the leaves are fully ground into a paste, then the pine nuts are added and the grinding continues until everything is smooth. The cheeses are

added gradually while continuing to grind the pesto to make it even creamier, and finally the extra-virgin olive oil is drizzled in while continuing to mix. All the ingredients are thoroughly combined until the mixture has an even consistency."

If there is not enough time to make it this way, feel free to purchase some. My favorite brand is the Good and Gather target brand signature basil and sun dried tomato pesto, but creating your own pesto will always be the best option.

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The Ingredients Needed:

- 1 Box of Mac and cheese
- 3 tablespoons of milk (add more to create more sauce)
- Optional: 2 tablespoons of butter for richness.
- 6 cups of water to boil
- 3-4 ounces of pesto.

Steps

1. Boil 6 cups of water in a large saucepan with salt.
2. Open the box, remove the cheese packet, and add the noodles once the water boils.
3. Boil for 6-10 minutes depending on how chewy one wants the noodles.
4. Strain noodles once done, and leave on the side
5. Add milk and butter into the saucepan on a low heat.
6. As butter melts, mix in the cheese packet.
7. Add pasta back into the saucepan once the cheese has mixed.
8. Once the pasta is coated in the sauce, add the pesto to the Mac and cheese and mix.
9. Add on any extra cheese or other toppings you like and then serve.

Baldies Restaurant Review

BY RICHARD MAHLE

An interview with Brooke Vohnoutka:

HOW LONG HAVE you been working here?
"About 2 and a half years."
Why?

Mom's been here for 6 years as a bartender.

"This place is small, but not too small. It's formal but not too formal. It's cozy."

Moved to Lakeville 9 years ago.

"I consider them my family."

Recommended from the menu?

"Our street tacos are so good, our cooks make them perfect every time. You might not finish it."

Portion:

Huge portions.

"If you want somewhere to go for a family friend's restaurant, I'd definitely come here. We just love to see smiles on everyone's faces as they come or as they leave."

Food:

Baldy's BBQ features four different sauces. Ranging from sweet to spicy barbecue.

Bleach sauce has a decently complex flavor. It really stands on its own. The sweet barbecue has a basic barbecue taste, but with an elegant sweet tang at the end. They're orange sauce has a great flavor; it's Carolina vinegar style with a little bit of a honey mustard taste. Finally, there's just a basic barbecue sauce that is just all reliable.



Photo Credit: Richard Mahle

My meal consists of brisket, whole chicken and their baldies sausage. The sausage is a basic bratwurst perfectly cooked throughout slicing the center for proof; it tastes excellent with the spicy barbecue, it just brings it together. Pull chicken on its own is a nice, simple flavor not over seasoned to any extent. It isn't dried out which can really tend to happen in these Midwest barbecue places which is a happy change for what I'm used to. It works perfectly with the basic barbecue for the honey mustard barbecue sauce. The brisket is cooked to perfection. Just juicy, flavorful, and immaculate with any sauce on its own or as a sandwich.

For my side I chose to get mac and cheese and french fries. They also give you a slice of cornbread.

Mac and cheese is very simple, a little soupy for my taste, but no complaints because it reminds me a little bit of home. The french fries on the other hand are done perfectly. They are crispy on the outside and nice in the center. They have a slight seasoning on them that really just enhances the flavor. I will say the cornbread tastes like cornbread. I've been spoiled growing up in the south with perfect cornbread, but while this one doesn't stand out, it's a certain wealth addition to wrap up the plate.

This restaurant smokes all of their meat 24 hours before serving, so you know you are getting a quality product.

A major highlight of the meal is it wasn't heavy despite there being so much food. I only really ate meat and grain, but I don't feel weighed down. It's very impressive for a barbecue joint to not be heavy especially when you ate mac and cheese, fries, and smoked meat.

Hospitality:

It might be one of the homiest restaurants I've been to here in Minnesota. Staff are all super nice, really caring about what they're doing and the chefs are clearly passionate about food. They were very helpful in talking about the restaurant, they really, really understand how to be hospitable in the current state of the world.