

CULINARY ADVENTURES



BRUCE KONOWALOV

Creole, Cajun cuisine sizzles in New Orleans

All the way to the airport, I couldn't get that old Hank Williams song out of my head. "Good-bye Joe, me gotta go, me oh my-a. Tonight I'm gonna see my ma cher amio, jambalaya, crawfish pie..."

I'm really excited because I'm on my way to New Orleans for the first time. Since I attended culinary school in the mid-1970s, the "Crescent City" so named because it sits on a big crescent-shaped bend of the Mississippi River, was a culinary destination that eluded me.

Popularity grew

For years I heard and knew about the famous restaurants like Brennan's, Arnaud's, Galatoire's and of course K-Paul's, Paul Prudhomme's restaurant that first spurred national attention to Cajun cuisine.

"Chef Paul," with his down-home sense of humor and his innate sense of good cooking, inspired me to learn more about American regional cuisine.

Once a year Chef de Chefs, and an affiliated group, the Food Educators Network, meet at back-to-back conferences, attracting culinary educators, chefs and industry professionals from all over the country. I attended five days of seminars and demonstrations from the leading culinary educators, chefs and top industry leaders.

Prudhomme, Allan Sussor, Stephen Pyles and John Foley were just a few of the nationally renowned chefs who appeared at educational seminars and demonstrations. Topics ranged from "The Taste of Texas" to "Hot, Sour, Salty, and Sweet: The Cuisine of the Mekong River."

I asked a few of the speakers about their views of the cuisine in New Orleans.

Creole is more refined

Jessica Harris, a food historian and professor at New York University, spoke about Creole cooking of yesterday and today. Creole has various definitions, but the term refers to American-born descendants of the French and Spanish. Creole also refers to the cuisine of the city, a more refined, sophisticated cuisine than the country cuisine called "Cajun."

Creole cooking was influenced by the French, Spanish, Native Americans, Italians and African American slaves, while Cajuns were the descendants of French Canadians who were forced to move from their colony of Acadia in Nova Scotia.

New Orleans is a "Mecca of food, on par with other great restaurant cities like San Francisco and New York, but with its own distinct culinary traditions." Harris said. One of her favorite restaurants was the UpperLine, a modern Creole restaurant. UpperLine's updated versions of classic Creole fare were greatly praised.

Ren Smith, the chef of the UpperLine, cooked us a delicious duck and andouille sausage etouffee. Etouffee, a term that means "smothered," can be found in different versions all over New Orleans.

Chef Smith, a soft-spoken gentleman and a man of simple tastes, said that when he went out to eat he often dined at the Piccadilly Cafeteria where there was "something there for everyone to eat."

Trip was legendary

When the seminars were done for the day, I tried some of those legendary places like Brennan's and venerable old restaurants like Mother's, a favorite of locals and tourists alike. I ate the famous New Orleans poor boy

Please see **CULINARY**, D2

LOOKING AHEAD

- Culinary Extravaganza
- Kitchen Kapers



The final cut: Mike Smith, a meat cutter at Holiday Market in Canton, cuts up pork to make bratwurst. Smith creates more than 25 pounds that day to sell to customers for the following Sunday's Super Bowl parties.

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK
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About 12 years ago I talked with a state lawmaker about a heated battle over a legislative bill. "Well, you know, legislation is like watching sausage being made," he said.

I was stunned, and sat silently for a moment. "Wait a minute...I love sausage," I said. "Why is making it so bad?"

"Well, haven't you ever seen sausage being made? It's gross and it isn't pretty," he replied. I think he was wrong. I'd like to turn his question on its ear: Did you ever watch lawmakers study legislation? It rolls through the grinder in committee after committee, hearing after hearing, roll call after roll call...

Now that's ugly. Politicians really should quit bad-mouthing sausage by juxtaposing it with politics. Sausage tastes pretty darn good if it's made right. (Besides, you'll never



Linking spices: Kevin Peterson feeds a sausage grinder to create the links.

see a butcher receive a 36 percent pay raise. The meat markets would be out of business in no time.)

Crossing the lines

Anyway you slice it, smoke it, fry it or grill it, sausage is a wonderful mixture of pork, garlic and various spice blends including marjoram or cayenne pepper or fennel or cumin or Hungarian paprika or coriander — and on and on and on.

John Pardington, owner of Holiday Market in Canton, calls sausage "comfort food." He loves its versatility and tradition.

"You can use it with spaghetti sauce, or take it to tailgate parties with green pepper and onion," Pardington said.

Meat cutter Mike Smith has made sausage for 25 years. "You can make a lot of different varieties," Smith said. "Almost every ethnic group has a sausage."

It may be the only food that truly transcends ethnic groups. The Poles grind pork and garlic for kielbasa, Italians create their fennel and pepper mix, the Spanish link chorizo, French-influenced Louisianians hit andouille with pepper, Germans love their brats.

