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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



A Warm Winter's Welcome

It's been unseasonably cold here in Northern California over the past few weeks. Old Man Winter came right on cue, just in time for the holidays. High winds brought down branches and scattered them along the roads, and mounds of brown, crunchy leaves piled up in the gutters and on sidewalks. We celebrated at parties dressed in layers of wool, wearing hats and gloves.

The extreme cold and the blustery winds were an inspiration for me to create this year's winter menu, which includes both a soup and a stew made with ingredients from local farms and ranches. As an added bonus, simmering and braising will warm you and your kitchen while you cook. And when the front door opens and your guests bustle in, they'll be greeted with the delicious aroma of braising stew and baking cornbread. Now that's what I call a warm winter's welcome!

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

WINTER MENU

Serves 8

Pitman Farms Organic Chicken Soup with Escarole

Capay Farms Organic Winter Greens with Blood Oranges and Creamy Poppy Seed Dressing

Braised Paso Prime Grass-Fed Beef Stew with Winter Vegetables and Cornbread Cobbler

Port-Poached Thomas Farms Quince and Cranberry Shortcake with Three Twins Vanilla Bean Speck Ice Cream



photo: www.chowtownstudios.com



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Pitman Farms Organic Chicken Soup with Escarole

2 quarts chicken stock
1 1/2 pounds skinless, boneless, organic chicken
3 tablespoons butter
2 stalks celery, diced
2 medium carrots, peeled and diced
1 small yellow onion, peeled and diced
1 medium parsnip, peeled and diced
2 teaspoons garlic, chopped
2 tablespoons fresh thyme, chopped
2 bay leaves
1/2 cup dry white wine
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper
1 small head escarole, washed and torn into bite-size pieces

Directions:

Bring stock to a boil in a heavy-duty stockpot. Poach* the chicken - add raw chicken, bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer. Skim the foam that forms on the surface. Cook until chicken is thoroughly cooked, about 25 minutes or until the internal temperature registers 165 degrees on a meat thermometer. Remove the chicken and allow to cool. Strain the stock and set aside.

Return pot to the stove over medium heat. Melt butter. When foaming stops, add celery, carrots, onions, parsnips, garlic, thyme and bay leaves. Cook until the onions are translucent. Add wine and reduce by half. Add strained stock and bring to a boil. Dice the cooked chicken and add to soup. Drop heat to a low simmer and cook for 15 minutes. Add kosher salt and fresh ground pepper to taste. Add escarole and cook until just wilted.

To serve:

Ladle into 8 soup bowls and serve immediately.

*** Epicurean Tip: Poaching**

Poaching is a great technique for cooking chicken breasts for soups and other recipes. It leaves the meat tender and, because it doesn't require fat to cook, is low in calories. We like to use chicken stock for our poaching liquid, although water and wine will work as well. Poaching can also be used for fish, however, note that fish require a much shorter cooking time.

Capay Farms Organic Winter Greens with Blood Oranges and Creamy Poppy Seed Dressing

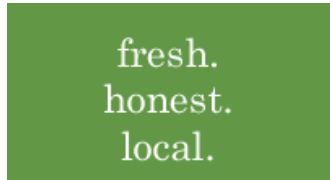
1/2 head savoy cabbage, julienned*
2 heads Belgian endive, leaves washed and separated
2 heads Treviso radicchio, leaves washed and separated
1 head chicory, washed and chopped coarse
2 shallots, peeled and julienned*
Kosher salt and fresh-cracked pepper
3 blood oranges, peeled; each orange cut into 8 slices
1/2 cup hazelnuts, toasted, peeled and chopped coarsely
1/2 bunch Italian parsley, sprigs only
1/2 bunch chervil, sprigs only

Directions:

Place cabbage, endive, radicchio, chicory and shallots in a salad bowl, season with salt and pepper and set aside.

For the Dressing:

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
3 teaspoons honey
1 tablespoon crème fraîche
1 tablespoon poppy seed
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and fresh-cracked pepper



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** Epicurean Tip: Julienned Vegetables*

Julienne is an attractive way to prepare vegetables for a special meal. Also called a "matchstick" cut, a julienne is 1/8 x 1/8 x 2-3 inches in length. To prepare a julienne, trim the ends and sides of the vegetable to make a rectangular shape, then make uniform-size cuts at 1/8 inch intervals. Trim the julienne to the desired length and compost the remaining small ends, or use them for stock.

