STUFFED CABBAGE

SERVES 8

FOR THE STUFFING:

- 4 slices crustless white bread, sliced ½-inch-thick, quartered
- ¾ cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 4 medium carrots, peeled, trimmed, cut into ⅛-inch dice
- 1 medium celery root, peeled, cut into ⅛-inch dice
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 sprigs thyme, leaves only, finely chopped
- Salt and freshly ground white pepper
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 5 ounces slab bacon, cut into short thin strips
- 2 chicken livers, cleaned and halved
- 1 large onion, peeled, trimmed, sliced ¼-inch thick
- 5 large white mushrooms, cleaned, sliced ¼-inch thick
- 1 ½ pounds pork shoulder, cut lengthwise into 5 strips
- 1 ½ ounces fat back, cut into chunks
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ¼ teaspoon quatre-épices
- 1 small bunch flat parsley, leaves only, finely chopped
- Salt and freshly ground white pepper

FOR FINISH:

- 4 very long slices bacon
- ¾ cup veal demi-glace, homemade or store-bought
- ¾ cup unsalted chicken stock or low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- Salt and freshly ground white pepper

BRING A LARGE POT OF SALTED WATER TO THE BOIL. Pull off the leaves from each cabbage and cook 5 to 6 minutes, until pliable. Transfer to a colander, run under cold water, then remove the tough ribs cutting them out in a "v" pattern. Dry the leaves between paper towels. Soak the bread in the heavy cream.

Melt the butter in a small skillet over medium heat, toss in the carrot, celery root, garlic and thyme and cook, stirring, until the vegetables soften, about 8 minutes. Cool on a plate.

Warm a large skillet over medium heat, add the bacon and cook until it starts to brown. Add the livers and onion, cook 15 minutes. Add the mushrooms, salt and pepper, and continue to cook, stirring, until everything is cooked through and browned, about 10 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the ingredients to a bowl; chill. Reheat the cooking fat in the skillet over medium-high heat. Add the pork shoulder, salt and pepper, and cook until well browned, about 15 minutes. Add the pork to the ingredients in the refrigerator and chill until very cold.

Keeping the carrot and celery root aside, run the chilled ingredients and the soaked bread through the medium blade of a meat grinder. Transfer to a large bowl and mix in the carrots, celery root, any remaining cream, the egg, 1 ½ teaspoons salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, the quatre-épices and the parsley.

CENTER A RACK IN THE OVEN AND PREHEAT THE OVEN TO 300°F. Spread a large kitchen towel out on a work surface and lay out the bacon strips so they criss-cross like spokes. Using the darkest, best-looking cabbage leaves, make a circle of 5 slightly overlapping leaves on top of the bacon. (The circle should be about 20 inches in diameter, “v” cuts facing out.) Put a small leaf in the center. Repeat. Press one-third of the stuffing into an 8-inch patty in the center. Cover with a 10-inch circle of cabbage. Make a patty with about one-third of the remaining stuffing and top with another layer of cabbage. Repeat until you have four layers of stuffing separated by cabbage. Pull up the corners of the cabbage, then the bacon strips, and then the towel. Grab tightly at the top and twist, using the towel to shape the stuffed cabbage into a ball. Wrap the cabbage in cheesecloth and tie the bundle in a pumpkin shape with kitchen twine.

Put the demi-glace, stock and cabbage in a roasting pan just large enough to hold the cabbage. Brush the cabbage with the olive oil, top with butter. Bring the liquid to a boil, basting the cabbage a few times. Slide the pan into the oven and bake 80 to 90 minutes, basting frequently, until the cabbage is 150°F in the center.

Transfer the cabbage to a platter: remove the string and cheesecloth. Skim the fat from the sauce, add 1/3 cup water and bring to the boil, scraping up browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Season with salt and pepper and strain the sauce.

To Serve: Slice the cabbage and serve with the sauce.