

In Good Taste

BY VERA STEWART
RECIPES COURTESY
OF CHEF TODD
SCHAFER



Lauren Carnes

One of the most rewarding aspects of my 40-year career is working with the best chefs

from across the country as we craft unforgettable experiences for clients during Masters week. Recently, I was fortunate enough to work with a fine example of this brilliant talent — and I didn't have to go very far.

Cooking with Todd Schafer, who is chef and owner of Abel Brown Southern Kitchen & Oyster Bar located in Surrey Center (and almost directly across from the VeryVera Cottage), was such a treat. I've known Todd for decades and have watched his passion for food and hospitality grow in abundance. He's noted as one of the most successful chefs and restaurant owners in Augusta. He recently joined me in my kitchen studio and shared his ideas for new twists on classic creations, something I often enjoy doing with my own recipes.

One of the first details I learned about Todd as we cooked together is how his love for cooking started at a young age, much like my experience. Not only was he inspired by his mother's love of cooking,



Dusty Jackson

but he shared with me how he caught the “culinary bug” early on as a young student, thanks to Lawrence Bennett, head of the vocational department at Westside High School. Mr. Bennett was instrumental in Todd’s early learning experience, providing much-needed support and encouragement. To this day, the two remain good friends due to his mentorship.

From an early age, Todd knew the importance of a balanced plate and enticing presentation when creating dishes. He explained how the symmetrical structure of plating, something still seen with his dishes today, came to him naturally.



Courtesy of Todd Schafer

Todd continued his culinary journey after high school to work as an apprentice at The Cloister at Sea Island, then attended the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. After graduating, cooking took him all over the country, from Atlanta to Washington D.C., then Napa Valley. After time away, he decided to plant roots back home, opening his first Augusta restaurant in 1999. It was an easy decision since he loved the sense of community in the Garden City, the great weather and getting put on the international stage every year in April.

As Todd and I continued cooking in my studio, we remarked on how much Augusta has grown into a city for hospitality and entertaining in recent years. While the city’s reputation for hospitality is mainly due to the Masters Tournament, Todd recognizes it as an essential component of his restaurant’s success. He works hard to convey that same hospitable spirit for guests at Abel Brown Southern Kitchen & Oyster Bar — no matter what week of the year it is.

Developing a fine dining destination is an art, but cooking alongside Todd made me realize how skilled he is at what he does. I enjoyed our time together in the kitchen — I learned what inspired his early cooking days and continues to inspire him now. I’m privileged to share the three recipes that he showed me. I know you’ll enjoy them for your own entertaining. As you make his recipes, it won’t take long to realize why he is such a strong force in the Augusta culinary community and beyond.

CHOCOLATE CROISSANT BREAD PUDDING

Nothing warms the heart like a bowl of bread pudding, but Chef Schafer’s twist on this timeless dessert brings you the ultimate comfort food. While most recipes call for sandwich bread or thick bread like brioche, Todd adds his own twist by using chocolate croissants as the main focus. Topping it off with chocolate chips at the end satisfies any chocolate lover’s dream.

PREP: 15 minutes

COOK TIME: 60 minutes

SERVES: 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 6 large egg yolks
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 cup milk
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 vanilla bean
- 3 chocolate croissants, cut into small cubes
- 16 high-quality, dark chocolate chips

DIRECTIONS

1. Place egg yolks and sugar in a large bowl and whisk together. Set aside.
2. Scrape the vanilla bean into a saucepan with the milk and heavy cream. Bring the mixture to a boil, then slowly whisk into the egg mixture. Go slowly to avoid curdling. Strain mixture and chill in an ice bath until cold.
3. Preheat oven to 375 F. Toast the croissant cubes on a baking sheet until lightly toasted, approximately 6 minutes.
4. Place the toasted croissant cubes in a shallow baking dish.
5. Lower the oven temperature to 275 F.
6. Pour the chilled cream mixture over the croissants to cover.
7. Dot with the chocolate chips. Bake at 275 F until set (about an hour).



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HOE CAKES WITH PIMENTO CHEESE

This recipe pairs a hoe cake, an iconic Southern classic, with Chef Schafer's select recipe for pimento cheese. Traditionally a flat cornbread, the hoe cake makes a perfect, sturdy vessel for the creamy pimento cheese. The result is a hearty appetizer that you can prepare outside on the grill or inside on a griddle, and it works great for large or small crowds.

