

Appetizers and Starters

THERE IS PERHAPS NO BETTER EXAMPLE OF THE ARTISTRY EVIDENT IN CONTEMPORARY African-American cuisine than what lies ahead on the following pages. These appetizers are delicious. Each one is perfect for entertaining, whether your party includes a gathering of well-traveled professionals, adventurous friends with an exotic palate, or just plain folks who are eager to see Grandma's cooking in a whole new light.

It's true that appetizers are not native to the African-American cooking scene, with the exception of crudités, chips and dips, and relish trays. To the contrary, dinner tables sagged under the weight of a veritable feast of delicious foods served all at once, overwhelming guests. All that has changed. People have begun to wonder how all the wonderful heirloom recipes in our history can be presented as part of an exquisite, multicourse menu.

The idea isn't a new one for chefs who, early in their careers, learn the French principle of *mise-en-place*, which means "everything in its place." Chefs are used to spending their time planning, organizing, chopping, and blending ahead of time so that dishes that appear complex can be served quickly at the last minute. Meanwhile, home cooks struggle with timetables and overcrowded ovens, juggling dishes and serving glorious menus that no one can possibly eat all at once. Home cooks will benefit from learning the techniques of planning ahead.

Although I created some of these original appetizers for *Elegant Taste of Heritage* dinners featuring a hundred guests or more, they translate well to the home kitchen. Some have dressings and other components that can be made entirely in advance; others actually benefit from standing overnight so the flavors have a chance to mingle.

Don't be intimidated by the rest. Crab cakes and crispy fried chitterlings do require more last-minute preparation. The key is to make sure you have

planned and paced the evening carefully, utilizing shortcuts wherever possible, and allowing yourself plenty of time so you stay calm, organized, and ready before serving each course.

If you plan to serve a sit-down dinner, which is usually more formal than a family meal or buffet, you will want to fill your most attractive serveware with those recipes that can be made into tiny, nibble-size portions and pass them around before dinner. Or if you have some help in the kitchen, you can arrange individual servings on salad plates and allow your guests to enjoy their starter at the dinner table with glass of wine before the rest of the meal is served.

At less formal occasions, such as family gatherings, when the atmosphere is more relaxed, you can still set out nibble-size portions on serving trays, but invite your guests to join you in the kitchen as you serve the plates, to keep the theme casual.

Whichever style party you decide to host, plan your guest list ahead and think about the menu. With these appetizers, the evening will be first class.

BAKED OYSTERS WRAPPED IN COUNTRY BACON

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

The rustic flavor of country smoked bacon tastes delicious with oysters.

Be sure to serve them hot with plenty of cocktail sauce.

1/2 cup olive oil
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground
black pepper
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
3 dashes Tabasco sauce
48 large Eastern oysters,
shucked and well drained
16 slices country bacon, each
slice cut into thirds
Cocktail Sauce (recipe follows)

Combine the olive oil, salt, pepper, lemon juice, and Tabasco in a large bowl and mix thoroughly. Add the oysters and refrigerate for 2 hours. If you wish to marinate the oysters longer, add the lemon juice just before wrapping them. Drain the oysters, discarding the marinade.

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Wrap each oyster with a piece of bacon and secure with a wood pick. Place the wrapped oysters on a baking sheet and bake until the bacon is brown and crisp, about 6 to 8 minutes.

Serve the baked oysters hot, napped with Cocktail Sauce.

COCKTAIL SAUCE

MAKES 2 CUPS

2 cups chili sauce
1 tablespoon prepared
horseradish
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons Worcestershire
sauce
1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
1 tablespoon chopped
fresh parsley
Salt, to taste

In a bowl, combine all ingredients; mix well. Cover and refrigerate.

CATFISH FINGERS WITH REMOULADE SAUCE

MAKES 4 TO 6 SERVINGS

Fried catfish is so popular on African-American dinner menus, it is a logical candidate for starting the meal. What is unusual here is the sauce. The Creole remoulade is magnificent on the crispy fish.

