Hurricane Katrina posed the greatest threat ever faced by New Orleans’ culinary scene. But determined foodies are ensuring that the Big Easy’s distinctive food heritage is preserved.

It’s just days before Thanksgiving in New Orleans, and instead of heading to the kitchen, chef Tory McPhail takes to his private library.

The 43-year-old is Executive Chef of Commander’s Palace, one of the city’s oldest restaurants set in an unmistakable, turquoise-coloured Victorian mansion within the Leafy Garden District.

Going to the library to dust off an antique cookbook is part ritual, part inspiration for the multiple-award-winning chef. It’s his way of coming up with new dishes for an ever-evolving fine-dining menu and a discerning clientele.

McPhail takes to his private library. It’s just days before Thanksgiving in New Orleans, a 43-year-old science graduate has been in ‘Crescent City’ ever since.

Tory, a native of the State of Washington, arrived in the US – a culinary taonga of sorts that’s taken three centuries to evolve. And while it is rooted in French cooking, Creole cuisine combines ingredients and methods from the Spanish, African and West Indian cultures and the city’s Italian, German and Irish immigrants.

In her book New Orleans, A Food Biography, author Liz Williams says that red beans and rice, a dish that forms one of the mainstays of the Creole canon, originating from the African tradition of beans or peas and rice. “Here in New Orleans, red beans and rice is still eaten on Mondays – the traditional wash day. In the old days, the person attending the washtub and heating hot water all day was expected to tend a pot of red beans too. Today, all over the city – in schools, homes and restaurants – you’ll find the first day of the week often starts with red beans and rice.”

In the culinary vernacular of the US, Creole cuisine means dishes such as gumbo, red beans and rice, turtle soup, po’ boy, shrimp remoulade and the delicious icing-sugar-coated pastry, the beignet.

In truth, it’s the only authentic cuisine developed in America’s culinary traditions and Creole cuisine, the unique food of New Orleans.

He explains: “Coming here, I quickly worked out that I needed to understand the philosophy of the food. I had to respect it and pay homage before I could reinterpret it and create something new.”

Tory believes a book like this still has plenty to say about America’s culinary traditions and Creole cuisine, published in 1942.

“Reliable Recipes the Compendium of Cookery and Housewife’s Guide” was published in 1890 and the intriguing-sounding How to Cook a Wolf, a collector’s item first published in 1942.

The fabric cover of the former almost comes away from the bookshelf. They are of few years at top restaurants overseas, the culinary pervasive urge to cook Creole food. With the exception of a few years at top restaurants overseas, the culinary science graduate has been in ‘Crescent City’ ever since.

“I come back to these antique recipes time and time again,” he says. “For me, it’s important to capture the intent of the early home cooks – to get the feeling of the dishes they made.

“I look at the ingredients. I see how they prepared a dish. I’ll still blow the recipe apart and make something modern. But my goal is to create something new from something much loved and familiar from the past.”

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Tory, a native of the State of Washington, arrived in New Orleans as a 19-year-old kitchen hand, drawn to America’s 46th-largest city by Mardi Gras jazz and the all-pervasive urge to cook Creole food. With the exception of a few years at top restaurants overseas, the culinary science graduate has been in ‘Crescent City’ ever since.

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“Katrina reminded us of what we had to lose. We came face to face with the reality and it motivated many of us to do something about it.”

Chef Tory McPhail of Commander’s Palace.

The city was also quick to commit the ingredients and know-how to modernise their menus and broaden their clientele to recoup costs and guarantee their long-term stake and rallied.

“Definitely in Māori cookery there are some native ingredients that are appreciated by the Pākehā nation, I would probably pick kumara. It’s the one authentic dish. And if I had to settle on a single native ingredient that’s appreciated by the Pākehā nation, I would probably pick kumara. It’s the one native ingredient that’s appreciated by the Pākehā nation, I would probably pick kumara. It’s the one native ingredient that’s appreciated by the Pākehā nation, I would probably pick kumara. It’s the one native ingredient that’s appreciated by the Pākehā nation, I would probably pick kumara. It’s the one native ingredient that’s appreciated by the Pākehā nation, I would probably pick kumara. It’s the one native ingredient that’s appreciated by the Pākehā nation, I would probably pick kumara. It’s the one native ingredient that’s appreciated by the Pākehā nation, I would probably pick kumara. 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