

Spice up your Winter; It's Cajun Season

by John Rizzo

As the winter doldrums set in, I can't help think about a place where the sun is warm, the food is extraordinary, cold beer is flowing and pretty much anything goes. It is Mardi Gras season in New Orleans. This celebration ranks among the best parties that the modern world knows.

Mardi Gras dates back to the early days of Christianity in Rome when they celebrated the Lupercalia, a circus like festival during the days leading up to the penance for Lent.

The celebration came to America in 1699 when the French explorer Jean Baptiste Le Moyne Sieur de Bienville sailed into Louisiana, about 60 miles south of New Orleans. Coincidentally Mardi Gras was being celebrated on this very day in Paris; hence he named the port Point du Mardi Gras.

Mardi Gras is celebrated from January 6th, the Christian Epiphany, through Fat Tuesday, always the day before Ash Wednesday. This is a time of parades, carnivals, masked balls, street celebrations, and extravagant costumes; not to mention the incredible Creole and Cajun foods indigenous to the Mississippi bayou.

The following recipe, shrimp etouffee, boasts a spicy brown sauce that is best served over a generous bed of rice.

Shrimp Etouffee

Yield 4 servings

Shrimp, Shell On	2 lbs.	Bell Pepper, Diced	1/2 Cup
Vegetable Oil	3 TBL	Celery, Peeled & Diced	1/2 Cup
Flour	5 TBL	Water	2 Cups
Onions, Dice	3/4 Cup	Parsley	3 TBL
Garlic, Minced	1 TBL	Oregano	1/2 tsp.
Bay Leaf	1	Tabasco Sauce	To taste
Lemon Juice	1 TBL	White Wine	1/2 Cup
Salt	To Taste	Chicken Bouillon	1 Cube

Peel and devein the shrimp; save the shells and set the shrimp aside. Make shrimp stock by placing the shells in a small greased roasting pan and bake at 350° F for 20 minutes. Add 2 cups of water to the pan and let it cook for an additional 15 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and strain out the shells and discard; save the liquid

Next, make a brown roux by heating the oil in a small skillet, whip in the flour and let it cook for several minutes (low to medium heat) until the mixture turns deep golden brown and has the aroma of roasted nuts. Set aside.

In a large sauté pan, heat the butter and cook the vegetables until soft. Stir in the bay leaf and oregano and continue to cook for one minute.

Add the shrimp stock, wine and chicken bouillon or chicken base; simmer for approximately 10 minutes. Slowly whip in the roux until the mixture thickens into a creamy sauce. Add the shrimp and parsley and simmer until the shrimp cook through; approximately three to four minutes. Stir in the lemon juice, salt and Tabasco sauce to taste. Serve shrimp and sauce over rice.