



MaverickUnity

# The Chilled Presentation Playbook

MAVERICK UNITY · THESSALONIKI

Everything we know about serving seafood cold. The method, twelve sauces, an oyster guide, and a timed plan for a table of twelve.



# Cold seafood is simpler than it looks.

There are only four things to get right, and one of them accounts for almost every failure.

In Greece, cold seafood is served without ceremony. Good product, plenty of ice, a sharp sauce, and nothing in the way. No foam, no tweezers, no architecture.

What makes it fail at home is almost never the recipe. It is heat, applied too hard, for too long. Shrimp cook in about two minutes and turn to rubber in about three, and a rolling boil removes your control over that window entirely.

The second most common failure is the ice. A shallow scatter of cubes is decoration, not refrigeration. A properly packed bed is the difference between ninety minutes of service and twenty.

Everything here assumes you are cooking for people you like, in a home kitchen, without special equipment. Where a technique matters we explain why, so you can adapt it.

If you read nothing else, read page four. That is the whole dish.

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# The shrimp

Half the outcome is decided at the counter, before you have turned on a burner.

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## Buy frozen

Almost all shrimp sold as fresh at an American counter was frozen at sea and thawed by the store. You are buying the same product with less control over when it thawed. Frozen raw shell-on shrimp gives you better texture, a better price, and a thawing schedule you set yourself.

## Buy raw

Pre-cooked shrimp were processed at industrial speed and have already given up their texture. Nothing you do afterwards recovers it.

## Read the count, ignore the adjective

Jumbo, colossal and extra large have no regulated definition. The two numbers do. **16/20** means sixteen to twenty shrimp make up a pound. Smaller number, bigger shrimp. **U/12** means under twelve per pound.

16/20 is the cocktail size. It cooks evenly in a two minute poach, four to five per person is a sensible serving, and it fills a tray in a single layer without looking sparse. Anything larger crowds the tray and cooks unevenly. Anything smaller disappears into the ice.

Check the ingredient list for sodium tripolyphosphate, often shown as STPP or sodium phosphate. It makes shrimp hold water so they weigh more, and gives them a faintly soapy, slippery quality once cooked. Shrimp with nothing on the list but shrimp and salt are worth the small premium.

## Thaw slowly

Move the bag from freezer to refrigerator the evening before. Twelve hours is right for two pounds. Thawing under running water is faster and costs you texture, because the outer layer of muscle starts to hydrate before the centre has softened.

If you have forgotten and it is Saturday afternoon: sealed bag, bowl of cold water, thirty minutes, change the water once. This is the emergency version, not the plan.

## Peel first, cook second

Peel, leave the tail segment attached as a handle, and devein by running a paring knife a quarter inch down the back and lifting the dark line out with the tip. The tail is not decoration. It is how a shrimp is lifted out of a bed of ice without anyone putting cold wet fingers into the tray.

# The poach

Two rules. The water is seasoned like the sea, and it never boils.

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## 01 Build the liquid

One quart water, half a lemon, one bay leaf, a teaspoon of black peppercorns, a generous tablespoon of kosher salt. Simmer ten minutes uncovered, then taste it. It should taste distinctly seasoned, close to seawater. Under-salting here is the commonest reason poached shrimp taste of nothing.

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## 02 Kill the heat

Take the pot off the burner entirely, or drop it as low as it goes. The surface must be completely still. No bubbles at all. Water held around 170 to 180°F cooks shrimp through in the same time as a boil while giving you a margin of thirty or forty seconds instead of ten.

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## 03 Add in one layer

Slide the shrimp in so none are stacked. Cook in two batches rather than crowding, which drops the temperature and stews them.

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## 04 Read the shape, not the colour

Two minutes for 16/20, closer to three for colossal, ninety seconds for 21/25. A relaxed **C** is done. A tight **O** has gone too far. Colour is not the test: shrimp turn pink long before the centre is cooked and stay pink long after they are ruined.