2 pounds boned catfish fillets,
trimmed of fat and patted dry
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon freshly ground
black pepper
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
 $3\frac{1}{2}$ cups yellow cornmeal
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour
1 cup peanut oil
2 cups Remoulade Sauce
(see page 289)

Cut the fillets into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch strips. Lightly season them with salt, black pepper, and cayenne. In a large bowl, combine the cornmeal, flour, and any remaining salt and pepper; dredge each strip of fish in the mixture.

Heat the oil over medium-high heat in a large frying pan or cast-iron skillet until hot. Fry each strip of fish until golden brown, about 2 to 3 minutes, then turn and cook it on the other side. Do not crowd the pan. Drain the fish strips on paper towels.

Serve immediately with Remoulade Sauce or your favorite Louisiana hot red pepper sauce.

CHIT'LIN PIZZA ON A CORNMEAL CRUST

MAKES 4 TO 6 SERVINGS

I began experimenting with this recipe for Chit'lin Pizza after hearing about Bob McCall, a young black chef and restaurateur who had tried a similar dish in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the early 1980s. The recipe came together years later and appeared at the fashionable Southern-style restaurant, Georgia, on Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles.

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly ground
black pepper
 $\frac{1}{2}$ pound Simmered Chitterlings
Country Style with Hog Maws
(see page 214), hog maws
removed and reserved for
another use
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup yellow cornmeal, spooned
into a medium-size bowl
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup peanut oil
Cornmeal Pizza Dough
(see page 6)
1 cup Pizza Sauce (see page 288)
6 ounces shredded mozzarella
cheese
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon red pepper flakes

In a large bowl, thoroughly mix the flour with the salt and pepper. Cut the chitterlings into pieces, dust in the seasoned flour, dip in the beaten eggs, and roll in the cornmeal.

In a cast-iron skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat until hot and fry the chitterlings on both sides until they are light brown and crisp, about 2 to 3 minutes. Being careful not to crowd the pan. Drain the chitterlings on paper towels and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Lightly oil two baking sheets and dust them with cornmeal. Cut the Cornmeal Pizza Dough in half. Roll each piece into a 9- to 10-inch circle, about $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick, then crimp the edges and place on a baking sheet. Top each with Pizza Sauce, spreading it evenly, and cover with cheese, chitterlings, and red pepper flakes. Bake until the cheese melts, about 4 to 6 minutes.

CORNMEAL PIZZA DOUGH

1 package active dry yeast
2 cups warm water
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup yellow cornmeal
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon honey
2 tablespoons peanut oil

In a large mixing bowl, dissolve the yeast in the warm water and allow to rest until it is frothy, about 10 to 15 minutes. Add the flour, cornmeal, salt, honey, and oil to the yeast mixture. Beat the dough until it forms a round ball that is dry to the touch. Cover the dough with plastic wrap or a damp towel and store it in a warm place to rise for 1 hour.

CORNMEAL PIZZA CRUST WITH SMOKED CATFISH

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

Cornmeal Pizza Dough
(see recipe above)

1 cup sour cream
4 ounces cream cheese
2 tablespoons prepared
horseradish
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon chili oil
1 pound Smoked Catfish fillets
(see page 273), sliced on a bias
1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Lightly oil two baking sheets and dust them with cornmeal. Cut the pizza dough in half. Roll each half into 9- or 10-inch circle $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick, then crimp the edges and place on a baking sheet. Bake the pizzas for 4 to 5 minutes, then remove from oven and set aside to cool.

In a bowl, combine the sour cream, cream cheese, horseradish, lemon juice, and chili oil. Mix the ingredients well. Spread some of the mixture evenly on top of each baked pizza crust. Arrange slices of smoked catfish on top of the sour cream mixture and return the pizzas to the oven until hot, about 3 to 4 minutes. Put the remaining sour cream mixture in a squeeze bottle and drizzle a zigzag design on top of each pizza. Sprinkle each with chopped chives, cut, and serve. Serve hot or at room temperature.

DEEP-FRIED CHIT'LINS AND MAWS

MAKES 8 TO 10 SERVINGS

Chitterlings are one of those things: You are either a fan or you are not. If you already love chitterlings, you'll appreciate this new approach to the dish, which takes a cue from the Chinese, who also enjoy them fried.

