



rigtsen's restaurant is aglow with shimmering lights. It's mid-December 2019 and a stripe of red ribbon decorates each table. Everyone is dressed for what we New Orleans locals, sensitive to dropping temperatures, call "gumbo weather." Spirited discussions reverberate off the dining room walls as family and friends chat about the holidays, the fast-approaching Mardi Gras season, the promises of the year beyond.

This is a Réveillon dinner—from the French word for "awakening"—an old French yuletide custom. In the city's early days, most of the population was Catholic and partook in the prescribed Christmas Eve fast. That was followed by Midnight Mass, after which families would return home to a feast of seafood gumbo, roast meats, dressings, desserts, eggnog and wine. Only in New Orleans would households repeat the ritual on New Year's Eve. In well-off homes, servants or enslaved people cooked and served the meal. By 1900, after the abolition of slavery and as the kitchens of French New Orleanians fell in line with American conventions, the tradition had faded. Then in the mid-1980s it was rekindled by restaurants hungry to fill dining rooms during the downturn of the holiday season. In recent years, well over 50 restaurants have offered a prix fixe menu throughout December and into the New Year.

For Frank Brigtsen, the chef and proprietor of Brigtsen's, Réveillon is a moment to go all in and "give them the good stuff," as he says. That means counting on the classics that have built his reputation over the past four decades: filé gumbo, satsuma orange salad dressed with spiced pecans and cane vinaigrette, pan-roasted pork chops glazed with mayhaw pepper jelly, and cornbread dressing. The New Orleans native sees Réveillon as

an opportunity to attract new customers while rewarding his most loyal patrons.

It also helps that Brigtsen adores the holidays. He's a Christmas-season baby—born December 9, a birthdate he shares with his wife, Marna—and remembers begging his parents to attend Midnight Mass at the nearby St. Matthew the Apostle Church. The scent of burning frankincense, the mystique of

the Latin liturgy, sitting in those pews, simmering in anticipation of Santa's arrival, all signified Christmas to young Frank.

An early appreciation for food led to a budding career in kitchens. In 1978, a 24-year-old Brigtsen answered an ad to apprentice under executive chef Paul Prudhomme at Commander's Palace, the city's elegant, Garden District Creole landmark. He soon followed Prudhomme to the French Quarter, leading the kitchen at his mentor's new venture, K-Paul's. At the time, there was no grander stage in the local, and arguably national, restaurant scene than cooking for Chef Paul, the patron saint of modern Louisiana cuisine.

Seven years later, Prudhomme called Brigtsen into a meeting and bestowed his ultimate blessing: "You're ready to go out on your own." Bankrolled by Chef Paul, Frank and Marna opened Brigtsen's just five days following his final shift at K-Paul's. "You don't want to see pictures of me from those five days," he laughs, still unable to believe he survived.

Today, following the recent passings of local luminaries like Prudhomme and Dooky Chase's much adored chef-owner Leah Chase, Brigtsen has become the éminence grise of Louisiana cooking. He's a beloved godfather to a new generation of chefs and restaurateurs.

eatingwell.com december 2020 9 1 RÉVEILLON IS A MOMENT TO GO ALL IN AND "GIVE THEM THE GOOD STUFF." -CHEF FRANK BRIGTSEN **BBO SHRIMP WITH SHRIMP** CALAS GRIDDLECAKES, PAGE TK



When chef Nina Compton moved from Miami to New Orleans to open her James Beard-winning restaurant Compère Lapin in 2015, Brigtsen became her local guru. "I looked to him for advice, whether it was culinary or personal," she says. "He's still nurturing, teaching and mentoring people to this day. That says a lot."

Brigtsen makes time to teach Cajun and Creole courses at a pair of culinary programs, one collegiate, the other at a high school arts conservatory. "It was a Hurricane Katrina thing for me," he says about those post-storm years when many New Orleanians feared the disappearance of their vernacular foodways. "If I can help," he says. "If I can create possibilities, while reminding people of the importance of this culture and cuisine, I'll die happy."

"In cooking, color is flavor," Brigtsen likes to tell his students, "and brown is the color of flavor." At Brigtsen's, the menu reads as a study in shades of sienna, mahogany and umber: chocolate-hued gumbo, BBQ shrimp bathed in beer and butter, sweet potato bread pudding swimming in praline sauce.

