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Cooking."**

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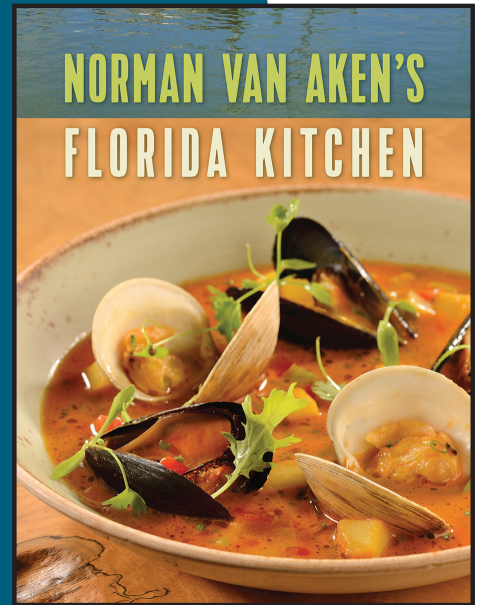
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WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

"Vast and delicious, nuanced and intelligent, this essential book reaches as far back as our colonial history and leaps forward to a new and vibrant culinary landscape that speaks not only for Florida but for America as a whole."

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"The term 'fusion' in cooking, pioneered by Norman Van Aken, motivated me to want to explore the world as a young cook in the '90s. *Norman Van Aken's Florida Kitchen* sheds a light on that revolutionary time and its ongoing role in American cuisine through its stories and recipes."

—Alon Shaya, executive chef and partner, Shaya

"Norman Van Aken is single-handedly the greatest influencer of new American cuisine."

—Vinny Dotolo, chef and co-owner, animal

"The recipes in this book are timeless and a delicious reference to food history in America."

—Jon Shook, chef and co-owner, animal

"Norman Van Aken is a visionary, a grand essayist and, after reading this book, the person you will most want to share a toast to a tangerine-mango colored Florida sunset."

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—Sandra Gutierrez, author of *The New Southern-Latino Table*

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"Norman elevates flavors that are the core of Florida's cuisine. He is truly gifted in the way he makes them shine."

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"Touches on the influences—from as far as the Middle East to as close as Cuba—that have helped mold and shape the dishes and ingredients of Florida's cuisine. Delicious and compelling, it has become a regular "go-to" cookbook in my kitchen."

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"Norman Van Aken's bright cuisine continues to shine and inspire home cooks."

—Daniel Boulud, chef-owner, The Dinex Group

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"Inspires readers to roll up their sleeves, don their aprons, and get cooking."

—Ferdinand Metz, president emeritus, Culinary Institute of America

NORMAN VAN AKEN'S FLORIDA KITCHEN

NORMAN VAN AKEN

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NORMAN VAN AKEN

is chef-owner of NORMAN'S at The Ritz-Carlton, Grande Lakes, Orlando, and 1921 by Norman Van Aken in Mount Dora, Florida. Additionally, he is chef-partner at Three, a fine dining restaurant, and No. 3 Social, a roof deck lounge, in the Wynwood Arts District of Miami. His cooking school, In the Kitchen with Norman Van Aken, is also in Wynwood. Van Aken is the only Floridian inducted into the James Beard Foundation's Who's Who of Food & Beverage in America and was a 2016 MenuMasters Hall of Fame inductee with Jacques Pépin and Wolfgang Puck. He is the author of five cookbooks, including *My Key West Kitchen: Recipes and Stories* with Justin Van Aken, and a memoir, *No Experience Necessary: The Culinary Odyssey of Chef Norman Van Aken*.

Norman Van Aken

is available for interviews and appearances



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Q&A

with
NORMAN VAN AKEN
author of
Norman Van Aken's Florida Kitchen

How did your love for cooking start?

Not long after I got hungry! Really it probably found root when our mother was preparing homemade jams to preserve for winter. Magically she let me help her. The intoxicating smell of simmering strawberries and sugar on our stove and watching her kind face as she cooked remains with me still.

Your New World cuisine blends flavors from immigrant cultures with local ingredients. When did you first decide to bring multiple tastes together and what inspired your fusion style?

It happened very naturally while I was a young cook in Key West. Being around the mix of humanity that was new to me, a transplanted Midwesterner, ignited new reactions to food in me. I wanted to make what I was tasting. And it was a fusion style that I ultimately named it.

How have other chefs informed your own cuisine?

I have loved reading my entire life. So it was a combination of that and working within the crazy and wonderful kitchen world that drove the

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information into me. I wrote my memoir, *No Experience Necessary*, on that idea, among others.