2 eggs
2 cups milk
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cornstarch
3 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
5 pounds Simmered Chitterlings Country Style with Hog Maws (see page 214)
4 cups peanut oil

In a medium-size bowl, combine the eggs and milk and beat well. In another bowl, mix the cornstarch, flour, salt, and pepper. Separate the chitterlings and hog maws and drain them well. Separately dip the chitterlings and hog maws into the egg-milk mixture, coating evenly, then dredge them in the flour mixture.

Heat the oil in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Fry the chitterlings and hog maws in batches until golden brown on both sides, about 2 to 3 minutes. Drain well on paper towels.

Serve hot with your favorite hot pepper sauce on the side.

DUO OF LUMP CRABMEAT CAKE AND GULF SHRIMP CAKE WITH HERB MUSTARD SAUCE

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

It can be frustrating to order crab cakes in restaurants. There is usually too much cake and not enough crab. This combination of crab cakes and shrimp cakes served side by side is a real winner. The fresh herbs make a difference you can taste.

CRAB CAKES

1 pound lump crabmeat, picked over for cartilage and bits of shell
1/4 cup mayonnaise
2 teaspoons prepared mustard
1 egg, beaten
2 dashes Tabasco sauce
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
14 club crackers, crumbled into fine crumbs (you should end up with 1/2 cup crumbs)
1 teaspoon chopped fresh parsley
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

SHRIMP CAKES

1 pound (10 to 15) jumbo shrimp
2 egg whites
1/4 cup mayonnaise
1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill weed
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
3 cups fresh bread crumbs
1 cup peanut oil

Remove and discard all shell and cartilage from the crabmeat and place the meat in a bowl. In a separate bowl, combine the mayonnaise, mustard, egg, Tabasco sauce, Worcestershire sauce, crumbs, parsley, salt, and pepper. Toss gently with the crabmeat, mixing thoroughly. Form six cakes about 1 inch thick (each will be about 3 1/2 ounces). Coat each cake with bread crumbs and set aside.

Peel and devein the shrimp and remove the tails. Place half of the shrimp meat in a food processor fitted with the metal blade and puree until smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the egg whites and puree 1 minute longer. Pour the mixture into a large bowl and stir in the mayonnaise, dill, mustard, lemon juice, salt, and pepper to taste. Mix well. Chop the remaining shrimp coarsely and add to the mixture. Form into six cakes about 1 inch thick (each about 3 1/2 ounces). Coat each cake with fresh bread crumbs and set aside.

Heat the oil in a cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat and fry each of the crab and shrimp cakes until golden brown, about 3 to 4 minutes on each side. Drain on paper towels. Keep the cakes warm in a preheated 200°F oven.

MUSTARD SAUCE

2 cups mayonnaise
1/2 cup Dijon mustard
2 teaspoons dry mustard
1 tablespoon finely chopped
dill weed

Combine the mayonnaise, Dijon mustard, dry mustard, and chopped dill, and pour the mixture into a squeeze bottle. Drizzle the sauce onto warm plates in a crisscross design and place one crab cake and one shrimp cake in the center of each plate. Serve hot.

TIMOTHY DEAN'S JUMBO LUMP CRAB CAKES WITH RATATOUILLE

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

This appetizer was inspired by Jean Louis, says Timothy. Their melt-in-your-mouth lightness is derived from the rich, smooth scallop mousse. To complete the presentation, the crab cakes are perched on a bed of ratatouille. Timothy says he adds ham to the vegetable dish so the flavor jumps off.

RATATOUILLE

3 ounces extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 cup diced Virginia ham
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 Italian eggplant, trimmed and cut into 1/4-inch dice
1 yellow onion, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice
1 zucchini, ends trimmed and cut into 1/4-inch dice
1 yellow crookneck squash, ends trimmed and cut into 1/4-inch dice
2 cups clam juice
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/8 freshly ground black pepper

CRAB CAKES

3 ounces scallops
1 cup heavy cream
1 pound jumbo lump crabmeat, picked over for cartilage and bits of shell
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon white pepper
2 tablespoons butter
1/2 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

In a large sauté pan, heat the olive oil and sauté the ham, garlic, eggplant, onion, zucchini, and squash until tender, about 3 to 5 minutes. Add the clam juice and tomato paste. Reduce the heat and simmer 3 to 4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Keep warm, but do not allow to overcook.