Despite keeping his restaurant closed for much of 2020 due to COVID-19, Brigtsen vows to celebrate Réveillon this year. He's reminded of the storms he and New Orleans have endured. When Katrina shuttered the city's restaurants in 2005, Brigtsen's reopened on December 29, just in time for Réveillon. "We learned after Katrina that there has to be a lot of rebuilding. Besides the hammers and nails, you have to lift people's spirits," he says. "Restaurants can be beacons of hope in a desperate situation."

To that end, Frank, Marna and the Brigtsen's team plan to serve Réveillon dinners in-house this year and, in a historical twist of fate, will offer takeout service as well. For the first time in many generations, locals will be able to taste this old New Orleans custom in their very own homes. And with these recipes now, so can you.

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# **BBQ** Shrimp with Shrimp Calas Griddlecakes

ACTIVE: 50 min TOTAL: 1 hr

This New Orleans staple has nothing to do with a BBQ pit; it's simply local shrimp doused in heavily seasoned butter with lots of hot French bread for dipping. Brigtsen created this version when he worked under chef Paul Prudhomme, using beer and shrimp stock for the sauce. For Réveillon, Brigtsen matches them with shrimp-studded griddlecakes inspired by calas, a typically sweet fritter that likely came to New Orleans with enslaved people from Africa. (Photo: page TK.)

#### GRIDDLECAKES

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 cup raw deveined peeled shrimp (any
- ½ cup thinly sliced scallions, plus more for garnish
- 3/4 teaspoon Chef Paul Prudhomme's Seafood Magic seasoning (see page
- 3/4 teaspoon minced fresh garlic
- 2 large eggs
- ½ cup low-fat milk
- ½ cup white whole-wheat flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- 1½ teaspoons granulated sugar
- 2 cups cooked brown rice
- 1½ tablespoons grapeseed or canola oil
- 18 raw jumbo shrimp (10-15 per pound), preferably with heads on
- 2 cups water
- 2 tablespoons grapeseed or canola oil
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- ½ teaspoon seafood seasoning
- 3 tablespoons beer or apple cider
- 1½ teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1. To prepare griddlecakes: Heat 1 tablespoon butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 cup shrimp and cook, stirring, just until they turn pink on the outside, 1 to 2 minutes. Add scallions, 3/4 teaspoon seafood seasoning and 3/4 teaspoon garlic; cook until the shrimp are cooked through, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer the shrimp to a plate. Refrigerate until cold, about 10 minutes.
- **2.** Puree half the shrimp in a food processor. Coarsely chop the remaining shrimp.
- **3.** Whisk eggs in a large bowl until frothy. Add milk and whisk until blended. Add flour. baking powder and sugar; whisk until smooth. Add rice along with the pureed and chopped shrimp; fold with a flexible spatula until blended. Cover and refrigerate for 15 minutes.
- **4.** Preheat oven to 200°F. Heat a griddle to 375°F or a large nonstick skillet over medium

heat. Brush 1 tablespoon oil over the griddle or skillet. Using \( \frac{1}{4} \) cup to make each, drop 4 griddlecakes onto the pan. Cook until browned on both sides, 2 to 4 minutes total. Adjust heat as necessary to prevent burning. Transfer the cakes to a baking sheet and keep warm in the oven. Repeat 2 more times with the remaining batter, brushing the pan with some of the remaining 1½ teaspoons oil before cooking each batch.

**5. To prepare shrimp:** Peel shrimp, reserving the heads and shells for stock; refrigerate the shrimp. Place the shrimp heads and shells and water in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Pass the stock through a fine-mesh sieve, discarding the shells. Measure out ½ cup stock and set aside (reserve the remainder for another use).

6. Heat a large skillet over high heat for 2 minutes. Add oil, rosemary, pepper and the peeled shrimp. Cook, shaking the pan, just until the shrimp turn pink, 2 to 3 minutes. Add garlic and seafood seasoning; cook, shaking the pan constantly, for 5 seconds. Add beer (or cider) and Worcestershire. Cook until the liquid is almost evaporated, 15 to 20 seconds.

**7.** Add the reserved \( \frac{1}{4} \) cup shrimp stock and bring to a boil. Cook for 20 to 30 seconds to allow the stock to reduce and intensify in flavor. Add butter and reduce heat to low. Shake the pan vigorously back and forth, just until the butter melts into the sauce and the sauce is emulsified. Garnish with scallions and serve immediately with the griddlecakes.

