

## **Baked Macaroni and Cheese with Cauliflower and Chard (from “Hudson Valley Mediterranean”)**

*Laura Pensiero is a master chef, nutritionist, and creator of Gigi’s Hudson Valley (and Hammertown Rhinebeck friend and neighbor). This is one of 150 magnificent recipes she includes in her new cookbook from her famed restaurant, Gigi Trattoria and Gigi Market, in Rhinebeck and Red Hook, respectively.*

### **(Makes 6 Entrees or 8 Side Servings)**

With an “enlightened” bechamel cheese sauce and spiked with vegetables, this is a delicious and healthier version of the American classic. The cauliflower melts as it cooks, leaving a creamy texture, and the chard adds flavor, color and nutrients.

### **Ingredients:**

- Kosher salt
- 8 ounces dried short pasta, such as fuscilli, elbows campanelle or cavatappi
- Small florets cut from about 1 pound cauliflower
- 6 cups Enlightened Bechamel (See below)
- 1-1/2 cups shredded local sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup shredded smoked cheddar (2 ounces) or smoked Gouda Cheese
- 2 cups chopped cooked green Swiss chard, or 2 cups frozen chard, thawed and drained
- 1/3 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmesan Cheese

### **Directions:**

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Butter a 12” to 14” round or a 13” x 9” rectangular baking dish.
2. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and season it with kosher salt, add the pasta and cook until al dente, following the package directions (usually 8 to 12 minutes), adding the cauliflower florets during the last 3 minutes of cooking. Drain the pasta and cauliflower, and transfer to a large bowl.
3. Pour the bechamel into the bowl, add the shredded cheeses and chard, and stir to combine.
4. Transfer the mixture to the prepared baking dish. In a small bowl, combine the bread crumbs and the Grana Padano. Scatter the bread-crumble mixture evenly over the macaroni, and bake until golden and bubbly, about 25 minutes. Serve immediately.

### **Enlightened Bechamel**

- 6 cups 2-percent milk
- 1/2 cup all- purpose flour
- pinch ground nutmeg
- inch cayenne pepper
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat the milk in a saucepan over medium heat until it is steaming hot (do not let boil).
2. Place the flour in a medium saucepan and whisk in 1/2 to 3/4 cup of the hot milk, just enough to form a smooth, creamy paste; there should be no lumps of flour. Slowly add the remaining milk, whisking constantly, until fully blended. Add the nutmeg and cayenne, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Over medium heat, gradually bring the mixture to a boil, whisking often. Cook until thickened, about 5 minutes.

**Nutrition:**

This dish is lower in fat than the classic mac 'n' cheese. Cauliflower and chard are both members of the cancer-fighting brassica family of vegetables.

**Variations:**

Substitute 2 cups peas or other cooked vegetables

Substitute whatever cheese suits you, but do not use fat-free cheese, because it will not melt.