Place the scallops in a food processor and puree until smooth. Blend in the cream until smooth. Place in a bowl and mix in the crabmeat. Season with salt and pepper, being careful not to break up the lumps. Form mixture into 3-ounce cakes and place on a buttered baking pan. Bake until golden. Remove and garnish with chopped parsley.

To serve, place about 1/3 cup ratatouille on a serving plate. Top with a crab cake and garnish with chopped parsley. Serve immediately.

FETTUCCINE WITH CHITTERLING SAUSAGE AND ROASTED RED PEPPER VINAIGRETTE

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

Grilled chitterling sausage has a unique flavor that is even more appealing when napped with a tangy roasted red pepper vinaigrette and perched regally atop spicy, fresh homemade noodles.

4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
4 eggs
2 tablespoons olive oil
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon peanut oil
 $2\frac{1}{4}$ pounds Chitterling Sausage, poached (see page 203)
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups Roasted Red Pepper Vinaigrette (see page 81)
6 sprigs fresh basil

Sift the flour and cayenne into a mound on a work surface and make a well in the center. Break the eggs into the well and add the olive oil and salt. Using a fork, beat the eggs and then gradually incorporate them into the flour. When the dough has begun to form, knead it with your hands until it becomes dry and elastic, about 10 to 15 minutes. Add a little more flour, if needed. Form the dough into a ball, dust with flour, and wrap it in plastic. Refrigerate for $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours until ready to roll and cut. (The dough can be refrigerated overnight.)

Divide the dough into four pieces and shape each into a ball. Flatten the pieces with a rolling pin until they are thin enough to pass through the largest setting on a manual pasta machine, then begin rolling the pasta through the machine, dusting with flour between rollings. The dough gets wide as it passes through the machine, so it needs to be folded in thirds lengthwise before each run through the machine. Keep lowering the setting on the rollers until the pasta has been rolled through the thinnest setting. Then cut the pasta into long strips for fettuccine, toss the strips with flour, and allow them to dry for at least 15 to 30 minutes before cooking. Drape them over a broomstick to dry. Repeat with the remaining dough.

Pan-fry the sausage in 1 tablespoon of the peanut oil over medium-high heat for 3 to 4 minutes on all sides. Cut it into 1-inch thick medallions and set aside in a covered dish in a warm oven to keep warm.

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil on high heat. Add the pasta. When the water returns to a full boil after the pasta has been added, cook for 30 seconds, then drain. In each of six serving dishes, arrange the sausage alongside the pasta, nap with Roasted Red Pepper Vinaigrette, and garnish with basil. Serve immediately.

CLIFTON WILLIAMS'S SAUTÉED SHRIMP WITH LINGUINE

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

African-Americans from Carolina to Louisiana love shrimp and some of us grew up with a seafood day every Friday. The marriage between pasta and shrimp in this dish is a delicious one.

24 large shrimp
1/2 cup Shrimp (Shellfish) Stock
(see page 280)
3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks) butter
1 cup finely chopped green
onions, green part only
1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
1/8 teaspoon minced fresh basil
1/8 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
1/8 teaspoon minced fresh oregano
1 cup thinly sliced button
mushrooms
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground
black pepper
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 pound linguine, cooked accord-
ing to package directions
1/8 teaspoon minced fresh parsley

Peel and devein the shrimp. Reserve the shells for the stock and refrigerate the shrimp until needed. Melt 1/2 cup of the butter in a sauté pan over medium heat. Add the green onions and garlic. Add the shrimp and sauté just until they turn pink, about 1 to 2 minutes, shaking the pan. Add the basil, thyme, oregano, and mushrooms and continue to shake the pan. Add the salt, black pepper, and cayenne. Add the Shellfish Stock and simmer 1 minute. Add the linguine and stir. Stir in the remaining 1/4 cup butter and sprinkle with fresh chopped parsley. Arrange the pasta on hot serving plates with four shrimp per plate. Serve immediately.