SERVES 6: 2 griddlecakes & 3 shrimp each **Cal** 319 **Fat** 17g (sat 5g) **Chol** 143mg **Carbs** 29g **Total sugars** 3g (added 1g) **Protein** 13g **Fiber** 2g Sodium 478mg Potassium 217mg.

# **Sweet Potato Bread Pudding** with Pecan Praline Sauce

ACTIVE: 40 min TOTAL: 1 hr 25 min

TO MAKE AHEAD: Refrigerate sweet potato (Step 1) for up to 3 days.

Brigtsen's dessert menu offers "Bread Pudding du Jour," which changes with the seasons. This sweet potato version plays well during the holidays.

## **BREAD PUDDING**

- 2 cups diced peeled sweet potato
- 3/4 cup water
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar plus ½ cup. divided
- 3 tablespoons light brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1½ teaspoons orange zest
- ½ cup orange juice
- 34 teaspoon lemon zest 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 6 large eggs



- 1½ cups low-fat milk
- 3/3 cup sweetened condensed milk
- 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> teaspoons ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 8 cups diced stale French bread, preferably whole-wheat

#### SAUCE

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- 1/4 cup light brown sugar
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup low-fat milk
- 2 tablespoons heavy cream plus \(^3\)4 cup, divided
- ¹⁄₃ cup finely chopped pecans, toasted
- 3/4 teaspoon vanilla extract Whipped cream for serving
- 1. To prepare pudding: Combine sweet potato. water, 3 tablespoons each granulated sugar and brown sugar, 1 tablespoon butter, orange zest, orange juice, lemon zest, lemon juice and salt in small saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer until the sweet potato is very tender, 15 to 25 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a food processor and puree. Transfer to a shallow pan and let cool completely, about 15 minutes in the refrigerator or 5 minutes in the freezer.
- 2. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 350°F. Coat a 7-by-11-inch or similar 2-quart baking dish with cooking spray. Put a kettle of water on to boil for the water bath.
- **3.** Whisk eggs in a large bowl. Add 1½ cups milk, condensed milk, cinnamon, vanilla, nutmeg, the sweet potato puree and the remaining \( \frac{1}{4} \) cup granulated sugar; whisk until blended. Add bread and stir until well coated. Pour the mixture into the prepared baking dish.
- 4. Place the baking dish in a roasting pan. Pour enough boiling water into the roasting pan to come 1 inch up the sides of the baking dish. Carefully transfer the roasting pan to the oven. Bake the pudding until the center is no longer runny, 45 minutes to 1 hour.
- **5. Just before serving, prepare sauce:** Combine 3 tablespoons butter, brown sugar, granulated sugar, milk and 2 tablespoons cream in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over mediumhigh heat. Cook for 1 minute, whisking occasionally. Add pecans and vanilla. Cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened and golden, about 3 minutes more. Add the remaining 3/4 cup cream. Return the mixture to a boil and cook, whisking, for 1 minute. Remove from heat and whisk in the remaining 1 tablespoon butter.
- **6.** Serve the pudding with the sauce and whipped cream, if desired.

**SERVES 18:** ½ cup pudding & 1 Tbsp. sauce each Cal 248 Fat 12g (sat 6g) Chol 87mg Carbs 31g Total sugars 21g (added 13g) Protein 6g Fiber 2g Sodium 163mg Potassium 196mg.

# Satsuma Salad with Spiced Pecans, Pickled Red **Onion & Cane Vinaigrette**

ACTIVE: 40 min TOTAL: 1 hr 40 min

TO MAKE AHEAD: Refrigerate pickled onion (Step 1) for up to 1 week. Store spiced pecans (Step 2) airtight at room temperature for up to 1 week. Refrigerate vinaigrette (Step 3) for up to 2 days; whisk or shake before using.

Satsuma mandarins are grown throughout Louisiana. These easy-to-peel fruit add a bright juicy burst to this salad. (Photo: page TK.)

