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We believe fresh, good food not only feeds the body, but the mind and spirit as well."

Reynaldo Hernandez,
Co-Founder and VP,
Epicurean Group



Experiencing the Season

I'm smiling, rising on an early spring day. I'm looking forward to spending time in my sunny kitchen, filled with my favorite spring vegetables and fruits - fresh ramps, slender asparagus, tender dandelion greens, delicate pea shoots, crunchy baby radishes and organic strawberries. I'm thinking about what I will create with them.

We're blessed here in California with an early spring. In the Northeast, it's still snowing! I always encourage my family and friends to get outside and personally experience nature's rebirth. Take a break from work and go on a hike or take a spin on your bike, push a stroller or take a walk with your little ones around the neighborhood. Look closely at the emerging buds and soft green leaves. Then take a step back and breathe in the fresh spring air. (And if you sneeze? It just means you've truly experienced it!)

Then, as the sun heads for the horizon, invite everyone inside to enjoy the end of a perfect day with an early evening feast of fresh seasonal food you've sourced locally and prepared with love. What could be a better way to welcome spring?

—Chef Rey Hernandez, Co-Founder and VP, Epicurean Group

SPRING MENU

Serves 8

*Chilled Spinach, Chervil and Strauss Family Yogurt Soup
with Grilled Ramps*

*Coke Farms Dandelion Greens, Pea Shoots and Butter Lettuce
with Spring Radishes and Lemon Vinaigrette*

*Pan Seared Pacific Cod with Happy Boy Farms Heirloom Tomato Confit
Served with Roasted Asparagus with Red Bell Pepper and Laura Chenel
Goat Cheese and Potato Casserole with Hobbs Bacon,
Caramelized Onion and Dill*

Watsonville Organic Strawberry Dream Cake



photo: www.chowtownstudios.com



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Chilled Spinach, Chervil and Strauss Family Yogurt Soup with Grilled Ramps

4 cups baby spinach, washed & dried
3 bunches chives, washed and trimmed
1 cup chopped chervil
1/2 cup crushed ice
Kosher salt and fresh ground white pepper
2 teaspoons wasabi powder
2 cups vegetable stock
3 cups Greek yogurt
1 1/2 cups heavy cream
6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
9 each fresh ramps, washed, trimmed and cut in half
8 chervil sprigs for topping

Directions:

Place spinach, chives, chopped chervil, ice, kosher salt, pepper, wasabi and stock into blender and puree until smooth. Strain through a bullion strainer into a non-reactive bowl and add yogurt.

Whip the cream to stiff peaks* and fold into the yogurt mixture. Hold in the refrigerator until service.

Toss ramps with olive oil, and more kosher salt and pepper. Grill over red-hot coals until just charred. Rest for 5 minutes, then slice ramps thinly on the bias.

To serve:

Ladle soup into 8 bowls and top with grilled ramps and sprig of chervil. Serve immediately.

**** Epicurean Tip: A Cool Whipping Trick***

Start by placing your bowl and utensils in the refrigerator. When you are ready to whip, take them out and dry off the bowl and utensils. Remove the cream just before you whip. The cold affects the fat bubble that forms during whipping. The colder the cream and the tools, the fluffier the cream will get and the longer it will maintain its finished texture.

Coke Farms Dandelion Greens, Pea Shoots and Butter Lettuce with Spring Radishes and Lemon Vinaigrette

2 cups dandelion greens, washed and drained
2 head butter lettuce, washed and torn into bite-size pieces
Kosher salt and fresh ground black pepper
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
Zest from 1/2 lemon, minced fine
3 ounces extra virgin olive oil
2 cups pea shoots, washed and drained
8 spring radishes, sliced thinly on a mandoline*

Directions:

Place dandelion greens and butter lettuce in a salad bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Top with lemon juice, zest, extra virgin olive oil and toss to coat.

To serve:

Distribute onto 8 chilled salad plates. Garnish with pea shoots and radish slices. Serve immediately.