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## 05 Shock immediately

Into a bowl of half ice, half water, prepared before the shrimp went in. Five minutes. This stops the residual cooking, which would otherwise continue for another minute and use up most of your margin, and it firms the flesh into the snap you want in a cold shrimp.

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## 06 Dry completely

Drain, spread on a towel, pat the tops. Wet shrimp will not hold sauce and will water down an ice bed from the first minute.

Cooked, shocked and dried, shrimp keep for twenty-four hours covered in the refrigerator on a sheet of paper towel. Best within twelve. Never store them sitting in melted ice water, which leaches the seasoning straight back out.

# The ice bed

The part everyone rushes, and the reason a tray looks worse in the second hour than the first.

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## Crushed beats cubed

Cubes stack with air gaps between them. Air is a poor conductor, so contact between ice and seafood is intermittent, and as the cubes melt the structure fails unevenly. Forty minutes in, a bed of cubes has slumped in the middle and the shrimp on that side are sitting in water.

Crushed ice packs into a dense, continuous surface. More ice touches more shrimp, it melts evenly, and it holds its shape as it goes.

None of which means cubes are wrong. For a table that will be cleared inside the hour they are perfectly good, and they are what most people have. For anything longer, put them in a heavy zip bag, wrap it in a towel, and give it thirty seconds with a rolling pin.

## Fill high, press flat

To just below the rim, pressed level with the back of a spoon. A shallow scatter is decoration, not refrigeration.

## Chill the piece before the food goes on

This is the step almost nobody does and it is worth more than everything else here. A serving piece out of a cupboard is at room temperature, and the first thing your ice does is spend thermal budget cooling the metal. Ten minutes in the refrigerator with the bed already built means the ice arrives at the table with that work done. It buys you the better part of an hour.

Stainless steel makes this especially effective, because it conducts and holds cold far better than glass or ceramic. That property works against you if you skip the pre-chill and strongly for you if you do it.

**How much ice.** Roughly one pound for every half pound of seafood, plus enough to build the bed itself. For twelve people that is eight to ten pounds. Buy it the morning of the event. Ice bought the night before and left in a home freezer fuses into a block and sublimates measurably.

# Plating and service

Arrange it so it can be eaten, not so it can be photographed.

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## A ring, not a heap

Tails pointing outward, backs curled up, in a single continuous ring. A pile looks generous and eats badly, because taking one shrimp disturbs six. A ring also holds its shape as it empties, which a heap does not.

## Keep the sauce out of the meltwater

A recessed centre well holds the sauce above the ice. If you are improvising, set the bowl on a small inverted ramekin pressed into the bed, or keep it beside the tray entirely. Cocktail sauce diluted by meltwater goes pale and thin within the hour.

## Garnish, restrained

Lemon cut into sixths rather than quarters, so it fits the hand. A few sprigs of dill or flat parsley pressed into the ice, not scattered over the shrimp. That is the whole list. Anything sitting on top of the food has to be moved before anyone can eat.

Skip the shredded lettuce. It was there in the 1970s to fill a coupe glass and does nothing on a modern tray except absorb meltwater and go grey.

## Where the tray sits

- Away from the oven, the dishwasher, and any window with afternoon sun.
- Never on a heated warming tray, which happens at more buffets than you would think.
- Not directly beside a chafing dish. Radiant heat from six inches away is measurable.
- Near where people are standing, so it empties in the first hour rather than lingering into the second.

## Two trays beat one big one

Above about fifteen guests, split the service. Build both, put one out and hold the second fully assembled in the refrigerator. Swap when the first is two thirds gone.

Every guest gets a tray that looks like it was just put down, and the total time any individual shrimp spends at room temperature stays short.

## The clock

The USDA limit for cold food held out of refrigeration is two hours, or one hour above 90°F, and it is cumulative rather than per appearance. Plan to clear or refresh at ninety minutes and you are comfortably inside it.



# Twelve sauces

Serve two rather than one. One red and one not-red gives the tray a second colour and covers both the guest who wants the familiar thing and the guest who is tired of it. Two tablespoons per person.

