

Taste

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Inside:

Hearty soup recipe

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FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD



RICK HALBERG

Simmering soup warms and soothes

What is it about soup that we have always loved? Is it the slow process of creating soup that gives it its magic? The warmth with which a pot of simmering soup fills a home? I think it's these things and a whole lot more. Soup is the food we want when we are not feeling well, it is the food we reach for after coming in from the cold, what we make when we want to use up vegetables that aren't quite fresh anymore. It is the quintessential "one pot meal."

Chicken soup

In my home, chicken soup has always had a magical medicinal quality. You may have heard the term "Jewish Penicillin." There have actually been scientific (I think) studies on the healing qualities of chicken soup. Although I'm not sure what the results were, it has always worked for us.

Soup is something that even the least proficient cook can have some success with. My wife, Karen, who is not particularly well known for her cooking, does beat with food when she puts it all into one pot and adds some liquid. It can be as simple as that, or as complex as clarifying a difficult consomme. Soup can be made from just a couple of simple ingredients for a carrot soup or a long list of things to make a wonderful Minestrone.

Soup can be found in all cuisine, in all parts of the world. They can be clear, pureed, chunky, vegetarian, cheesy, with beans, pasta, rice, thick, thin, healthy, or loaded with fat. Wow, and they can all great.

Soup can be a light appetizer or a hearty pot pie meal. You can prepare soups ahead and freeze them, eat them in a meal. You can make really elegant soups finished at the last minute for a truly fine dinner. They can be the most economical of meals or made with a heavy of fancy, expensive ingredients put together to impress your guests.

We are serving a particularly elegant and seasonal soup now at my restaurant Emily's, it is a silky puree of butternut squash that we serve with a rich yet light porcini mushroom and juniper infused flan with a few drops of cranberry coulis for added zing and color.

Now soup is finding new fame as shops on the East and West coasts open to specialize in just soups. The sitcom "Seinfeld" is widely given credit for this food phenomenon because of a mention of a zany soup shop owner in one of its episodes.

"Newsweek" magazine is calling soup "hotter than coffee." I think we have been waiting for a place to sit with friends, or alone and enjoy something warm and more fulfilling than coffee. I think it takes us back to our childhood when we were fed warm, soft food by a loving parent. Soup is more than food, it's nurturing and can be either healthy or give the illusion of health. They say bread is the staff of life, I think that bread was invented just to "soup" up soup.

Resolutions

Some early New Year's Resolutions. I will...

Continue to support as many small, independent businesses as possible, for if I don't all too soon we will have left will be mega-bookstores, super-sized restaurants and drug stores that sell everything except what I'd expect.

Try to instill the spirit of Slow Food to as many people as I can. Aren't we in too much of a hurry anyway?

Search out as many local food sources as I can for my restaurant, and encourage these people to use self-sustaining means of agriculture. After all we have only one Mother Earth.

Attempt to give some real quality time to one or two causes that really need the help.

May you and yours have a safe and happy new year!

See recipe inside

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Got Fit for the New Millennium

PIPER-HEIDSIECK'S
RED-HOT LOOK
HAS
HOLIDAY
APPEAL

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEAID
SPECIAL WRITERS

Sporting a stunning new red label, Champagne Piper-Heidsieck makes a dramatic holiday presentation. Pouring this champagne through the holidays will get you attention not only for the unique, contemporary look of the bottle, but for the quality of the wine.