****Epicurean Tip: This Mandoline Is Tuned to "Be Sharp"***

There is a wide variety of mandoline slicers on the market for home or commercial use. It is an invaluable tool and produces thin, even slices. Some come with different blades for julienne, baton or wavy cut (you can make waffle slices with the wavy cut, first go in one direction while slicing then rotate slightly to get a criss-cross cut). These tools are extremely sharp and must be used with the holder provided or a "cut glove" to prevent injury.



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Pan-Seared Pacific Cod with Happy Boy Farms Heirloom Tomato Confit

For the Tomato Confit:

4 sprigs fresh basil
2 sprigs fresh mint
6 large heirloom tomatoes, cut in half horizontally
Cloves from 1 head of garlic, peeled
2 cups extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon dry chili flakes

Directions:

Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

Place basil and mint in the bottom of a large casserole. Place tomatoes on top of herbs, cut side up. Wedge the whole garlic cloves between the tomatoes. Top the tomatoes with the olive oil, salt and chili flakes. Bake uncovered for 1 1/2 hours, basting every half hour with pan juices. Bake until tomatoes are tender and slightly browned.

Remove from oven and rest at room temperature for 1 hour. Gently remove the skin from the tomatoes. Drain the liquid into a sauce pan and reduce to a quarter of the volume. Pour reduction over the tomatoes. Tomatoes and herbs may be coarsely chopped or left whole, but leave garlic cloves whole. Hold at room temperature until serving.

For the Cod:

8 Pacific cod fillets, skinned and bones removed
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper
2 ounces extra virgin olive oil
Fresh dill
8 lemon-peel twists*

Directions:

Wash the filets and pat dry with paper towels. Season the de-boned side of the fillets with salt and pepper. Heat 1 ounce olive oil in a large skillet over medium high heat until shimmering. Place 4 of the fillets, skin side down in the pan. Season skin side with salt and pepper. Brown for 3 to 4 minutes. Carefully flip onto the skin side and cook for another 3 to 4 minutes. Fish should be fork tender.

Place cooked fish on a warm platter while you cook the remaining 4 fillets in the same manner.

To serve:

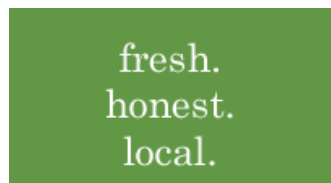
Place a bed of the tomato confit on each plate and place a fillet on top of each one. Garnish with fresh dill and a lemon twist.

** Epicurean Tip: Do the Twist!*

For a savory spark of flavor, cut a quarter-inch slice from the center of the lemon out through the peel. Grab the cut ends and twist in opposite directions. A twist imparts flavors from the fruit and the peel of the lemon.

Roasted Asparagus with Red Bell Pepper and Laura Chenel Goat Cheese

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
2 large red bell peppers, washed, trimmed and cut julienne
1 tablespoon butter
3 pounds asparagus spears, ends trimmed
Kosher salt and fresh ground black pepper
4 ounces crumbled goat cheese
1/2 cup roasted pine nuts



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Directions:

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a skillet over medium high heat until it shimmers. Add bell peppers and cook until just browned. Remove from pan and keep warm.

Turn on broiler.

Add butter and remaining oil to a baking sheet and place under broiler until butter melts. Add asparagus, salt and pepper. Toss until well coated. Spread the asparagus evenly over the pan and place under broiler for 3 minutes. Remove from the broiler and stir. Continue broiling and stirring until the asparagus is well browned and tender.

To serve:

Place asparagus on the plate, top with bell pepper and goat cheese, and garnish with pine nuts. Serve immediately.

Potato Casserole with Hobbs Bacon, Caramelized Onion and Dill

6 slices Hobbs bacon, sliced into 1/4 inch pieces
1 large white onion, cut thin julienne
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper
2 teaspoons fresh dill, chopped
2 1/2 cups chicken stock
3 pounds russet potatoes, scrubbed
4 tablespoons butter, cut into small cubes

Directions:

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
Oil a 13 x 9-inch baking dish.