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## One

### Classic cocktail sauce

3/4 cup ketchup  
 3 tbsp prepared horseradish, drained  
 1 tbsp lemon juice  
 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce  
 1/4 tsp fine sea salt  
 Hot sauce, a few drops

Stir together, cover, and refrigerate at least thirty minutes. Holds three days.

The rest is not optional. Horseradish is volatile and needs time to bloom through the ketchup. A sauce made and served in the same minute tastes flat, which is why most people think they dislike cocktail sauce. Drain the horseradish before measuring, or the vinegar in the jar will thin it.

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## Two

### Ladolemono

1/2 cup good olive oil  
 3 tbsp lemon juice  
 1/2 tsp dried oregano  
 1/4 tsp fine sea salt  
 Black pepper

Whisk lemon and salt until the salt dissolves. Add the oil in a slow stream, whisking hard, until it thickens and turns pale. Oregano and pepper last.

The Greek answer, and the one sauce here that makes shrimp taste more like shrimp rather than covering them. It separates in the refrigerator, which is fine. Whisk again.

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## Three

### Red wine mignonette

1/3 cup red wine vinegar  
 1 shallot, minced very fine  
 1/2 tsp cracked black pepper  
 Pinch of salt

Combine and rest at least an hour. Better after four. Holds a week.

Built for oysters. The mince matters more than anything else: large pieces of raw shallot are unpleasant on a raw oyster, so take the time.

## Four

### Caper rémoulade

3/4 cup good mayonnaise  
1 tbsp Dijon mustard  
1 tbsp capers, drained and chopped  
1 tbsp tarragon or dill, chopped  
2 tsp lemon juice  
1/2 tsp smoked paprika

Stir together and refrigerate an hour. Holds three days.

Richer than the others, so it works best as the second sauce rather than the only one. Particularly good on a cold-weather table where everything else is sharp.

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## Five

### Marie Rose, with heat

1/2 cup mayonnaise  
3 tbsp ketchup  
1 tsp brandy or dry sherry  
1 tsp lemon juice  
1/2 tsp cayenne  
Dash of Worcestershire

Whisk together. Rest twenty minutes. Holds three days.

The British take on cocktail sauce, softer and rounder than the American. The brandy is traditional and does more than you expect. Cayenne to taste, but it should have a warm finish rather than a sharp one.

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## Six

### Green goddess

1/2 cup mayonnaise  
1/4 cup sour cream  
1 cup mixed parsley, chives, tarragon  
2 anchovy fillets  
1 tbsp lemon juice  
1 small garlic clove

Blend everything until smooth and vivid. Refrigerate an hour. Best the same day.

The anchovies do not read as fish, they read as depth. Leave them out and the sauce tastes like it is missing something you cannot name.



## Seven

### Yuzu ponzu

3 tbsp soy sauce  
3 tbsp yuzu juice, or 2 lemon 1 lime  
1 tbsp mirin  
1 tsp rice vinegar  
1 tsp grated ginger  
Thinly sliced spring onion

Combine and rest thirty minutes. Holds a week.

The lightest sauce here and the best one for a hot evening. Also the natural choice if you are serving anything raw alongside the shrimp.

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## Eight

### Horseradish crème fraîche

3/4 cup crème fraîche  
2 tbsp prepared horseradish, drained  
1 tbsp chopped dill  
2 tsp lemon juice  
1/4 tsp salt

Fold together gently. Refrigerate thirty minutes. Holds two days.

Fold, do not whisk, or the crème fraîche loosens. The cleanest partner for smoked salmon or crab if either is on the tray.

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## Nine

### Romesco

1 jar roasted red peppers, drained  
1/3 cup toasted almonds  
1 garlic clove  
2 tbsp sherry vinegar  
1/3 cup olive oil  
1 tsp smoked paprika

Blend everything except the oil, then add the oil slowly with the motor running. Refrigerate an hour. Holds four days.