Directions:

Combine all ingredients, except oil, into a small mixing bowl. Whisk until blended. Slowly drizzle in the oil, while whisking until all is incorporated. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

To serve:

Top greens with dressing and toss until well coated. Arrange 3 orange slices onto 8 salad plates. Place tossed greens on top of orange rounds. Top each salad with crushed hazelnuts, parsley and chervil sprigs.

Braised Paso Prime Grass-Fed Beef Stew with Winter Vegetables and Cornbread Cobbler

3 ounces extra virgin olive oil
4 pounds grass-fed sirloin, diced into 1-inch cubes
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
3 carrots, peeled and diced large
1 small head celery root, peeled and diced large
1 pound red pearl onions, blanched and peeled
3 sprigs fresh thyme
2 bay leaves
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1/4 cup all purpose flour
4 each anchovy filets, rinsed and chopped finely
2 sweet potatoes, peeled and diced into 1-inch cubes
2 cups dry Marsala
2 cups beef stock

Directions:

Heat 2 ounces olive oil in heavy-duty stockpot. Season beef with salt and pepper and add beef cubes in small batches until browned. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside. Repeat until all beef is browned.

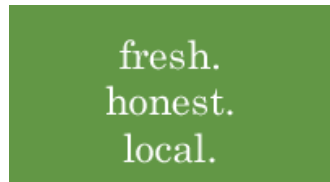
Heat remaining olive oil in pot until it shimmers. Add carrots, celery root, onions, thyme, bay leaves, tomato paste and flour. Stir over medium heat until fragrant and just starting to brown. Add beef, anchovy and sweet potatoes. Stir together, then add Marsala, being sure to scrape all the browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Mix until smooth and bring to a soft boil for 2 to 3 minutes. Add stock and return to a boil. Drop the heat to simmer and cook, covered, for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Remove the lid and continue to cook another 30 to 40 minutes or until the beef is tender. Transfer stew to a casserole and top with cobbler.

For the cobbler

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 cups white or yellow cornmeal
2 tablespoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons sugar
1 bunch dill, chopped finely
6 ounces butter, cut into cubes
2 cups milk

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.



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Combine flour, cornmeal, baking powder, salt, sugar and dill in a small mixing bowl. Add butter and mix on low speed until large crumbs form. Add milk and mix until all is incorporated.

Use scoop to dollop mixture over stew. Place in the oven and bake for 30 minutes or until topping is browned on the edges. Serve immediately.

Port-Poached Thomas Farms Quince and Cranberry Shortcake with Three Twins Vanilla Bean Speck Ice Cream

2 cups apple juice
2 cups tawny port
1/2 cup sugar
1 rosemary sprig
2 cups quince, peeled and diced
1 cup fresh cranberries

Directions:

Place juice, port, sugar and rosemary in a saucepan over medium heat. Add quince and cranberries and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a low simmer until quince is tender, about 30 to 40 minutes. Strain mixture and reserve liquid. Discard rosemary and set quince mixture aside.

Return liquid to saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook down to 1/2 cup. Add quince and cranberries to sauce and keep warm.

For the Shortcakes

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
3/4 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons evaporated cane juice
1/2 cup sour cream
2 tablespoons half and half
1 large egg
4 ounces butter, melted and cooled slightly

Directions:

Preheat oven to 475 degrees

Mix flour, baking powder, salt, and 1 tablespoon evaporated cane juice in a mixing bowl. Whip together sour cream, half and half, and egg, then add butter. Add sour cream mixture to dry ingredients and mix until well incorporated. Dough will be very sticky. Scoop dough into 8 equal portions onto sheet pan lined with parchment paper. Sprinkle remaining 1 tablespoon of evaporated cane juice on top and bake for 15 minutes until browned. Remove from oven and allow to rest for 15 minutes.

To serve:

Split each biscuit onto a dessert plate. Spoon quince, cranberry mixture onto the bottom half of the short cake and then place the remaining half back on top of the fruit mixture. Place a scoop of ice cream onto each plate and serve immediately.