#### PICKLED RED ONION

- <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> cup cold water
- ½ cup distilled white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt Pinch of cayenne pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 2 cups very thinly sliced red onion

# SPICED PECANS

- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter

- 1 tablespoon light brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

- ½ cup cane vinegar (see below) or rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 3/4 teaspoon dry mustard
- 3/4 teaspoon Creole mustard (see below) or spicy brown mustard
- ½ teaspoon minced fresh garlic
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 drops hot pepper sauce, such as Tabasco (see below)
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 16 cups mixed salad greens
- 1½ cups crumbled feta cheese, divided
- 4 medium satsumas, peeled and sectioned
- **1. To prepare onion:** Combine water, white vinegar, balsamic vinegar, granulated sugar, salt, pinch of cayenne, bay leaf and rosemary in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 3 minutes.

Stir in onion, cover and remove from heat. Let stand for 5 minutes. Transfer the onion in its cooking liquid to a heatproof container and refrigerate, uncovered, until chilled, at least 1 hour.

- 2. Meanwhile, to prepare pecans: Toast pecans in a small skillet over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until fragrant and dark brown, 5 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl. Add butter, brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt and cayenne to the pan. Cook over low heat just until the butter melts. Stir until well blended and remove from heat. Pour over the nuts and toss to coat well. Let cool for at least 30 minutes.
- **3.** To prepare salad: Whisk vinegar, honey, dry mustard, mustard, garlic, salt and hot sauce in a large bowl. Slowly add oil in a stream, whisking constantly, until thoroughly incorporated.
- 4. Drain the onion. Add greens, 1 cup feta, satsumas, the onion and pecans to the dressing and toss gently to coat. Serve topped with the remaining feta.

SERVES 12: 1½ cups each

**Cal** 214 **Fat** 18g (sat 5g) **Chol** 19mg **Carbs** 11g Total sugars 7g (added 3g) Protein 5g Fiber 2g Sodium 253mg Potassium 125mg.

# THE LOUISIANA PANTRY

# CANE VINEGAR

While it's made from fermented sugar cane, this mellow vinegar is no sweeter than other vinegars. Steen's Syrup makes their version with Louisiana-grown sugar cane. It's used for dressings, marinades and as the base for hot sauces.



For more Cajun and Creole recipes to use these ingredients hover your phone's camera ove this smart code.

# PEPPER JELLY

This sweet, tangy and slightly spicy Southern staple is made with sugar, vinegar and peppers. Brigtsen likes Mayhaw Pepper Jelly, made with the sweet juice of the Mayhaw berry, grown throughout swampy areas of the Southeast.

# SEASONING BLENDS

Chef Paul Prudhomme created his series of seasoning blends which includes Seafood Magic and Meat Magic, in the early 1980s to share the flavors of his New Orleans restaurants. They typically include garlic, onion, salt and an array of spices that's heavy on paprika. Though they're widely available in major supermarkets, if you can't find Prudhomme's, swap in an all-purpose



# **TABASCO**

This iconic Louisiana hot sauce has changed little since it was developed in the 1860s-bright red capsicum frutescens are ground, mixed with salt and fermented in oak barrels for 3 years before mixing with vinegar.

## CREOLE MUSTARD

Defined by its horseradish flavor, Creole mustard gets its signature spice from the brown seeds o Louisiana-grown mustard greens.

# "IF I CAN HELP, IF I CAN CREATE POSSIBILITIES, WHILE REMINDING PEOPLE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS CULTURE AND CUISINE, I'LL DIE HAPPY."

-CHEF FRANK BRIGTSEN

# **Roast Pork Loin with Pepper Jelly Glaze**

ACTIVE: 40 min TOTAL: 13/4 hrs

TO MAKE AHEAD: Marinate pork (Step 1) for up to 1 day. Refrigerate glaze (Step 3) for up to 4 days. Chef Brigtsen makes homemade pepper jelly to glaze thick pork chops for Réveillon. He recommends two ways to simplify for the home cook: go for store-bought jelly and, instead of chops, a pork loin roast. (Photo: page TK.)

