Festive seafood stew with garlic croutons
Serves 6

CROUTONS
3/4/ long baguette, cut into 24 slices that are 1/4-inch thick
1/3 cup olive oil
3 cloves garlic, peeled

1. Set the oven at 375 degrees. Have on hand a baking sheet.

2. On the baking sheet, spread the baguette slices. With a pastry brush, brush them on both sides with oil. Bake for 12 to 14 minutes, or until golden brown.

3. Set the sheet on a rack to cool. Scrape the garlic cloves once or twice across each crouton.

STEW
1 fennel bulb, stalks separated from the bulb
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 anchovy fillets, rinsed and finely chopped
1 can (28 ounces) whole peeled tomatoes, crushed in a bowl
1/2 cup fresh orange juice
1 bottle (8 ounces) clam juice
1 cup white wine
1 cup water
2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme leaves
1 bay leaf
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 pound small clams such as littlenecks or steamers
1 pound mussels, scrubbed
1/2 teaspoon saffron
1/2 pound bay scallops
1 1/2 pounds firm, white fish fillets cut into 2-inch chunks
3 tablespoons chopped parsley

1. Cut a thin slice off the root end of the fennel bulb. Stand the bulb upright and cut into quarters (lengthwise from top to root end.) With a paring knife, cut out the tough core portion of each quarter. Slice each quarter crosswise into thin slices.

2. In a large casserole over medium heat, heat the olive oil. Add the onion, garlic, anchovies, and fennel. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 8 minutes.
3. Add the tomatoes, orange juice, clam juice, wine, water, thyme, bay leaf, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil, lower the heat, and simmer for 15 minutes.

4. Add the clams, mussels, and saffron to the broth, and cook for 2 minutes. Add the scallops and fish, and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the fish is opaque and cooked through, and the mussels and clams have opened. (Discard any that remain closed.)

5. With a slotted spoon, divide the fish and shellfish among six bowls. Ladle the broth into the bowls. Sprinkle with chopped parsley and serve with garlic croutons.

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