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ON THE COVER:
PICKLED SHRIMP WITH CUCUMBERS
PHOTO BY BETH KIRBY

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Sweet From The Sea

Southern Shrimp Deserve Your Attention

INTRO BY STEPHANIE BURT

SWEET, SUCCULENT SHRIMP are one of the finest Southern delicacies of the season. From the catch of the shrimp boats in McClellanville, South Carolina, to the pink shrimp of the Florida Keys, these crustaceans abound. Pickled or fried, poached or skewered, we love to serve 'em up. Chef Erik Niel may now be in land-locked Chattanooga, Tennessee, but he grew up in south Louisiana. "I spent the entirety of my childhood fishing on the bayous, catching crawfish and netting shrimp," he explains, so he knows a good shrimp when he sees one. If you live near the water, he asserts head-on shrimp is the way to go. If you cook them head-on, the little fat pocket behind the head melts into the shrimp, making it even sweeter. If you're away from the coast, he recommends purchasing individually quick-frozen Southern shrimp from any reputable green grocery or gourmet market. It's what he uses in the kitchen at Easy Bistro & Bar, and it's easy to trust this boy from the bayou once you taste his cooking—or try one of his recipes at home. ➡

PHOTOS BY BETH KIRBY



CALCASIEU RIVER CAMP FRIED GULF SHRIMP AND NEW POTATOES

6 eggs
 ½ cup milk
 ¼ cup cold water
 4 pounds medium Gulf brown shrimp, peeled and deveined
 2 pounds all-purpose flour
 1 tablespoon lemon pepper
 3 tablespoons salt
 3 tablespoons creole seasoning
 5 pounds red potatoes
 5 creole tomatoes or other acidic, vine-ripened tomatoes
 Salt and pepper
 6 quarts peanut oil
 Ketchup
 1 bag Bunny brand white bread

Helpful tools:

Propane burner with fry pot and basket
 4 large zip-close bags

Paper towels

Headlamp (makes it easier after dark because it always takes longer to do this than you think!)

1. In a bowl, whisk the eggs and combine with milk and water.
2. Divide the peeled shrimp between 2 zip-close bags and pour egg mixture evenly over the shrimp in each.
3. In a bowl, mix flour, lemon pepper, salt, and creole seasoning. Then add ½ flour mixture to 2 additional zip-close bags.
4. Slice the red potatoes into chips (they will be uneven, but that is the idea), and reserve in cold water so they don't brown.
5. Slice the tomatoes, arrange on a plate, and season liberally with salt and pepper.
6. Heat the peanut oil over medium heat to approximately 225 degrees. Drain potatoes well and add about half of them to the fry pot, simmering for 7–8 minutes.
7. Turn heat up to high. Crisp the potatoes. Remove when they start to brown around the edges.
8. Drain onto paper towels and season immediately with salt and pepper.

9. Enjoy the potatoes with a dab of ketchup while you start the next batch.
10. By hand, transfer the shrimp to flour bags, leaving the egg wash behind, then close the flour bags and shake vigorously.
11. Turn heat back up to medium-high and drop in a shrimp; if it floats then quickly add the rest.
12. Fry for 2–3 minutes until crispy and brown.
13. Drain on paper towels (next to what is left of the potatoes) and repeat with remaining shrimp.
14. Serve immediately with the sliced tomatoes, more ketchup, and Bunny bread.

Yield: 4–6 servings

Note: This recipe recreates Chef Niel's river camp ritual with his father and brother. They love eating in shifts—first the potatoes, then the tomatoes and shrimp, sipping beer as the sun sets. Of course, you're welcome to serve everything at once, but this version assures that your potatoes are hot and crispy.

WARM GULF BROWN SHRIMP WITH GOLDEN BEETS, ORANGES, ALMONDS, AND FRISÉE

For Beets

2 pounds baby golden beets, tops removed, rinsed, and scrubbed with a towel
 Herb sachet (2 bay leaves, 3 cloves crushed garlic, and 1 tablespoon black peppercorns tied in cheesecloth)
 2 tablespoons salt

1. Cover the beets in a pot with cold water, then add sachet.
2. Bring gently to a simmer and slowly poach beets.
3. They are done when knife-tender, about 15–20 minutes.
4. Remove from heat, season with salt, and allow beets to cool in their liquid.

For Shrimp

2 tablespoons grapeseed oil
 2 shallots, peeled and julienned
 Juice of 1 orange
 2 tablespoons Champagne vinegar
 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
 Salt and pepper
 2 pounds poached golden beets from above, removed from liquid and sliced into bite-size pieces
 2 pounds large Gulf brown shrimp, peeled and deveined with the tails left attached
 ¼ cup fresh mint leaves, torn and divided

1. Heat a cast iron skillet over medium-high heat. When hot, add oil and shallots. Sauté briefly.
2. Deglaze by pouring in orange juice and Champagne vinegar. Simmer briefly.
3. Add the mustard and season with salt and pepper.
4. Stir briefly, then add the beets and glaze for 2–3 minutes.
5. Season the shrimp with salt and pepper, then add to the pan along with ½ the torn mint. Save the reserved mint to plate.
6. Cook for about 2 minutes then turn off the heat.

To Plate

4 heads frisée lettuce, cleaned and rinsed
 3 oranges, peeled and sliced
 ¼ cup sliced almonds

1. Lay a bed of lettuce on each plate and top with orange slices and sliced almonds.
2. Spoon the beets and shrimp over and sprinkle with the remaining torn mint.

Yield: 4–6 servings

QUICK PICKLED SHRIMP WITH PICKLING CUCUMBERS THREE WAYS

2 pounds large Gulf brown shrimp, peeled,
deveined, tails left on

For Poaching Liquid

2 lemons
1 quart water
3 tablespoons kosher salt

For Pickling Mix

½ cup lemon juice
¼ cup Champagne vinegar
1½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 dashes Tabasco
12 bay leaves
6 thyme sprigs
4 cloves garlic, crushed
1 teaspoon celery seed, toasted
1 teaspoon mustard seed, toasted
Pinch whole black peppercorns
Pinch chili flakes

1. Allow shrimp to warm to room temperature.
2. Combine poaching liquid ingredients in a small pot and bring to a simmer for 5 minutes.
3. Poach shrimp in the liquid for 90 seconds, then drain in a colander and let cool.
4. Combine all wet ingredients of pickling mix in a mixing bowl with bay leaves, thyme, and garlic.
5. Add remaining spices to the mixing bowl, along with the shrimp.
6. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour (up to 6).

For Quick Pickles

1 cup hot water
½ cup Champagne vinegar
¼ cup sugar
2 tablespoons salt
1 tablespoon mustard seed
1½ pounds pickling cucumbers, ½ pound cut into
slices, ½ pound peeled with peeler into ribbons,
and ½ pound peeled, halved, and seeded, then
cut into half moons

1. Combine all ingredients except cucumbers in a bowl with the hot water, making sure the sugar and salt are well dissolved.
2. Add the ½ pound sliced cucumbers and toss, then cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour (up to 24).

Note: Hold the cucumber ribbons and moons in a covered dish in the refrigerator.

To Assemble Salad

Your favorite good-quality crackers,
broken into pieces*
Salt and pepper

1. In a bowl, combine all the cucumbers and season with salt and pepper.
2. Mound the cucumbers on each plate, then place the broken crackers around and over the cucumbers.

3. Top with the drained pickled shrimp.

4. Drizzle each plate with 1 tablespoon pickling liquid from the shrimp.

Yield: 6 servings

**Find Chef Niel's recipe for housemade sesame crackers on thelocalpalate.com.*