Cook bacon in a sauce pan until crisp. Transfer cooked bacon to a paper-lined plate. Drain all but 3 tablespoons of drippings from the sauce pan. Add the onion and a pinch of salt. Cook over medium heat until onion is golden brown and tender. Place onion in a large non-reactive bowl, add bacon and dill and season with salt and pepper. Add stock to the sauce pan and bring to a slow simmer. Scrape any browned bits from the bottom of the pan as you simmer.

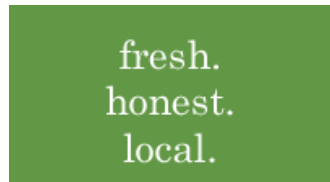
Peel the potatoes and slice into 1/8 inch slices using a mandoline*. Add to the onion/bacon mixture and toss until well mixed. Transfer to the baking dish. Spread evenly and lightly press into a smooth layer. Pour the warm stock over the potatoes and spread the butter cubes evenly over the top. Bake uncovered until potatoes are golden brown and tender, about 45 minutes. Place on cooling rack and let rest for 20 minutes before serving.

To Serve:

Use a serrated knife to cut any desired portion size and place on plate using a small spatula. Serve immediately.

Watsonville Strawberry Dream Cake

1 cup unsalted butter*, plus butter to coat baking pan
2 1/2 cups cake flour, plus flour for baking pan
2 cups, plus 1/4 cup organic evaporated cane juice
2 large cage-free eggs
2 teaspoons lemon juice, divided
2 teaspoons vanilla extract, divided
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup buttermilk
1 pint fresh organic strawberries, washed, stemmed and chopped fine
2 pints fresh organic strawberries washed, stemmed and sliced
1 pint whipping cream, chilled
1 cup sifted icing sugar



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Directions:

Place oven rack in the center of the oven and preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Butter and flour a 13 x 9 inch pan.

Cream butter together with 2 cups cane juice until smooth and fluffy. On slow speed, add eggs one at a time. Add lemon juice and 1 teaspoon vanilla.

In a separate non-reactive bowl, sift together flour, soda and salt. Add flour mixture to egg mixture, on low speed, alternating with buttermilk. Mix batter until blended and smooth.

Fold in chopped strawberries gently until well incorporated.

Pour into baking pan and bake for 30 to 40 minutes until center of cake springs back up after a gentle press with your finger, or a paring knife you've inserted comes out clean. Remove from oven and place pan on a cooling rack to rest for 30 minutes. Turn out the cake* onto the cooling rack and let cool for 1 hour.

Mix the sliced strawberries with 1/4 cup cane juice and mix thoroughly. Let rest while cake is cooling.

Whip the cream on high speed. Slowly add icing sugar when cream is frothy. Add remaining 1 teaspoon vanilla. Whip to stiff peaks.

To assemble cake:

Spread sliced strawberry mixture evenly over cake. Spread the whipped cream over the sliced strawberries.

To serve:

Portion cake and serve immediately

** Epicurean Tip: Salted or Unsalted? That is the Question!*

Most chefs prefer salted butter for savory preparations and unsalted butter for baking and sweet preparations. Here's why: When preparing savory food and using salted butter, note that there is 1/3 teaspoon of salt to each 1/2 cup butter - the proverbial "pinch." Baking is a much more exacting food science. By using unsalted butter, it lets the baker control the amount of salt in the mix.

** Epicurean Tip: A Good Turnout*

To turn the cake out of the pan, run a paring knife carefully around the edge of the pan to separate it from the cake. Place the cooling rack over the cake pan. Using oven mitts, slide the cake pan off the table onto your hand. Place your other hand on the rack directly over the cake. Invert the pan and place the rack back on the table. Tap the bottom of the cake pan and lift the pan from the cake.