

MENU NOTES

ROASTED BANANA BAVAROIS

I was working on a truffle dish around the holidays when we happened upon this combination. I wanted something lighter than the traditional garlic or potato that might get paired with the truffles and started thinking about other ingredients that had depth and which make work with the truffles' earthiness. Sea urchin is what came to mind with its unctuousness and that feeling of "breath of ocean". In order not to overpower the sea urchin, we needed a medium that wasn't too savory. I often get chocolate undertones with truffles, and had been joking with my pastry chef about doing a banana-truffle dessert and figured that would be the obvious choice.

TOMATO SALAD

Rue is a mysterious herb that smells like bubble gum and we have always wondered what to do with it. Driving back from L'Abeille Garden at RdV Vineyards recently, I came up with the idea of trying to infuse it in Galia melon. A Galia being a very aromatic, floral melon I thought it might be a nice flavor combination with a touch of sweetness for the tomatoes in the dish, while keeping the dish refreshing and light.

COUSCOUS DE POISSON

In 2008, Célia and I went to Sidi-Bou-Said for vacation. A beautiful town in Tunisia on the Mediterranean, the outburst of middle eastern fragrances and flavors was a very eye-opening experience for me. While there, we ate at a restaurant called Le Café Vert that had a specialty of Fish Couscous. The dish was delicious and I visited the kitchen. The cooks basted all their grilled seafood with an herb infused oil before being placed onto the grill. I found the restaurant simple, delicious and inspiring. This is our ode to that experience.

GRILLED FOIE GRAS

Foie Gras Torchon, Foie Terrine, Sautéed Foie Gras, Poached Foie Gras, Foie Confit, Whole Roasted Foie Gras, but Grilled Foie Gras...??.?.? For nearly 20 years, I worked in kitchens without a grill. When I took over Sou'Wester in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Washington D.C., that kitchen had a grill so on a whim, I put a piece of foie gras on it, and found it delicious. Its smoky and fatty succulence paired with smoked tomato jam is the perfect bite of summer indulgence.

STEAK DE BURGO

This is a dish from my native Iowa, shrouded in mystery and intrigue. There is a great debate as to the authentic Steak de Burgo recipe; the point of contention being whether to include blue cheese. While this inclusion would make sense given the prominence of Maytag Blue, it is the most contested ingredient. We are opting for a Blue Cheese Sticky Bun to pair with the dish. We are using a Martin Ranch calotte cut as our steak and our own L'Abeille Garden Herbs to season it.

BEAUMES DE VENISE

During a visit to France, I spent some time in Beaumes de Venise with a friend's parents who were refurbishing an old farming shack in the hills. Standing on the hillside at sunset, the evening breeze brought incredible aromas of the nearby thyme, lavender and rosemary, warmed from a day in the sun. I've flashed back to that evening numerous times when our harvest from L'Abeille garden arrives, wafting the scent of mint, verbena and anise hyssop in its wake. Those flavors pair wonderfully with summer melon, a common accompaniment in France to a Muscat de Beaumes de Venise, and are the local touch to this memory from abroad.

SAINT HONORÉ

I officially began my pastry career studying classic French technique at The French Culinary Institute in Manhattan. We studied the great canon of French desserts, including Gâteau St. Honoré, a choux-based cream tart named for the patron saint of bakers. In my inexperienced opinion, it was complicated to execute and seemed old-fashioned. I was sure it was the product of another era – the French version of a jello fruit salad. To my chagrin, I was assigned the cake as part of my graduation exam and even had to make them in miniature for display. Months later while apprenticing in France, I discovered the St. Honoré is still highly beloved in its native country. As my skill in and knowledge of pastry has grown, so has my appreciation of this classic gâteau.

ERIC ZIEBOLD, Chef ANNE SPECKER, Pastry Chef