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the
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Grill Cajun

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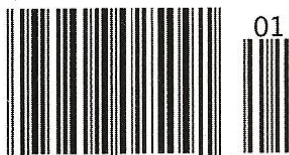
**SOUTHERN-STYLE
DINING AT NOLA'S
BEST TABLE**



*Seafood Gumbo
New Orleans, page 28*

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Souvenirs from New Orleans

FOR AUTHENTIC NOLA FLAVOR WITH A TWIST, TRY THE GRILL

BY ELIZABETH KARMEL

“Laissez les bon temps roulez!” was the first thing that I heard when I stepped off the plane for my maiden visit to New Orleans. Growing up in North Carolina, I thought I knew Southern. But this strange and wonderful city was a country unto itself.

As soon as I walked outside, I was covered with a sticky film of sultry humidity and my bags were scooped up by a boisterous taxi driver speaking a dialect I could barely understand except for the frequent use of “darlin’”.

What I immediately understood was the food. It was rich and hot and potent—just like the city. I quickly discovered simple dishes from the oyster bars, diners and po’boy shops. I fell in love with the classic New Orleans cuisine from the old-line restaurants, and I became passionate about the way the natives cooked at home. As I write this, three such dishes instantly come to mind like treasured souvenirs.

I moved away from New Orleans years before Hurricane Katrina, and have only been back once, so I do not lay claim to the city, but it left me with delicious memories and its foodways influence me every day.

In the past few years, exciting new restaurants have popped up and most of the bastions of tradition have reopened without missing a beat—I had a particularly fabulous boozy lunch at Galatoire’s last spring. But one of my favorite restaurants closed a while back, causing locals and tourists alike to mourn. Uglesich’s restaurant looked like its Yugoslavian name sounded. It sat on a lonely section of Baronne Street in a dilapidated building—if you didn’t know it was open, you might think that it had been abandoned. But

inside, the eatery was fresh and alive. My dish of choice was the fried green tomatoes topped with chilled Gulf shrimp and rémoulade sauce. Since I can no longer order this dish, I created my own version as homage to Uglesich’s. I “grill-fry” thick slabs of cornmeal-dusted green tomatoes and top them with grilled shrimp folded into a spicy, mayo-based sauce. I usually eat this for my main course, but it also makes a dynamite starter for a steak dinner.

My next favorite food memory is gorging myself on the plump, juicy, briny oysters at my favorite oyster bar, Felix. When I visited, I never sat down, opting instead to stand at the small service counter and make friends with the shucker. He always told wonderful stories about how it used to be “back in the day...”, and as we exchanged smiles, we both knew that I would tip generously for the privilege of being served the “choice” oysters. As the shucker fixed platter after platter of oysters for the restaurant, he would select perfect oysters and place them one by one on the counter for me. While my oysters were lining up, I would walk to the end of the bar and concoct my own cocktail sauce by squirting ketchup into paper cups and adding my choice of seasonings from the array of condiments on the counter. I would always add heaps of fresh horseradish, three shakes of Tabasco and the juice from two or three wedges of lemon. A quick swirl of the oyster fork—or a coffee stirrer—to roughly mix the sauce, and I was ready to dig in. This experience inspired my recipe for Barbecued Oysters with DIY Cocktail Sauce.

My third favorite recipe has become part of my everyday repertoire. I teach this recipe in my Southern Barbecue

class once a month at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York, and it is one recipe that almost every student makes again at home. The recipe is so easy that I didn’t write it up for a long time, preferring to teach by experience. My students wanted the written instructions as a safety net—but rest assured, once you make them or even read the recipe once, you’ll never look at it again!

Here’s the story: It was in Louisiana that I saw my first oil-drum grill and tasted my first Louisiana hot sauce. Prior to my first trip to NOLA, I only had Tabasco and Texas Pete in my pantry (the latter is actually made in Winston-Salem, NC). It was at a backyard barbecue on the banks of Lake Pontchartrain that I had the best wings I had ever eaten—made over a rusty oil-drum grill. I had never been a fan of wings until I had these crispy grilled—not fried—hot wings. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that it was a three-ingredient recipe: Louisiana hot sauce, wings and a pinch of salt. All the magic is in the grilled method that makes these wings lip smackin’ good, darlin’!

Elizabeth Karmel is a nationally known grilling and barbecue expert and cookbook author. The native North Carolinian is also the creator of Girls at the Grill, an umbrella company that includes consulting, writing and designing her Grill Friends and Kitchen Friends line of outdoor cooking and kitchen tools (GirlsattheGrill.com). In addition, she is the executive chef of Hill Country, a Texas barbecue restaurant and live music venue in Manhattan (HillCountryny.com) and an instructor at New York’s Institute of Culinary Education.

*“Grill-Fried” Green Tomatoes
with Shrimp Rémoûlade*





Barbecued Oysters with DIY Cocktail Sauce

Yield: 2 to 4 servings • Zest Factor: Medium
Grilling method: Direct Medium-High Heat
If you live in "oyster country," try the DIY sauce with raw oysters as well. This sauce is also perfect for grilled peel-and-eat shrimp!

12 to 24 live oysters in the shell
2 tablespoons salted butter, cut
in 12 pieces

Sauce ingredients:

Tabasco

Louisiana hot sauce
garlic hot sauce
chili sauce
ketchup
prepared horseradish
malt vinegar
sherry vinegar
chopped shallots
cut lemons
cut limes
black pepper

Prepare a grill for direct grilling.

Using long-handled tongs, place oysters flat-side down directly on the cooking grates. Grill for about 5 minutes, or until

the oyster shells open—the timing will vary depending on size.

Once the oysters open, add a sliver of salted butter to each. Swirl the butter around to coat the oyster and prevent it from drying out. Do not overcook. Discard any unopened oyster shells.

Remove from grill, and put on a clean platter. Remove the top shell of the oysters and serve immediately with cocktail sauce ingredients, and let your guests make their own sauce.