Do you have a particular vision in mind as you create and test new recipes?

For me it is like writing a song. I have a few notes, maybe a bit of a melody that floats into my head. But in cooking there are ingredients instead of notes. In both cases one wants to evoke deep feelings and make lasting memories.

Are you still learning new techniques along the way?

The beauty of cuisine is that one is always learning. I learned a really old technique while writing this book. I offer it as an alternative to cubing potatoes in my “Chowder, the Red One . . . Like Sailors Make” recipe. You prepare the potatoes by cutting them once in half and then by driving a knife into them and twisting the knife. It’s an ‘old school’ way of ensuring the potatoes “break” along their natural lines and better absorb the soup’s merging flavors.

You’re opening a cooking school in Miami. What has the response to this idea been like?

Nearly everyone who has worked in our kitchens who hears about the school says, “Oh, that is so perfect for you, Chef! You always surrounded us with ways to learn!” And that makes me quite happy.

What is one must-have kitchen tool that you couldn’t live without?

My tasting spoons. You must always taste the food as you go along to see what it is revealing to you.

Do you have a signature dish your family members request at special gatherings over and over again?

There are a number of them, but one is certainly my creamy cracked conch chowder with saffron, citrus, and coconut. But I think my “After Church’ Ham, Mac ‘n’ Cheese, and Coca-Cola Collards” dish from the new book could become a contender!

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If you weren't a chef, what would you be?

A songwriter in a blues and country rock and roll band living about as simply as imaginable with lots of family, friends, books, and music around me, probably in the South somewhere. I'd like there to be a lake if it can be arranged. I can't imagine not cooking so I'd need a good stove too, a wood burning grill, a wine cellar. . .

What advice would you give home cooks just starting out in the kitchen?

The food is always guiding you much more than is spoken about and much more than people realize. Your powers of observation are a marvelous way to learn. People lean on recipes and TV food shows and such too much. It is better to immerse yourself in great ingredients—seasonal, local, properly-raised and curated ones. Keep it simple, get your feet under yourself for a few years, and then you can blossom.

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PREFACE

When I was still in my teens, a friend of mine and I took a Greyhound bus out of our native state of Illinois during the month of April, leaving the last of a brutish winter behind. As we rode south, I peered out through the bus windows, transfixed by a very green, floral place with . . . lo and behold . . . the Atlantic shimmering in its gargantuan majesty near Jacksonville. I continued gazing out the glass; and then a shadow from some trees changed the light and suddenly the glass turned to *mirror*—and I saw my own image, wide-eyed, enraptured by the spectral, unfolding scene.

The years pass, as years do. Arriving in Key West as a twenty-one-year-old, I was greeted with the Spanish welcome written on the wall of the Key West Airport: “Bienvenidos a Cayo Hueso!” My first years cooking would not be what they are without the calypso, soul, blues, and funk of the music and flavors of that storied island. As my career turned from a fledgling newcomer to an established member of the working class and a chef at that, I spent more and more time in the center of our state. The words were now dominated by the English language, with a delightful drawl at times.

From my very early days of cooking I was guided by something my grandmother, Nana, told me when I was younger and investigating a trove of books left behind by my Uncle Norman (who died prematurely at the age of 24). She said, “Norman, you don’t need to have a lot of books. You just need to have the right ones and truly read them.” So the die was cast and my love of reading and learning was set by her wisdom. I decided at some point in my journey as a cook, a chef, and a writer that my goal in life would be to help shed light on the power of the cooking and foodways of Florida. Through each book I’ve written, the path went this way and that, but always guided by the hope that I was able to get it right—to translate the powerful flavors that I was finding in the kitchens I worked in or places I was fortunate enough to eat at. In some ways I still feel like that young man on the bus, looking out the windows and then catching my reflection as we go on. I hope the wonders of this state, so graced with beauty and bounty, will inspire you as they do me as we spend time sharing my Florida kitchen.

Provide caption here



Oldways Chicken, Sausage, Shrimp, and Crab Gumbo

Note: If you shell the shrimp yourself, you can use the shells to infuse your Chicken Stock (strain them out after 30 minutes), or save them for another stock or broth for the future.

Like many American chefs of my generation, it was Paul Prudhomme who taught me about that eternal key to a great gumbo—a proper roux. In today’s rush-rush world it might be a ghost method, yet there is a zen-like state you can reach as you nurse a drink of some potency, listen to an Alison Krauss ballad, and watch a roux turn from blond to a coppery hue while filling your kitchen with an ineffable nutty aroma. When I first attempted roux, I purchased an enormous black iron pan and held Chef Prudhomme’s masterwork, *Louisiana Kitchen*, open with a wooden spoon. The book had color pictures to illustrate the “mother types of roux making.” It would have taken a video, however, to record the sparks that erupt as you add the cut-up “holy trinity” of vegetables and spices to the finished roux! That is also the spark of genius that illuminates the comforting constancy of old foodways kept alive.



