

THE PERFECT BLEND

Culture and cuisine come together for Manny Augello

The many influences that combine to create South Louisiana's distinct culture make it vivid and bright. French, Spanish and southern roots have yielded a warm, inviting and sometimes spicy Cajun and Creole culture. And the same can be said for the food, particularly around Mardi Gras.

Manny Augello, sous chef at Jolie's Louisiana Bistro, knows all about cultural combination. Born in Sicily, his family moved to Louisiana and got into the restaurant business.

"My dad taught me basically what you'd learn in culinary school," he said. "I credit my dad with the basics of cooking. But the heart and soul came from my mom."

Although Augello majored in criminal justice, his passion is food. He's been a dishwasher, line cook and head cook and considers Chef Todd Barrios his mentor. He worked at Antoine's Riverside Restaurant before Jolie's owner Steve Santillo tapped him as sous chef under Executive Chef Paul Mudge.

As for the menu he prepares at Jolie's, he says it's a "reflection on the culture of New Orleans, but in a way you've never had it before." He describes it as classic French and Creole cooking but with lighter methods. Some of those twists on traditional items include pork rilletes with onion marmalade and duck confit crepes.

"We concentrate on creating a unique blend by capturing the essence of the classic New Orleans French and Creole cooking and combining that with seasonal ingredients," he said.

But it isn't just French and Creole culture that have an influence on local food. You can combine it with Asian, German and Italian cuisines (and cultures, for that matter). For example, Augello suggests serving black eyed peas with sauerkraut and boudin. But one of his favorite cuisines is British.

"The British, in my opinion, are the embodiment of what it means to look inward into one's own culture. They are true foragers of their land, preferring what they

Alligator Pie with Cane Syrup Sticky Cabbage and Pepper Relish Creole Cream Cheese

Alligator Pie Filling:

1 cup chopped alligator meat
1/2 cup seasoned flour
1 tablespoon garlic
1 tablespoon parsley
2 tablespoons oil
1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper
1/4 cup shallots, chopped
1/4 cup bell pepper, chopped
1/2 cup Madeira wine
1/4 cup chicken demiglace
Kosher salt to taste
Egg yolk, beaten
Pie dough

Toss alligator in seasoned flour. Meanwhile, heat oil in a sauté pan on medium heat. Shake off excess flour from alligator meat and add to pan along with the garlic. Stir, and add shallots and bell pepper. Once vegetables begin to sweat, add crushed red pepper and deglaze with Madeira. Scrape bottom of pan, and finish with chicken demiglace, parsley and season with kosher salt. Spread mixture onto a plate and allow it to cool to room temperature.

Roll out pie dough to about 1/8-inch thick, using plenty of flour so that it does

not stick. Cut out 5-inch rounds, filling each round with about 2 tablespoons of alligator mixture. Fold into half crescent, brush with beaten egg yolk and bake at 350 degrees for approximately 10 minutes.

Cane Syrup Sticky Cabbage

1/2 cup cubed pancetta, thick cut
1/4 red onion, thinly sliced
1/2 small head of red cabbage, thinly sliced
1/4 cup malt vinegar
1/2 cup cane syrup
Kosher salt to taste

In a hot sauté pan, add pancetta, stirring constantly till brown and crunchy. A good amount of fat will collect in the pan as the pancetta cooks. Drain most of it out, leaving about 2 tablespoons in the pan. Turn heat down to medium and add onion cooking them till they become translucent. Add cabbage and toss everything together. Keep tossing until cabbage begins to wilt.

Deglaze pan with malt vinegar and add cane syrup. Turn heat to low and cook till cabbage is withered, and the liquid reduced to coat the back of a spoon. Season with kosher salt.

know to be good about the nature around them over exotic imports," he said.

And Augello has respect for those ingredients and tries to be as close to the source as possible, making his own cheeses and curing his own meats.

"It's the only way you get to understand what you're making," he said. "Take time to honor the ingredient. Respect what it is, and enhance what's there."

Technique is equally as important as the ingredients, Augello says. The key to being a

good cook is a good understanding of basic food mechanics.

"You can't be absent-minded," he said. "To cook well is very psychological. It's science; it's applying heat."

Of course, cuisine and culture combine again in technique. For instance, it might not be called the same thing, but many cultures have some version of a boucherie. But it is that unique blend of cultural influences and culinary technique that give food of South Louisiana its distinct flavor.

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