



Photos by Kenny Morrison

Oysters St. Claude

Acclaimed cookbook author and food writer Yotam Ottolenghi, just one of many famous guests who joined JoAnn at Upperline, had this to say about one of Upperline's beloved appetizers on his website: "The oysters were sublime, but the punchy sauce—an ingenious combination of sweet, sour, savory, and spice—stood out even more." JoAnn and Chef Ken Smith named the sauce after one of their favorite neighborhood spots, Restaurant Mandich on St. Claude Avenue. The two had lunch there shortly before it was lost to Hurricane Katrina.



Photos by Kenny Morrison



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Visiting Upperline was always a feast for the senses, even before your dinner arrived. But the most evocative experience I had at the restaurant was on my last visit. It was empty except for JoAnn herself, who met me for an interview about her decision to retire and not reopen.

The dining room did not feel empty for long. As she told stories of her customers, of the subjects and artists behind the paintings on the walls, of the chefs and waiters and dishwashers who worked

together here, she re-animated the room with her vivid gratitude for it all.

That's when I fully realized just how much Upperline represented, not just as her vocation but as her life's work, a manifestation of her journey through New Orleans culture expressed through hospitality. It made me yearn for one more evening here, but I also left so very thankful to have experienced it through the years.

Oysters St. Claude

1 1/2 to 2 hours, plus prep

Serves 5 to 6 appetizer portions

Plating

Plate on a small round: Put 5 or 6 oysters on the plate in a circle pattern with a tiny space between each one. Use a coffee spoon to put a dollop of sauce on each oyster. Sprinkle with minced parsley if desired.

Spicy or a touch too hot is hard to predict; your judgment is required at serving time. Use smaller dollops if considered too spicy.

Fried Oysters

24 to 30 fresh oysters, shucked

1 Tbl Kosher salt

2 cups corn flour

1 tsp fine grind black pepper

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

Vegetable oil

Pour oil to a depth of 2 inches in a large saucepan or Dutch oven, then heat oil to 350°F.

Drop carefully into oil, as they may splatter. Do not crowd the oysters.

Mix corn flour, all-purpose flour, salt, and pepper in a bowl.

Fry until crisp and lightly browned, 1 to 2 minutes.

Working in batches with a small colander, toss oysters in flour mixture and shake off excess.

Transfer to paper towels to drain

St. Claude Sauce

2 Meyer lemons, seeded and sliced (do not peel), or 1 1/2 lemons if extra large

3/4 tsp sugar

1 1/2 cups peeled garlic cloves

2 Tbl Crystal Hot Sauce

1 large bunch parsley, rough chopped (if stems are very thick or long, chop off some of them), or two small bunches

2 tsp Tabasco®

2 1/2 Tbl Worcestershire sauce

1/2 tsp white pepper

2 Tbl Spanish paprika (non-smoked)

1 tsp Kosher salt

12 oz unsalted butter, melted

Purée lemons, garlic, the chopped bunch of parsley, Worcestershire sauce, paprika, sugar, hot sauce, Tabasco®, white pepper, and salt in a food processor until fairly smooth. The texture will be similar to mayo but not as smooth or silky.

often to avoid the sauce burning. The sauce will turn dark red and thicken. Cooking time varies, approximately 1 1/2 to 2 hours, so keep a close watch on the sauce.

Heat melted butter in a medium-large saucepan over medium heat. Add the purée to the butter, heat to a low simmer, then turn heat to very low. Using a wooden spoon, stir

Add salt to taste, if needed.

Keep at room temperature if using it within 3 to 4 hours. Mix the sauce well if it begins to separate.