GRILLED SHRIMP WRAPPED IN SMOKED BACON WITH WHITE BEAN CAKES AND ROASTED RED PEPPER VINAIGRETTE

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

White toast made from French and Italian breads is a common canvas for chefs creating new and unusual appetizers. White bean cakes are a nice change of pace for hosts who are eager for a change. In this dish, Asian seasonings create an alluring backdrop for the shrimp.

24 large shrimp (16 to 20 per pound), peeled and deveined
1/2 cup peanut oil
1/8 teaspoon dark sesame oil
2 tablespoons seasoned rice vinegar
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
12 strips thinly sliced smoked bacon, each strip cut in half crosswise
8 White Bean Cakes, cooked (see page 113)
Roasted Red Pepper Vinaigrette (see page 81)

Put the shrimp into a large bowl. In a separate small bowl, combine the peanut oil, sesame oil, rice vinegar, garlic, and cilantro and mix well. Pour the oil mixture over the shrimp, cover, and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or overnight.

Preheat the grill until white ash forms on top of the coals or preheat the broiler to high. Place the broiler pan under the broiler to heat.

Remove the shrimp from the marinade and discard the marinade. Wrap each shrimp with half a strip of bacon and secure the bacon. Arrange the bacon-wrapped shrimp on long wooden skewers, about six shrimp per skewer. Grill the shrimp on each side over hot coals or under the heated broiler until the bacon browns and the shrimp turn pink, about 3 to 4 minutes. Remove the long skewers.

Drizzle a pool of Roasted Red Pepper Vinaigrette onto a serving plate. Place a hot bean cake on top of the pool and arrange the shrimp around the bean cake. Serve immediately.

GRILLED QUAIL STUFFED WITH COLLARD GREENS WITH CREAMY GRITS

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

Leftover greens are common in African-American refrigerators. For something elegant, serve them to guests stuffed in quail on creamy grits.

6 whole quail, breastbones removed
2 tablespoons olive oil
Salt to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1½ cups Southern Collard Greens (see page 109)
½ cup Chicken Stock (see page 279)
2 tablespoons red currant jelly
¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
2 cups Creamy Grits, cooked (see page 95)

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Rub the quail with the olive oil and season them inside and out with salt and pepper. Place the quail on the rack of a large roasting pan, and roast for 15 to 20 minutes or until juices are clear. Remove the quail from the oven and set aside to cool. Stuff each bird with 4 tablespoons of cooked Southern Collard Greens.

Preheat the grill until white ash forms on top of the coals or preheat the broiler to high. Place the broiler pan under the broiler to heat.

Start reducing the sauce after the bird is in the oven. In a small saucepan, bring the chicken stock, jelly, and red pepper flakes to a boil, then reduce until syrupy or it coats the back of a spoon, about 1 hour. Meanwhile, grill the quail evenly over medium-hot coals, basting with the syrup until thoroughly cooked, 4 to 5 minutes on each side.

Perch each quail on a bed of Creamy Grits and serve immediately.

SAUTÉED SEA SCALLOPS WITH BLACK BEAN CAKES AND CITRUS VINAIGRETTE

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

These feisty bean cakes can be made in advance and reheated while the scallops are cooking. The vinaigrette can be made a few days ahead. The bean cakes can be served with any number of steamed or sautéed vegetables.

24 large sea scallops, connective muscle removed
1/2 tablespoon salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/4 cup all-purpose flour (optional)
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon minced garlic
8 Black Bean Cakes, cooked (see page 112)
2 cups Citrus Vinaigrette (see page 80)
1 tablespoon chopped chives

Season the scallops with the salt and pepper. If you care to use flour, lightly dust the seasoned scallops with it and shake off any excess. Heat the olive oil and butter in a cast-iron skillet or sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the scallops and garlic and sauté for 3 minutes on each side.