Spanish, thick, and the only sauce here substantial enough to eat with a spoon. Bring it to room temperature before serving or it will be stiff.

## Ten

### Nam jim

3 tbsp lime juice  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
1 tbsp palm or brown sugar  
2 garlic cloves  
1 or 2 bird's eye chillies  
Coriander stems, chopped fine

Pound the garlic, chilli and coriander stems to a rough paste, then stir in the liquids and sugar until dissolved. Holds three days.

Thai, and the sharpest thing in this book. A little goes a long way, so serve it in a small bowl.

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## Eleven

### Aioli

2 egg yolks, room temperature  
2 garlic cloves, crushed to paste  
1 cup olive oil, mild  
1 tbsp lemon juice  
1/2 tsp salt

Whisk yolks, garlic and salt. Add the oil drop by drop at first, then in a thin stream, whisking constantly. Finish with lemon. Best the same day.

Use mild olive oil rather than a peppery one, which turns bitter when emulsified. If it splits, start with a fresh yolk and whisk the broken sauce into it slowly.

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## Twelve

### Mustard dill

3 tbsp Dijon mustard  
1 tbsp honey  
2 tbsp white wine vinegar  
1/3 cup neutral oil  
3 tbsp dill, chopped fine

Whisk mustard, honey and vinegar, then add the oil slowly. Dill last. Holds a week.

The Scandinavian sauce for cured fish. If gravlax or smoked salmon appears anywhere on the table, this is what belongs beside it.

# Oysters

The same bed, a different discipline. Shucking is a technique, not a strength contest.

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## Buying

Buy them closed and heavy. A gaping shell that does not close when tapped is dead, and goes in the bin. Store cup side down in the refrigerator under a damp cloth, never sealed in a bag and never in water. Use within two days.

## Shucking, without injury

Fold a towel into a thick pad and hold the oyster cup side down, hinge pointing out. The towel is what protects your hand, not your grip.

Find the hinge, the narrow point where the shells meet. Work the knife tip in with steady pressure and a small twist, not force. When it gives, you will feel it. Twist the knife like a key and the shell pops.

Run the blade along the inside of the top shell to cut the muscle, lift the lid away, then slide underneath to release the oyster from the bottom. Check for shell fragments.

Keep the liquor. That is the seasoning, and pouring it out is the single most common mistake.

## Setting them out

Press each shell into the ice at a slight angle so the liquor stays in. Shuck as late as you can manage. Thirty minutes ahead is acceptable, an hour is the outside limit, and a whole afternoon in advance is how oysters end up tasting of nothing.

Two per person if a full meal follows, four to six if the raw bar is the event.

## What goes alongside

- Mignonette, page seven. The classic and still the best.
- Lemon in sixths.
- Yuzu ponzu, page nine, if you want something less expected.
- Nothing else. Cocktail sauce on a good oyster is a waste of the oyster.

## To drink

High acid and low oak. Muscadet, Chablis, Assyrtiko, dry Champagne, or a cold Greek retsina if you want to be honest about where this book comes from.

# Beyond shrimp

The bed does not care what is on it. Eight cold courses that use exactly the same method.

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## Crab claws

Buy them cooked and cracked, or crack them at the knuckle yourself before they go out. Nobody enjoys wrestling a claw over a tray. Serve with rémoulade.

## Ceviche

Firm white fish cut in half-inch cubes, cured in lime juice for twenty minutes, no longer, then dressed with red onion, coriander and chilli. Spoon it into small shells set over the ice rather than in a bowl.

## Chilled asparagus

Blanched two minutes, shocked, dried. Ladolemono. The cleanest vegetable course there is and it costs almost nothing.

## Caviar service

The tin sits on the ice, not in it. Mother of pearl or plastic spoon, never metal. Blini, crème fraîche, chopped chive and egg alongside.

## Cold smoked salmon

Rolled into loose curls rather than laid flat, so it has some height. Mustard dill, page ten. Capers and thin red onion.

