

# OBSERVATIONS & PHILOSOPHIES OF ELLA BRENNAN



ELLA BRENNAN, mentor, entrepreneur, culinary pioneer

## **On Learning By Watching**

I don't cook, but I learned what good food was from my mother. I sat in the kitchen on a stool and watched her butcher the meat, prepare the fish. I believe watching a great chef cook is like watching a great ballet. Chefs have magic in their hands.

## **On Learning From Your Competition**

When we were at Brennan's in the French Quarter our whole goal was to be recognized like Arnaud's. We could see the line and that hurt for a long, long time. At first we didn't take reservations, but people started to show up and the wait would be long, so they sat on the patio and drank first. My sister Dottie bought a rope but people kept coming, swarming in, so finally we started taking reservations.

## **On Learning From Each Other**

Back in the forties and fifties, chefs were schooled in the kitchen. You took somebody, you tried to help them learn and grow. You didn't "use" people. The word "use" was unacceptable. You set up a teaching arrangement that improved over the years and it was rather fantastic. Over the years our kitchen has been run by Chefs Paul Prudhomme, Emeril Lagasse, Frank Brigtsen, Jamie Shannon, and now Tory McPhail, who's been here since 2002.

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## **On Fresh Ideas**

My sister, Adelaide, was the smartest Brennan alive. She told me, "Don't let the guys know you can type!" All the innovative ideas in our restaurants came from my brothers and my sister. There was dinner at Antoine's, so my older brother, Owen, started breakfast at Brennan's, and he came up with Bananas Foster, named for one of his old friends. My brother, Dick, brought in the idea of live music for a jazz brunch. My sister, Adelaide, came up with the system for having a form for each reservation where you got as much information about the person on the phone as you could. Are you a visitor or local? Are you here for a special occasion? If so, your table gets a green ribbon. This way when you sit down your waiter knows something about your table. I must admit that the balloons at jazz brunch were my idea. Everyone loves balloons. And many good ideas have come from the people working with us. Our chef, Jamie Shannon, insisted that everything be cooked to order.

Someone had the idea that rather than have your waiter take your order to the kitchen and pick it up when it was ready, runners would bring your food to the dining room, so waiters never had to leave their tables. Every week the staff meets with the chef and management. Everybody is involved; everybody is listened to.

#### **On Eating Out In Your Own Town**

The food industry in New Orleans is fraternal. We have learned to respect each other. Our family believes that you must be friends with the people in your business. Nobody eats out more than the Brennans do. We could support the industry.

#### **On What's Ahead**

I still have the dream that New Orleans could become the Paris of America.



## Commander's Palace

# PECAN-CRUSTED FISH WITH CRAB SALAD & CRUSHED CORN SAUCE

### INGREDIENTS

1 ½ cups (5 ounces) pecan halves	4 tbsp butter
1 ½ cups all-purpose flour	4 oz mixed baby greens
Creole seafood seasoning to taste, or your favorite Creole seasoning	2 tbsp mixed fresh herbs (basil works well)
1 medium egg	½ lbs Champagne-poached jumbo lump crabmeat, picked free of shell
1 cup milk	2 tbsp cane vinegar
6 fish fillets, 5 to 7 ounces each (use flounder, bass, catfish, or any thin, smaller, non-oily fish), free of bones and scales	Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

### Crushed Corn Sauce

½ gallon cream	1 oz flour
5 ears of corn	1 oz chopped thyme
1 oz butter	1 chopped onion

Combine butter and flour and cook until dark (roux).

Cut corn off cob and place in cream. Bring to boil and add chopped onion. Add roux and chopped thyme. Return to boil. After the sauce thickens, add the crushed corn. Salt and pepper to taste.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Place the pecans, the flour, and the Creole seasoning in a food processor and process until finely ground. Transfer the pecan flour to a large bowl.

Whisk the egg in a large mixing bowl and add the milk. Season both sides of the fish fillet with Creole seasoning. One at a time, place the fillets in the egg wash.

Remove one fillet from the egg wash, letting any excess fluid drain back into the bowl. Dredge the fillet in the pecan flour and coat both sides, shaking off any excess. Transfer to a dry sheet pan, and repeat with the remaining fillets.

Place a large skillet over high heat and add 2 tablespoons of the butter. Heat for about 2 minutes, or until the butter is completely melted and starts to bubble. Place three fish fillets in the pan and cook for 1 ½ minutes per side, or until the fish is an even brown. Remove the fish, place on a baking rack, wipe the pan clean with a paper towel, add another 2 tablespoons of butter, and repeat with the three remaining pieces of fish.

In a large bowl toss greens, herbs, crabmeat, and vinegar and season with salt and pepper.

Divide the corn sauce in six serving plates, place trout in center of sauce, and top with salad.