Serving suggestion: Serve the gumbo with simple white rice. Our “Pikliz” Slaw (page 000) is a nice tangy condiment to serve alongside too.

1 free-range chicken, cut into 8 pieces
1 teaspoon ground cayenne
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
½ teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves, minced
1 teaspoon fresh sage leaves, minced
¾ cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dredging
Canola or peanut oil, as needed to cook the sausage and sear the chicken
1½ pounds *uncooked* Italian (hot or mild, as desired) or andouille sausage
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 serrano chiles, seeded and minced
3 cups diced sweet onions
1½ cups diced red bell peppers
½ cup diced celery
1 cup diced fennel
1 bay leaf
2 quarts Chicken Stock (page 000)
1½ pounds large fresh shrimp, peeled, deveined, and cut into bite-size pieces
1 pound fresh crabmeat

This is not a pretty dish. It is earthy, rustic, even peasant food. The chicken is kept on the bones. It smells heavenly and tastes deep, rooted, and resonant with the mix of land and sea that it is. Just the way I like to eat when surrounded by old friends and the growing family.

Serves 6 to 10

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Season the chicken with the cayenne, cumin, salt, pepper, thyme, and sage. Lightly dredge the chicken in flour. Set aside.

Heat a large Dutch oven or rondeau over medium heat. Add some oil and then the raw sausage and gently cook for about 10 minutes, turning a few times. Remove the sausage to a plate and set aside. (It will not be fully cooked yet.) Add more oil to the pot and allow it to get fairly hot. Add the chicken, skin side down, and cook, turning it until nicely colored on both sides. Leave the bits that stick to the pot, as they will make the roux much tastier.

Remove the chicken to a baking sheet and place it in the oven to roast for about 30 minutes. (It will not be fully cooked at this point.)

When ready to proceed with the roux, heat up the drippings in the pot with more oil if necessary to make ½ cup fat. When it is fairly hot, add the ¾ cup flour and cook over medium heat, whisking almost constantly, until the flour mixture turns a nutty or chocolate brown, about 25 minutes.

Add the garlic, chiles, bell peppers, celery, fennel, and bay leaf, stirring well. Cook for about 5 minutes. Gradually add the stock. Whisk well and bring to just under a boil. Add salt to taste. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, for about 1 hour, stirring occasionally.

Add the partially cooked chicken and sausage, as well as the shrimp, and cook until the shrimp are pink and firm and the chicken is fully cooked. The time will vary so check it out. Remove the sausage to a board, cut it into rounds, and return them to the pot.

Add the crabmeat and simmer for about 2 minutes. Serve.



The American South

When I came up with the thesis of a “New World Cuisine,” I realized very quickly that it was not only a New World that opened up for Europeans when the shores of Plymouth Rock and St. Augustine were landed upon. It was also the very idea of old and new joining as well. So the “Immigrant Songs,” as I like to call them, are joined now in a choir of sorts that never existed before. *Listen to the music!* Black voices and instrumentalists created the blues and then, with the changing pace of life in the dawn of the twentieth century, wrought jazz. The foodways of the American South—Bourbon, country ham, chitlins, gumbo, cornbread, collard greens—are born of an agricultural age and remain rooted to it. And we are all the more fortunate for it.

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 was probably the greatest real estate deal in history, and it took a mere \$15 million. With that acquisition, America became a nation that superseded the size of France, Britain, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Switzerland combined. The belle of the ball of that land deal was the port city of New Orleans. The belle sure knew how to cook! The flavors of New Orleans were the very first iteration of a kind of New World Cuisine that would rival anything ever created in Europe. While leaning on traditions and techniques from the Old World, cooks of all strata created a *fusion* that still rings a mighty dinner bell (breakfast, brunch, and lunch too) in this age. And it likely will straight through to the next. Flavors don’t go out of fashion—they evolve. And often they return. It is the nature of mankind to play in the surf of sensation.

As I write from my home in Florida I’m aware that many find our state somehow “less southern” than those to the north and west of us. Perhaps the notion took hold because the plantation society so prevalent in other southern states had a slightly lighter footprint in Florida. Conversely, Florida saw the arrival of a Central and South American population sooner and more steadily than other places in the South. That has certainly been true of the lower part of the state. This wonderful assimilation brings a unique hyphenation now between the South and the “Latino.” Cookbook author Sandra Gutierrez wrote a book exploring that wedding with delicious reverberations. I contend that this will arc ever higher in the next decade.