Place a bean cake in the center of each serving plate. Arrange the warm scallops around the cakes and nap with Citrus Vinaigrette. Garnish with chopped chives and serve hot.

SAUTÉED FOIE GRAS, CRISP MUSTARD GREENS, WATERCRESS, AND CARAMELIZED RED ONION WITH COUNTRY SMOKED BACON DRESSING

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

Chefs are always looking for new ways to add flair to menus. Adding foie gras, the epitome of aristocracy, takes humble mustard greens to new heights. Be careful not to overcook this dish.

1 tablespoon butter
1 pound fresh foie gras, cut into eight 2-ounce slices
2 bunches mustard greens, washed thoroughly, stems removed, and cut into a broad chiffonade
1 bunch watercress, washed and trimmed
2 strips smoked bacon
8 slices red onion, cut $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon sugar
1 cup Country Smoked Bacon Dressing (see page 78)

Heat a cast-iron skillet over high heat. Add the butter and sauté four slices of foie gras for 30 seconds on each side and keep warm on a plate. Repeat with the remaining foie gras. Mix the mustard greens and watercress in a large serving bowl. In the same skillet, fry the bacon until it is brown and crispy. Remove the bacon and drain it on paper towels. Crumble the bacon into small pieces.

Sauté the red onion in the bacon drippings over medium-high heat. Sprinkle them with the sugar to help caramelize them. Sauté until they begin to caramelize and are almost brown, about 3 to 5 minutes.

Toss the greens with the Country Smoked Bacon Dressing. Arrange the coated greens on individual serving plates and place a piece of foie gras on each plate. Top the pieces of foie gras with onion and crumbled bacon and serve at once.

SAUTÉED SALT MACKEREL, WILD MUSHROOMS, SMITHFIELD HAM, AND OYSTER BROTH

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

My father loved fresh oyster stew; my grandmother adored fried salt mackerel. Fond memories of both inspired me to create this dish. It was a huge hit, served at the first Elegant Taste of Heritage benefit dinner in the spring of 1993 at the Hay-Adams Hotel in Washington, D.C., which was hosted by Chef Patrick Clark.

Four 4-ounce Cured Salted Mackerel fillets (see page 269)
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon paprika
1/2 cup peanut oil
1 cup Sautéed Wild Mushrooms (see page 107)
1/4 pound Smithfield ham, thinly sliced and cut into julienne
2 cups Oyster Broth (see page 282)
1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives

Remove the mackerel from the brine and rinse under cold running water. Place the mackerel in a bowl and cover it with cold water. Allow the fish to soak for at least 12 hours or overnight. Just before use, drain the mackerel and pat dry with paper towels.

In a bowl, mix the flour, pepper, and paprika. Heat the oil in a sauté pan over medium-high heat, dust the mackerel fillets with seasoned flour, and sauté them for 2 to 3 minutes on each side. Remove the fillets from the pan and drain them on paper towels; keep hot in a preheated 200°F.

Place each mackerel fillet in the center of a large soup plate. Place 3 tablespoons of mushrooms and 3 of the oysters reserved from the Oyster Broth around each fillet; top with slivers of Smithfield ham and pour Oyster Broth into each bowl. Garnish with chopped chives and serve immediately.

SAUTÉED SHRIMP AND CREAMY GRITS WITH TASSO TOMATO BROTH

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

When Norm Nixon and Brad Johnson asked me to create the menu for the opening of Georgia, the popular Melrose Avenue restaurant in Los Angeles, I knew it would have to be something really special. This recipe was just for them.

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup clarified butter
48 large shrimp, peeled and deveined
6 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 cups Tasso Tomato Broth (see page 282)
1 cup Creamy Grits (see page 95)
8 sprigs thyme

In a large sauté pan, heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the butter over medium-high heat and sauté 12 shrimp and 2 cloves of the minced garlic on each side until the shrimp turn pink and are firm, about 3 to 4 minutes. Repeat with the remaining shrimp and 2 more cloves of minced garlic. Add half the thyme and pepper, stir in 1 cup of Tasso Tomato Broth, reduce the heat, and simmer for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and keep warm in a double boiler or hot water bath. Repeat with the remaining butter, shrimp, garlic, thyme, pepper, and broth.