# PORK & MARINADE

- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano
- 1½ teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
- 1½ teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground pepper
- 2 pounds boneless pork loin roast
- 2½ tablespoons Chef Paul Prudhomme's Meat Magic seasoning (see opposite)
- 2 tablespoons canola oil

#### GLAZE

- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 1/3 cup finely diced red and/or green bell pepper
- ½ cup finely diced onion
- 2 tablespoons finely diced carrot
- 1/4 teaspoon salt Pinch of ground cumin
- 3/3 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- ½ cup pepper jelly (see opposite)
- 1½ teaspoons unseasoned rice vinegar
- 1½ teaspoons cornstarch mixed with 1½ teaspoons cold water
- 1. To marinate pork: Combine olive oil, wine, oregano, thyme, garlic, salt and pepper in a sealable plastic bag. Add the pork to the marinade. Refrigerate for least 1 hour or for up to 24 hours.
- **2.** When ready to continue, preheat oven to 450°F. Line a large rimmed baking sheet with foil.
- **3. To prepare glaze:** Heat 1 tablespoon canola oil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Add bell pepper, onion and carrot. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion begins to brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Add salt and cumin; cook for 1 minute. Add broth, pepper jelly and vinegar. Bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. Return the mixture to a boil and add cornstarch mixture; cook whisking, until thickened, about 1

minute. Cover and remove from heat

- **4. To prepare pork:** Remove the pork from the marinade (discard marinade) and season on all sides with seasoned salt. Heat 2 tablespoons canola oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the pork and cook, flipping occasionally, until browned on all sides, about 6 minutes total. Transfer to the prepared baking sheet. Roast for 10 minutes. **5.** Spoon 2 tablespoons of the glaze over the pork and continue roasting, spooning 2 tablespoons glaze over the pork every 10 minutes, until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part registers 145°F, 25 to 35 minutes more. Transfer the pork to a clean cutting
- board. Tent with foil and let rest for 15 minutes. **6.** Slice the pork and serve with the remaining

SERVES 8: 3 oz. pork & 2 Tbsp. glaze each **Cal** 295 **Fat** 15g (sat 3g) **Chol** 57mg **Carbs** 18g Total sugars 15g (added 13g) Protein 22g Fiber 0g Sodium 504mg Potassium 317mg.

# **Crescent City Cornbread Dressing**

ACTIVE: 11/4 hrs TOTAL: 3 hrs

TO MAKE AHEAD: Store cornbread (Steps 1-4) airtight at room temperature for up to 2 days.

This dressing is made with Brigtsen's cornbread which is sweet and flecked with scallions and jalapeños. If you want to streamline the dish, use store-bought cornbread. (Photo: page TK.)

### CORNBREAD

- 34 cup white whole-wheat flour
- 3/4 cup yellow cornmeal
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup thinly sliced scallions
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped jalapeño pepper
- 2 large eggs
- 11/4 cups buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon grapeseed or canola oil
- 8 cups finely diced onions, divided 5 cups finely diced celery, divided
- 3 cups finely diced red and/or green bell peppers, divided
- 2 bay leaves

- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper 1/4 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3/4 cup low-sodium chicken or turkey broth
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1. To prepare cornbread: Preheat oven to 350°F. Coat an 8-inch-square baking dish with
- 2. Whisk flour, cornmeal, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a large bowl. Stir in scallions and jalapeño.
- 3. Whisk eggs in a medium bowl until frothy. Add buttermilk and melted butter; whisk until blended. Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients and mix with a flexible spatula until well blended. Scrape the batter into the prepared baking dish.
- **4.** Bake the cornbread until the top is browned and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 40 to 45 minutes. Let cool in the pan on a wire rack, about 30 minutes.
- **5. To prepare dressing:** Preheat oven to 350°F. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
- **6.** Heat oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add 6 cups onions, 4 cups celery, 2 cups bell peppers and bay leaves. Cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are very tender and dark brown, about 15 minutes.
- 7. Add the remaining 2 cups onions, 1 cup each celery and bell peppers, garlic, salt, thyme, pepper, white pepper and cayenne. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the recently added onions are translucent, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Discard the bay leaves.
- 8. Crumble the cornbread and add to the vegetable mixture, along with broth; mix until well blended. Transfer the mixture to the prepared baking dish. Bake for 25 minutes.

9. Whisk eggs in a medium bowl until frothy.

Add 3 large spoonfuls of the cornbread dressing, one at a time, mixing well after each spoonful. Fold the eggy mixture back into the dressing in the pan. Add butter and mix until well blended. Bake until the top is golden brown, 30 to 40 minutes more.

SERVES 10: about 3/4 cup each

Cal 255 Fat 9g (sat 4g) Chol 88mg Carbs 38g Total sugars 15g (added 5g) Protein 8g Fiber 6g Sodium 459mg Potassium 560mg.