

A Provocative Question at the Dinner Table with

SONNY LEE

PRESIDENT, SON OF A SAINT

Sonny Lee's last meal would be a time to celebrate with all his favorites. This would include not only great food but also family, lively conversation, and traditional jazz music. His last meal would feature dishes that are not usually paired together, such as **Saffron NOLA's Curried Seafood Gumbo** with Parkway's Shrimp Poor Boy, dressed with no mayo and extra pickles, and fresh boiled crawfish. However, these are amongst his favorite dishes, all of which can be best enjoyed with a group of people. He would begin his evening with an Old Fashioned, and after a night of good conversation and cool-toned, intimate songs of Chet Baker, he would finish with a Dominican cigar.



Bivian "Sonny" Lee III is the President and Executive Director at Son of a Saint.



Photos by Kenny Morrison

"For me, a last meal is celebrating life with all my favorites: a little Chet, Saffron NOLA's Curried Seafood Gumbo, my family, a sip of Old Fashioned, a bite of shrimp po-boy."

—SONNY LEE



Saffron NOLA's CURRIED SEAFOOD GUMBO

Make the roux: In a large pot, heat the oil over medium until just short of smoking, 3 to 5 minutes. Using a wooden spoon, stir the flour into the oil, reduce the heat to medium-low and cook, stirring almost constantly, until the roux is the color of milk chocolate, 15 to 20 minutes.

Add the onion, bell pepper, and celery to the roux. Cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables are softened, 5 minutes. Stir in the garlic and ginger and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Stir in the stock, crushed tomatoes, curry leaves, bay leaves, turmeric, and thyme, along with 1 teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon chili powder. Bring the gumbo to a boil over high heat. Once the mixture boils, reduce the heat to low and simmer until the flavors meld, skimming the skin that forms on the surface, about 1 hour.

Season the shrimp with the remaining ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon chili powder. Stir into the gumbo and cook until the shrimp is pink and cooked through, about 2 minutes. Stir in the crab meat and adjust the seasoning as necessary.

Crack black pepper into empty soup bowls, then divide the cilantro and scallions among the bowls. Place a scoop of steamed rice in each bowl and ladle the gumbo on top to serve.

INGREDIENTS

Roux

- ¾ cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup all-purpose flour

Gumbo

- 1 medium white or yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 small green bell pepper, finely chopped
- 2 celery stalks, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons minced ginger
- 6 cups homemade shrimp stock or store-bought seafood stock
- 3 medium tomatoes, crushed in a food mill, or 1 cup canned crushed tomatoes
- 2 sprigs curry leaves (about 15 leaves), stems discarded
- 2 dried bay leaves

- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 ½ teaspoons kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon Kashmiri chili powder or ground cayenne
- 1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined, tails removed
- ¼ pound lump blue crab meat (about ¾ cup), or use other lump crab meat
- Cracked black pepper, for serving
- ½ cup chopped cilantro stems and leaves, for serving
- ½ cup chopped scallions, for serving
- Steamed rice, for serving

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