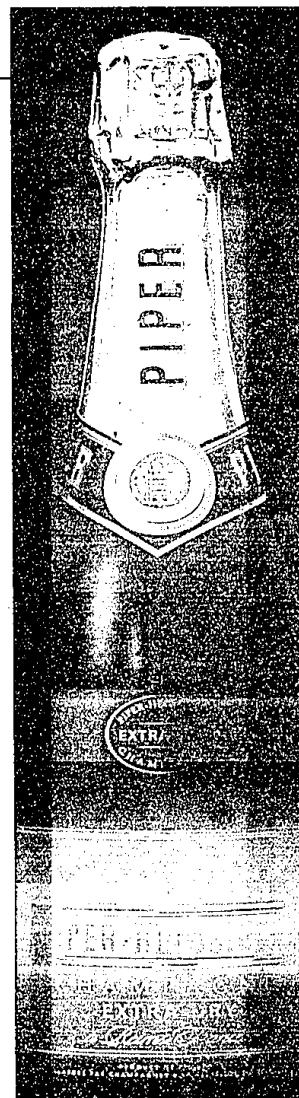
If you've purchased champagne as a holiday gift before, then searched around for an attractive bag, you'll appreciate that with a bottle of Piper-Heidsieck you get the bag free! Offered in red, green and grey, it comes with an elegant gold cord. It's inclined, to keep a chilled bottle cold for up to three hours.

For more than two centuries, connoisseurs have regarded Piper-Heidsieck as one of the great champagnes. Its presence in our market has been downplayed, but if its quality, red hot packaging and great pricing you're looking for, then Piper-Heidsieck fills the bill. Over the years, Piper-Heidsieck has maintained respect for centuries-old champagne traditions while tuning into the times with a sense of fashion and style.

Both the Piper-Heidsieck Brut \$32 and Extra Dry \$32 sport the red hot look. Because of the exuberance of both, they can be killed as extrovert champagnes. Fresh and fruity upfront, the Brut finishes with crispness, elegance, toasty notes and the hallmark of a great champagne, creaminess. If you prefer more fruit characters from start to finish, then choose the Extra Dry.

Piper-Heidsieck Brut Rosé \$32 has an undeniably attractive salmon-pink color that is most compelling with food. If you're serving turkey for a holiday dinner, make a cornbread stuffing and include dried cranberries as an ingredient. The match with the Rosé champagne will get rave reviews.

Piper's California sparkling wine program Piper-Sonoma has two wines, lower in price, yet very flavorful values. A Brut and a Blanc de Noir



are both \$18.

We didn't get stuck on the Heidsieck name, but in trying to give you different options this holiday, we rediscovered both Piper-Heidsieck and Champagne Charles Heidsieck. It, too, is an established champagne house, dating to the 1850s. There's a marked youthfulness in "Cham-

Holiday treat: Champagne Piper-Heidsieck decked out for the holidays in new red hot packaging.

CHAMPAGNE PICKS

In addition to the champagnes and sparkling wines singled out in the wine column, we also highly recommend:

■ French champagnes
Champagne Bollinger Special Cuvée Brut \$36; 1989 Bollinger Grande Année \$70; 1988 Bollinger Rosé \$84
Champagne Louis Roederer: Brut Premier \$43

■ Sparkling wines from California
S. Anderson: Napa Valley Brut \$25 and Blanc de Noirs \$23

Iron Horse: 1994 Wedding Cuvée \$28.50; 1992 Brut \$26.50; 1992 Brut Rosé \$28.50; 1992 Vérité Anis \$26.50

J Wine Company: 1993 J Sparkling Wine \$26
Roederer Estate: Anderson Valley Brut \$18

pagne Charlie." And this is unusual, since the Charles Heidsieck Brut Reserve \$43 typically includes a high percentage of reserve wines in the blend. This distinction also makes it a more expensive bubbly.

Compared to other champagne houses, Charles Heidsieck is small and concentrates on quality. Uncompromisingly, it holds back stocks equivalent to no less than four years' sales. This ensures a high degree of dissolved carbon dioxide in the wine, evidenced by the small bubbles that ever so delicately rise in the glass and break with a silent fizzness in your mouth.

To slow champagne off, serve it well-chilled in tall, slender glasses that are either flute or tulip shaped.

Several premium spirits have impressed us lately. Their enjoyment during the holiday season will only enhance a festive atmosphere.