To serve, spoon 2 tablespoons of hot Creamy Grits in the center of each heated soup plate; arrange 6 shrimp and some broth around the grits. Spoon extra broth over the shrimp, garnish with a sprig of fresh thyme in the center of the grits, and serve immediately.

SAUTÉED SHRIMP WITH TOMATO BROTH AND PAN-FRIED GRITS

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

This is an original creation I prepared for an Elegant Taste of Heritage benefit dinner held in the spring of 1995 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Washington, D.C. It was a hit with the attendees.

24 large shrimp, peeled and
deveined
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground
black pepper
2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
1/2 cup (1 stick) butter
4 cloves garlic, minced
16 cooked Pan-fried Grits
Triangles (see page 105)
2 cups Tomato Broth
(see page 283)
8 sprigs fresh thyme

Place the shrimp in a bowl and season with the salt, pepper, and thyme.

Heat the butter in a sauté pan over medium-high heat. Sauté half the garlic and 12 shrimp until the shrimp are firm, about 2 to 3 minutes on each side; do not overcook. Set aside and repeat with the second batch of shrimp.

To serve, place a Pan-fried Grits Triangle in the center of each of eight soup plates. Place a second triangle at an angle across the top. Arrange 3 shrimp around the triangles. Spoon the Tomato Broth around the shrimp. Garnish with a sprig of fresh thyme in the center and serve immediately.

SHRIMP CUSTARD WITH ROASTED RED PEPPERS AND REMOULADE SAUCE

MAKES 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

Shrimp remoulade is a standard in New Orleans and there are many versions, of which this is a lighter, more delicate version.

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup ($\frac{1}{2}$ stick) butter
8 large shrimp, peeled, deveined, tails removed, and cut into small pieces
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon minced shallots
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
 $2\frac{3}{4}$ cups milk
4 eggs, beaten
1 teaspoon finely sliced fresh chives
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
2 marinated Roasted Red Peppers (see page 272)
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon red wine vinegar
Salt to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
 $\frac{1}{2}$ head green leaf lettuce, shredded
1 cup Remoulade Sauce (see page 289)
1 tablespoon sliced chives, for garnish

Heat the butter in a sauté pan over medium-high heat. Sauté the shrimp for 2 to 3 minutes, then add the shallots and lemon juice and sauté 1 minute more. Remove from the pan and set aside to cool.

In a medium-size saucepan, bring the milk just to a boil. When the milk is scalded, turn off the heat and cover the pan so the milk will remain hot.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk the eggs until they are light and just frothy; whisk in the chives, salt, and cayenne. Gradually whisk the hot milk into the mixture, beating well.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease six 4-ounce soufflé molds, or any nonstick 3- to 4-ounce cup or dish.

Divide the shrimp evenly among the six soufflé molds, then pour in the custard. Set the molds in a 13 × 9-inch baking pan; pour very hot water 1-inch deep into the pan. Put the baking pan in the oven and bake the custards until a thin-bladed knife inserted in center comes out clean, about 35 to 45 minutes. Remove the soufflé molds from the water, cool, and refrigerate until ready to serve. They will keep 1 to 2 days in the refrigerator.

Cut the roasted peppers into strips. In a large bowl, combine the olive oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Pour the mixture over the roasted pepper strips and refrigerate until needed. They will keep 1 to 2 days in the refrigerator.

To serve, place shredded lettuce in the center of six serving plates. Unmold the chilled custards onto the center of each plate. Spoon 2 tablespoons of Remoulade Sauce over each custard, arrange the marinated peppers around each plate, and garnish with fresh chives.

SMOKED CATFISH WITH CORN CAKES, CREOLE SOUR CREAM, AND HOT CHILI OIL

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

I have always enjoyed smoked fish of all kinds—salmon, trout, sturgeon, and catfish. This was my contribution to the Black Culinarian Alumni Chapter of the Culinary Institute of America benefit dinner, held at the Loew's Hotel in New York City in February 1995. The smoked catfish along with the corn cakes stole the show. This version of smoked catfish is juicy and moist and has a real smoky flavor.