## Mussels on the half shell

Steamed open in white wine, cooled, one shell discarded. A spoonful of ladolemono or green goddess in each. Cheap, and looks like it was not.

## Marinated anchovies

Bought cured, arranged with olive oil, lemon zest and parsley. Nothing to cook, and a genuinely Mediterranean note on a table of American classics.

## Watermelon, feta and mint

Not seafood, and the best thing on a tray in July. Cubed watermelon, crumbled feta, torn mint, a little olive oil, cracked pepper. The ice keeps it crisp for an hour.



# A timed plan for twelve

Working backwards from the moment the tray goes down. Nothing after early afternoon needs a burner.

| WHEN            | WHAT                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TWO DAYS OUT    | <b>Shop.</b> Three pounds of raw shell-on 16/20 shrimp, frozen. Lemons, horseradish, whatever the two sauces need. Do not buy the ice yet.                               |
| NIGHT BEFORE    | <b>Thaw.</b> Shrimp from freezer to refrigerator. Twelve hours. Make any sauce that improves overnight: mignonette, romesco, mustard dill.                               |
| MORNING OF      | <b>Sauces.</b> Make the rest. Cocktail sauce needs at least thirty minutes and is better after three hours. Refrigerate covered.                                         |
| EARLY AFTERNOON | <b>Poach.</b> Peel, devein, poach, shock, dry. Twenty minutes of work, and the last time you need a burner. Into a covered container on paper towel in the refrigerator. |
| FOUR HOURS OUT  | <b>Cut nothing yet.</b> Lemons cut early go dry at the edges. Leave them.                                                                                                |
| ONE HOUR OUT    | <b>Ice.</b> Buy or bag it. Crush if the table will run long. Build the bed, press it flat, and put the assembled piece in the refrigerator.                              |
| TWENTY MINUTES  | <b>Cut the lemons</b> into sixths. Shuck oysters if any. Pull the sauces so they come to temperature slightly.                                                           |
| FIFTEEN MINUTES | <b>Plate.</b> Shrimp in a single ring, tails out. Sauce in the centre well. Herbs pressed into the ice.                                                                  |
| SERVE           | Expect ninety minutes of good life on a room-temperature table. Swap in the second tray at two thirds gone.                                                              |

**The shopping list, for twelve.** Three pounds of 16/20 shrimp, about sixty. Eight to ten pounds of ice. Three lemons. One cup of each of two sauces. Herbs for garnish. That is the entire list.

## Caring for your piece

304 stainless steel will outlive all of us. It asks for very little.

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- Wash by hand in hot soapy water before first use and dry with a soft towel.
  - Rinse promptly after every use. Acids and oils left standing will dull the finish.
  - Dishwasher safe, though hand washing preserves a mirror finish considerably longer.
  - Never use steel wool or abrasive cleaners.
  - Do not cut or stir directly against the surface.
  - Dry fully before storing. Stainless will not rust, but standing water leaves mineral spots that need polishing off.
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## The Maverick Unity guarantee

Every piece is warranted for life against rust, pitting, weld failure and defects in finish. There is no registration and nothing to fill in. Your order record is your proof of purchase.

If a piece fails, we replace it. That is the entire policy.

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## Why 304

It is not marketing shorthand. 304 stainless, sometimes marked 18/8, resists corrosion from salt and acid, takes a mirror or brushed finish without plating that will eventually peel, and is food safe indefinitely. It also conducts and holds cold considerably better than glass or ceramic, which is the entire reason a properly built bed lasts a party rather than half an hour.

Lower grades and plated finishes will pit or flake with repeated exposure to lemon, brine and dishwashers. You will not see it in the first year. You will see it in the fifth.



## Cold seafood, served properly.

Maverick Unity is a chilled seafood presentation specialist:  
a design studio in Thessaloniki, Greece that makes serving  
pieces for shrimp, oysters and other seafood served cold  
over ice.

[MAVERICK-UNITY.COM](https://maverick-unity.com)

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