

JUAN CARLOS GONZALEZ

SoBou

Juan Carlos Gonzalez was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to a large family of Spanish and Italian descent. Gonzalez, one of 35 first cousins on his father's side, fondly recalls large family gatherings as the reason he initially became interested in pursuing a culinary career.

Please provide us with a few thoughts on your time at Commander's Palace and specifically with Ella Brennan.

In January of 2000 I began my externship through CIA at Commander's. During one of my first days, Ella was sitting at the Chefs Table in the kitchen and she called me over. She told me that she knew every one of her employees, but did not know me so I must be new. So she introduced herself, asked me some questions, and we talked for about 30 minutes. When I look back at that conversation, it amazes me that with over 200 employees, she could spot the new one within minutes of sitting down. And she not only wanted to know my name, but also know about me.

What years did you work at Commander's and in what positions? I started my externship in 2000 and worked from the bottom up: prep, pastry, garde manger, and hot line. In 2003 I received my first management position and was promoted to Butcher. In 2004 I was promoted to Saucier, then Garde Manger Chef, then Sous Chef. In 2005 I went to Café Adelaide as a Sous Chef, then became the Executive Chef of Bistro Alex in 2009. I came back to Commander's in 2011 to test recipes for SoBou, then opened SoBou in 2012 as Executive Chef.

What was the most important thing or lesson you learned at Commander's or from Ella Brennan? Professionalism – from Jamie, Tory, Ella, and Ti. Also the statement, "We are ladies and gentleman serving ladies and gentlemen." And the biggest enemy of the best is the good.

What do you think will be Ella Brennan's legacy on the New Orleans culinary scene? Influential – Miss Ella taught us all that the riches and depths of Creole cooking are endless, and that we are lucky to have incredible food at our back door.



*CHEF JUAN CARLOS GONZALEZ, SoBou
Commander's Palace 2000-2004*



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New Orleans cuisine is America's greatest indigenous cuisine, and that we should keep pushing it's boundaries and evolving it!

What is or was your favorite dish at Commander's Palace that you either helped create or you just love to eat? There are a few, but the BBQ Stew stands out – garlic crusted redfish, poached oysters, seared shrimp, garlic aoli toast and New Orleans style BBQ sauce. It is the dish that taught me how to be a line cook and represents all things good in New Orleans food.

After more than a decade of culinary experience with the Commander's Palace Family of Restaurants, Gonzalez returned to New Orleans from Houston in 2012 as the executive chef for SoBou, the newest addition to the expanding restaurant group.



Chef Juan Carlos Gonzalez of SoBou

CREOLE CREAM CHEESE CHEESECAKE

INGREDIENTS

Crust

2 cups graham crackers
½ cup sugar
½ cup unsalted butter, melted

Topping:

¾ cup sour cream
2 tbsp sugar
shaved bittersweet and white chocolate

Filling

2 ½ pounds cream cheese
1 ¼ cup sugar
3 medium eggs
1 ¼ cup Creole cream cheese
(see recipe below)

CREOLE CREAM CHEESE

3 ½ cups skim milk
3 drops rennet
2 tbsp buttermilk

Combine the skim milk and buttermilk in a large sauce pot. Heat over medium heat until the temperature reaches 110 degrees. Pour into a large mixing bowl. Add the rennet and stir in. Cover the bowl with cheesecloth. Let stand at room temperature for about 24 hours. Line a colander with cheesecloth. Pour the Creole cream cheese into the colander and let it drain for about ½ hour. Spoon the cheese into a container and refrigerate. Makes about 1 ¾ cups.

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 250°.

Combine the graham cracker crumbs, sugar, and melted butter in a mixing bowl. Mix thoroughly by hand, and press the crumbs evenly over the bottom and up the sides of a 9 x 3 inch springform pan. Refrigerate.

Use the large bowl of a mixer with the paddle attachment to combine the softened cream cheese and sugar. Mix until smooth, occasionally scraping the bowl with a spatula. Add the Creole cream cheese and mix until smooth. Add the eggs one at a time, scraping the bowl with a spatula and mixing until smooth after each addition. Pour the batter into the prepared crust and bake for 2 hours, until the center of the cake is firm to the touch. Let the cake cool while you are making the topping.

Whisk together the sour cream and sugar. When the cake is almost at room temperature, spread the mixture over the top with a spatula. Refrigerate until completely chilled, preferably over night.

Sprinkle with shaved chocolate. Cut with a knife dipped into very hot water then dried.