My trip to Holiday Market, and the smell of the sausage inspired me. As luck would have it, a new cookbook on sausage arrived at about the same time in the mail. So I spent a recent Saturday afternoon chilling with sausage, just me and the grinder.

Homemade is healthier

Bruce Aidells and Denis Kelly outline craft of sausage-making in the *Bruce Aidells' Complete Sausage Book*. (Ton Speed Press, 2000, \$21.95) with easy-to-follow recipes. (See related story.)



I read the first chapter on sausage preparation and made two of the selections — the fresh kielbasa and Italian sweet fennel sausage. This wasn't my first sausage making venture, it was probably my fourth.

Sausages made by big meat companies, while delicious, contain far too much fat and sodium for my taste. When I look at how "white" those links are, I cringe at the fat content. I limit myself to one sausage, and almost always feel cheated.

Homemade sausage, and sausage sold and made, at many local markets, contains significantly less fat. Homemade sausage is wonderful, and economical to make. The pork butt roast used to make it is inexpensive, and you can create several links to freeze and enjoy later.

I chopped two 5-pound Boston butt roasts into large long strips, and removed a good portion of the fat for a good mix of about 85 percent meat to 15 percent fat. It might have even contained less fat than that. I coarsely ground the pork, then worked the spices in by hand.

As the first scents of pork, garlic and marjoram in one bowl, and fennel and pepper spices in the other, began to fill the air, I knew I was on to something special.

This truly is the Lord's bounty. Amen.

Please see **SAUSAGE**, D3

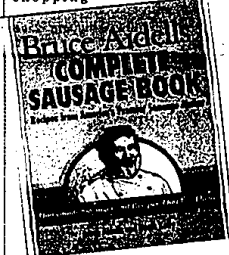
Cookbook rolls out favorites

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK
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Bruce Aidells' Complete Sausage Book by Bruce Aidells and Denis Kelly highlights some of the best ethnic and American fare that crosses nationalities and neighborhoods.

The authors touch a chord of Americans. Who doesn't remember Sunday mornings with sausages pan-fried, coffee brewing and eggs scrambled with toast?

"Making sausage at home is not difficult or overly complicated, and it can be a lot of fun," the authors write. "There's something about chopping



the meat and mixing in the spices, stuffing the sausage into casings, and tying off the plump links that is, in a word, satisfying.

"When you prepare your own linguica or andouille, chorizo or boudin, and the rich aromas drift through the house, the effort seems like nothing. You join uncounted generations of sausage makers who have made the world, and its food, a bit more lively and interesting."

Interesting, indeed, as is the book. Simple recipes with easy-to-find ingredients make this book a cornerstone for any lover of links or ethnic foods, or folks who enjoy escaping to the kitchen to work with their hands a little bit.

The book offers tips and tech-
Please see **BOOK**, D3

Create a low-fat version of fisherman's stew



MURIEL WAGNER

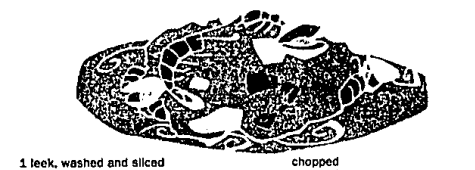
MAIN DISH
MIRACLE

Bouillabaisse literally means a "fisherman's stew." My version features shellfish because of its low-fat, low saturated fat and low calorie profile. They're also a good source of Omega-3 fatty acids that lower triglycerides.

Use firm fish like halibut or monkfish or shellfish. I've added lots of veggies for flavor and — of course — nutrition.

EATING YOUNGER BOUILLABAISSE (FISHERMAN'S STEW)

- 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 (46 ounce) can fat-free, sodium-reduced chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 (28 ounce) can tomatoes and juice



- 1 leek, washed and sliced
- 6 small onions, peeled and halved
- 1 tablespoon chopped garlic
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 3 ribs celery, washed and sliced
- 1 (12 ounce) package baby carrots, washed
- 1 parsnip, washed, peeled and sliced
- 1 fennel bulb, washed and sliced
- 6 medium redskin potatoes, washed, but not peeled
- 1/4 cup fennel fronds (from a fennel bulb), washed and chopped
- 1/4 cup fresh dill, washed and chopped
- chopped
- 12 ounces shrimp, shelled and deveined
- 12 ounces bay scallops
- 1 pound king crab, divided into 6 portions
- Fresh ground pepper to taste

Simmer until vegetables are tender. Add seafood. Simmer until shellfish are cooked (about 2 to 3 minutes). Do not overcook.

Place one potato in each deep bowl and divide vegetables and shellfish between six bowls. Divide the broth between the bowls. Garnish with the reserved fennel fronds and dill. The broth improves after standing overnight in the refrigerator. Serves 6.

Nutritional Information: Calories, 285; fat, 3.2 g; saturated fat, .8 g; cholesterol, 160 mg; sodium, 475 mg. **Food Exchanges:** 3 lean meat, 3 vegetables

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