CORN CAKES

3 cups fresh or frozen sweet corn kernels
1/2 medium onion, finely chopped
1 cup milk
3 eggs
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
3/4 cup yellow cornmeal
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons melted butter
3 green onions, finely sliced
1 cup corn oil

TO FINISH THE DISH

2 pounds Smoked Catfish, thinly sliced (see page 273)
2 cups Creole Sour Cream (see page 287), poured into a squeeze bottle
1/2 tablespoon hot chili oil
1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives

In a blender, puree the corn, onion, milk, and eggs until smooth. Pour the mixture into a mixing bowl and whisk in the flour, cornmeal, salt, and pepper. Stir in the butter and green onions.

Lightly oil a griddle preheated to a medium-high heat. Ladle about 2 tablespoons of the batter for each cake onto the hot griddle. Cook until lightly brown, turn, and repeat on the other side. Keep warm, covered, on a plate in a preheated 200°F oven.

To serve place 3 corn cakes on each serving plate near the center. Arrange 4 ounces of sliced catfish on top. Drizzle Creole Sour Cream in an attractive zigzag pattern over the entire plate, and place 3 drops of hot chili oil around the plate. Sprinkle with chopped chives.

CHEF'S TIP

Look for hot chili oil in Asian markets or in the Oriental section of your supermarket.

JOHN HARRISON'S CLAMS CASINO

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

Clams are among John's favorite shellfish and he says this dish is a good example of how a little bit of the country can spice up any meal.

*1/4 cup (1/2 stick) butter
1/2 cup diced onion
1/2 cup diced green pepper
1/4 teaspoon paprika
1/2 cup diced pimiento
2 dozen cherrystone clams,
washed
6 slices slab bacon, cut into
quarters*

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Heat the butter in a sauté pan and sauté the onion, pepper, and paprika about 2 minutes. Stir in the pimiento and set aside. Open clams, discarding top shells and removing the muscle. Arrange clams on a baking pan and top with about 1 tablespoon of the sautéed vegetables. Place a piece of bacon on top of the vegetables. Bake until bacon is browned, about 20 minutes.

CHEF'S TIP

This dish is wonderful with a squeeze of fresh lemon juice.

STEAMED LITTLENECK CLAMS WITH CLAM NECTAR, FRIZZLED LEEKS, AND HOT PEPPER BUTTER SAUCE

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

Steamed shellfish always make a nice first course and these spicy clams are no exception to the rule. Be sure you discard any clams that arrive unopened. Hot Pepper Butter Sauce is also great with steamed cracked crabs.

3 cups julienned leeks, white part only
1 quart clam juice
1 cup sauternes
8 dozen littleneck clams, scrubbed

HOT PEPPER BUTTER SAUCE

1 cup clarified butter
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Frank's Red Hot Sauce or other Louisiana hot pepper sauce
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh parsley
2 cups peanut oil

Chill the leeks in ice water until ready to use.

Heat a stainless-steel pot over medium-high heat until hot, then add 2 cups of the clam juice, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the sauternes, and 4 dozen clams. Cover and cook for 6 to 8 minutes, shaking the pot so the clams cook evenly. As the clams open, remove them immediately to a heated bowl to keep them warm. (Be sure to remove the clams as soon as they open; they become chewy and tough if overcooked.) Repeat with the remaining juice, wine, and clams. Strain the cooking broth and pour a little in each heated serving bowl. Place the bowl in a preheated 200°F oven for 10 minutes before serving.

For sauce, in a blender, puree the butter, hot sauce, lemon juice, and parsley until the mixture reaches an even consistency. Place in a saucepan and boil over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat and keep warm.

Drain the leeks and dry them on paper towels. Heat the oil in a skillet over high heat and deep-fry the leeks until frizzled, crispy, and crunchy. Drain the frizzled leeks on paper towels. Place a mound of leeks in the center of the clams. Pass the Hot Pepper Butter Sauce at the table.