■ Johnnie Walker Gold Label \$67.50, produced in limited quantities, is a skillful blend of 16 renowned whiskies, such as Clynelish, Royal Lochnagar, Cardhu and Tullisker, each matured no less than 18 years. Rich yet refined with a smooth silk finish, it is a truly inspired blend.

■ The Glenrothes \$57, is one of the finest Speyside single malt Scotch whiskies we have tasted. The Glenrothes, 1982 vintage, was selected by the distillers of the world-famous Cutty-Sark Scotch whisky to be offered in a strictly limited quantity. It is a whisky connoisseurs single malt with elegant roasted grain aromas and delicate peat notes that only improve when sipped by a warming fire!

■ If you enjoy cigars, Hine Cigar Reserve Cognac \$99 creates a unique taste partnership with a fine hand-rolled cigar. Aged an average of 15-20 years, the various cognacs in the Cigar Reserve blend come from the finest Cognac districts. Rich woody, hazelnut and spicy elements of the full-bodied cognac pair favorably with tobacco leaf.

Look for Focus on Wine on the first and third Sunday of the month in Taste. To leave a voice mail message for the Heads, dial (323) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.

Chef wants to put a little spice in your life

SPECIALTY FOODS



Food is easy for Chef Zachary Smith, and he wants to make it easier for you.

"I've been cooking all my life," said Smith who has created six gourmet spice blends — Mediterranean Magic, Soft Herbs, Blackening Spice, Chelsea Spice, Zippy's Gumbo and Shana Spice, which he says will turn "ordinary foods into extraordinary, and boring into brilliant with just a shake."

"These spice blends are like the difference between a Cadillac and a Neon," he said. "Spices can help people change unhealthy habits. It's a lighter way of cooking."

Smith is an artist who uses spices to color his food presentations, and his goal is to help you do the same. Each spice blend reminds him of special people in his life.

Chelsea Spice, a blend of paprika, garlic, onion, chili pepper, fennel, white and black pepper is named after his daughter. "She's the most precious thing in my world," said Smith. "She would come into the kitchen while I was blending spices and wanted to help."

Chelsea Spice is a "colorful spice, decorative as well as flavorful and makes pale dishes more attractive."

The Shana Spice is like little girls — "sugar and spice and everything nice." This dessert spice blend, was named in honor of Shana's friend, Shana, who is the daughter of Robin, "a guy I've known since high school," said Smith. Chelsea and Shana designed the

colorful label with help from Smith.

"Ziggy" is Smith's nickname, and his spice is a blend of 28 different peppers, spices and herbs that's best used in gumbo's jambalayas, sauces and soups.

Soft Herbs — a blend of chives, dill, parsley, tarragon, chervil and cilantro enhanced the flavor of many dishes including chicken, fish, sauces, and omelets.

Try Mediterranean Magic — oregano, basil, rosemary, thyme, marjoram, anise and parsley with vegetables, soups, stews and chile Marinara sauce.

Blackening Spice — Cayenne Pepper, white and black pepper, kosher salt, thyme, rosemary, marjoram, chili powder, paprika and sage, was the blend that started Chef Zachary's Gourmet Blended Spice.

One day they ran out of blackening spice at One23 in Gross Pointe Farms where he was the executive chef, so Smith went home did some research, and made up his own version. Blackening Spice was a key ingredient in an appetizer he created "Blackened Trio" — shrimp, chicken and beef seasoned with blackening spice, sautéed in butter and served with a salad of melon, rice and fresh mint. It was a best-seller, and before long, customers and friends were asking him to mix up some blackening spice for them to use at home.

In 1995, after hearing over and over that he should bottle his spices to make a few pennies, Smith decided to go into the gourmet spice business.

"I grew up using seasoning spices and things like Lawry's," said Smith. The idea of making a product



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACQUELINE

Spicy: Chef Zachary Smith is helping people put a little more spice in their lives with his flavorful blends.

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