



Photo courtesy of The Times-Picayune

Roasted Duck with Ginger-Peach Sauce

by JoAnn Clevenger

Roasted duck was an Upperline staple from the very beginning but Chef Tom Cowman took it to an apotheosis during his tenure as the restaurant's second executive chef. Chef Tom evolved a long, slow method of cooking and created new sauces – always served on the side so guests could choose their own ways of indulging or not.

Eventually our master prep men, James Chester and Miguel Gabriel, were prepping dozens of ducks for overnight cooking at a very low temperature (200 degrees). They put the ducks in at 11:30pm and took them out the next day at around noon. They then carved, deboned, and utilized different parts for the gumbo and étouffée appetizers. The half-duck main course became our most celebrated entrée, and all of us thrived on the media attention and customer excitement and admiration.



Brett Martin

Journalist

Upperline is simply the restaurant I miss more than any other, and to say that I miss Upperline is indivisible from saying I miss JoAnn—talking to her, watching her move around the dining room, seeing the expression of her long and fabulous history in the art displayed across the walls. She was Upperline and Upperline was she—at least during the decades when it was her second home.

Many others will speak to her talents as storyteller, friend, feminist, style icon, and grande dame of the front of the house at a time when the skills of a great host often seemed to have fallen out of fashion. What I worry might be overshadowed by all these obvious qualities is how important JoAnn was in the kitchen. For all the functions Upperline served, it was above all a wonderful place to eat. While that was the product of a succession of talented chefs, it was largely due to JoAnn's hand on the rudder. She was not afraid of innovation—after all, this is the woman who invented fried green tomatoes with rémoulade—but neither was she going to chase trends. Upperline was not the kind of restaurant where a chef was going to show off, put their stamp on the menu, or make a name for themselves—unless, of course, it was for executing

modern New Orleans classics with a consistency and excellence rarely found in any kitchen.

At the same time, JoAnn believed customers should get what they want. One of my favorite Upperline dishes was the slow roasted half-duck, served with either ginger-peach or garlic-port sauce. This choice always gave me a moment of anxiety until I realized I could order both—and I always got the feeling JoAnn approved. Maybe the greatest expression of her philosophy of restaurants was the Upperline dessert menu. There were nine items available on what was most often the third course of a prix fixe dinner. They included: bread pudding, pecan pie, crème brûlée, stilton cheese with pecans, a Brandy Alexander on the rocks, Irish coffee, and a small green salad. All were exquisitely tasteful, perfectly wonderful ways to end a meal. The list was both wildly democratic, with something for everybody, and finely curated by a wise hand. *I want you to be happy*, it said, in a friendly but firm voice indistinguishable from JoAnn's. *Now, let me show you how.*

I miss being shown.



Me with my siblings on our farm in Alexandria, VA.



Me with my mother.

Roasted Duck with Ginger-Peach Sauce

3 hours 25 minutes

Serves 6 half-duck entrées

This recipe has been altered for cooking at home.

Plating

Split the ducks in the middle of their breasts and down both sides of the back bones, removing the back bones. This method is less messy than carving at the table. Serve sauce on the side in a gravy boat.

Mashed sweet potatoes are a good accompaniment, as is half of a baked sweet potato.



Duck

3 4-5 lb ducks, trimmed

2 Tbl garlic, chopped

¼ cup Kosher salt

Trim each duck by removing the wing tips, leg ends, neck skin, and tail point. Also remove the neck, liver, and gizzard from the cavity (save trimmings for duck stock).

Pat duck skin dry with paper towels.

Prick breast 5 or 6 times to release fat.

Mix garlic, salt, thyme, and pepper. Rub the ducks inside and out with the mixture.

Sauce

3 cups canned sliced peaches, drained and roughly chopped

8 oz jar Major Grey's mango chutney

2 tsp fresh ginger, grated

3 Tbl orange juice

Combine the peaches, chutney, ginger, orange juice, lemon juice, and drippings in a heavy, 2-quart saucepan over medium heat.

In a small bowl, whisk together cornstarch and brandy.

3 Tbl ground thyme

2 Tbl ground black pepper

Place them breast side up on a rack in a roasting pan and roast at 425°F for 45 minutes.

Turn the oven down to 350°F. Turn the ducks over and cook for another 45 minutes, basting occasionally with pan drippings.

Remove to cool.

2 Tbl lemon juice

3 Tbl duck drippings from pan (optional)

2 Tbl cornstarch

2 Tbl brandy

Once the saucepan ingredients are simmering, add the cornstarch-brandy slurry and cook, stirring occasionally, until the sauce has thickened. If too thick, a little peach syrup or water can be added.

Taste for salt.

Cook for 5 more minutes and set aside to cool.