Prep: 45 minutes
Cook Time: 60 minutes
Serves: 6 people

INGREDIENTS

Hoe Cakes

20 oz. coarse white cornmeal
7 oz. white cornmeal
5 oz. all-purpose flour
3/4 cup sugar
3/4 tsp. baking soda
3/4 tsp. baking powder
1 Tbsp. salt
2 large eggs
5 cups buttermilk, more if needed
1/3 cup melted butter
1/4 cup bacon drippings
jalapeños, roasted, peeled and diced,
to taste

Pimento Cheese

1 1/4 lbs. sharp cheddar cheese
1 1/4 lbs. Gruyère cheese
8 oz. cream cheese, at room
temperature
3/4 cup Duke's® mayonnaise
3 Tbsp. lemon juice
1 1/2 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
3 red peppers, seeded, roasted and
chopped
salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

Hoe Cakes

1. Mix together all the dry ingredients and set aside.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer, beat together the eggs and buttermilk for one minute.
3. Slowly add the dry ingredients until just combined. Add the melted butter and bacon drippings.
4. Add the roasted jalapeños to the batter and stir. Add more buttermilk if the batter is too thick.
5. In a cast iron skillet, cook on medium high heat for 4 minutes per side. Remove to a paper towel lined plate when done.

Pimento Cheese

1. Using a box grater, grate the sharp cheddar and Gruyère cheeses on the medium grate. Set aside.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the cream cheese, then add the mayonnaise, lemon juice and Worcestershire sauce; continue mixing until smooth.
3. Add peppers and beat for one minute on medium speed.
4. Fold the grated cheeses into the mixture.
5. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

ROASTED HALIBUT T-BONE WITH RICE GRITS

For those looking for a wow factor with their entree, the roasted halibut T-bone with rice grits will be a dish your guests will not soon forget. The recipe starts with beautiful halibut T-bones and incorporates many ingredients known throughout the Southeast. The rice grits offer a delicious accompaniment while soaking up all the goodness from the baby tomatoes and other fresh ingredients.

Prep Time: 45 minutes

Cook Time: 60 minutes

Serves: 4 people

INGREDIENTS

Shrimp Jus

- 8 oz. bacon, cubed
- 8 oz. Andouille sausage, cubed
- 1 fennel bulb, diced
- 1 large onion, diced
- 10 garlic cloves, diced
- 3 shallots, diced
- 2 bunches tarragon, finely chopped
- 1 bunch thyme, finely chopped
- 1-6 oz. can tomato paste
- 2 cups cream sherry
- 8 cups shrimp stock
- 4 oz. cold butter, cubed

Halibut

- 4 halibut T-bones (12-14 oz. each)
- clarified butter, as needed
- 1/2 cup Andouille sausage, diced
- 1 cup butter beans
- 1/4 cup pickled okra, cut into small slices
- 1 cup boiled peanuts, shelled
- 1/4 cup pickled pearl onions
- 10 baby tomatoes, blanched and peeled
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 1 freshly squeezed lemon
- fresh tarragon
- shrimp jus, for serving
- Parmesan cheese, for garnish

Brent Cline



DIRECTIONS

Shrimp Jus

1. Cook the bacon and sausage over medium heat until the fat begins to render.
2. Add the vegetables and herbs, cooking slowly until they begin to gain color.
3. Add the tomato paste and gently brown; add the sherry to deglaze the pan. Reduce by half, then add the shrimp stock. Bring to a simmer and cook for 1 hour.
4. Strain the mixture through a fine strainer, discarding all strained items. Reduce the sauce by half over medium heat.
5. Whisk in the butter until smooth. Set aside.

Halibut

1. Preheat the oven to broil.
2. In a very hot cast iron skillet with clarified butter, sear the halibut on one side for 1-2 minutes until golden brown.
3. Flip the halibut and place in the preheated oven for 4 minutes.
4. Sauté the Andouille sausage until warm and gently warm the butter beans, tomatoes, peanuts, onions and okra.
5. Remove the halibut from the oven, and add the butter, tarragon and lemon juice to the pan to baste the fish.
6. To serve, place the halibut on top of prepared rice grits, or side of choice, and spoon the vegetables over the top. Drizzle the shrimp jus over top.