Of course the well known is still rightly loved. I embrace the flavors of the Southern Foodways Alliance. Nathalie Dupree, Jessica Harris, Frank Stitt, John Besh, Emeril Lagasse, Paul Prudhomme, the Lee brothers, the joyful and scholarly John T. Edge, and before them Edna Lewis and Bill Neal, have books in a treasured place within my library. My early forays to Charleston and New Orleans will always be moments when I recognized the power of American-born cookery that gave me the confidence to seek it for us in Florida.

In 2007 there was a conclave of writers, chefs, and scholars who gathered in Charleston that was written about by a woman named Nancy Davidson for the *New York Sun*. Ms. Davidson wrote that there was general agreement about the nature of southern cooking. The consensus was this:

Flavors don't go out of fashion—they evolve

The cuisine is the result of a mingling of black and white cultures—in dishes frequently prepared by black servants for wealthy, white families, as well as meals derived from African traditions passed down among slaves that stretched limited resources over long periods of time (grits or rice, for instance, with small quantities of inexpensive cuts of meat). A lack of refrigeration in the hot climate also required that foods be either very fresh or cured. The panelists also agreed that Southern cuisine is not monolithic. It is regional, and the characteristic dishes vary from place to place. “Low-country” is a reference to the coastline region that extends from Savannah, Ga., to just north of Charleston. It is influenced by the Gullah people, descendants of various African ethnic groups, from the coastal islands of Georgia and South Carolina, whose language and cooking derives from a creolized mix of Spanish, French, Native American, and African cultures. It was the marshy, rice-growing plantations that first marked South Carolina’s place in the culinary history of the world.

“It was traditionally a rice culture with sandy soil, long growing seasons with strong influences from the coastal waters, crab, and other seafood from the estuaries,” explained

the chef of Charleston’s Hominy Grill, Robert Stehling. “Okra and eggplant came from slave influences, brought in originally with the slave trade from rice growing areas of Africa.” The Lowcountry rice casserole dish, purloo, made with chicken, sausage, and shrimp, is “similar to jambalaya and paella,” Mr. Stehling said.

Immigrant Songs indeed, then and now.





Squash Salad

WITH RED CABBAGE, CARROTS, MERKÉN, PEPITAS, POMELO, AND HONEY-SOY DRESSING

So often we lose the beautiful aspects of foods when we have to take the skins off. A banana is much more beautiful skin on, but we cannot eat it due to the toughness. And many of our squashes have skins we would be challenged to gnaw through. But the delicata is aptly named, as we can enjoy the skins with the interior flesh too. This salad has a strength in opposites: sesame and squash; honey and the Chilean spice merkén (which you will fall in love with if you haven't yet encountered its depth). The other new item for many will be pomelo, which, as Larry Schokman, the delightful emeritus director of the Kampong, once told me is the grandfather of the grapefruit.

Okay, so the stove has to be turned on a bit for this one. But you could slip the squash in the oven while you take a shower or sashay across the kitchen and shred the cold parts of this salad. And you will delight your vegetable-loving friends by serving a salad that could be a whole luncheon.

Serves 6 to 8

For the honey-soy dressing

6 tablespoons soy sauce
3 tablespoons honey
2 tablespoons minced fresh
ginger minced
¼ cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice
¼ cup rice vinegar
2 tablespoons dark toasted sesame oil
6 scallions, white part mostly, minced
2 tablespoons white sesame seeds,
lightly toasted
Cracked black pepper to taste

Make the honey-soy

dressing: Mix all of the ingredients together and set aside.

continued →

For the squash:

1 delicata or kabocha squash, or other winter squash with an edible peel

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon honey

½ teaspoon Chilean merkén spice (or a combination of ½ teaspoon smoked pimentón and 1 teaspoon ground cumin)

1½ teaspoons kosher salt

Cracked black pepper to taste

For the salad:

7 cups cored and finely shredded (with a knife or mandoline) red cabbage

1 cup peeled and coarsely grated carrots

1 pomelo or grapefruit (to yield about 1½ cups cut up)

½ cup pepitas (if you use pre-salted, adjust your salt downward to taste)

1 teaspoon caraway seeds

Goat cheese (I use a soft kind and allow about 1½ ounces per guest)

Kosher salt and cracked black pepper

Make the squash: Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

The skins of kabocha and delicata are edible. Remove any stickers that retailers too often feel compelled to add directly on the food, rinse the exteriors, and pat dry. Cut off the two ends, then cut the squash in half and scoop out the seeds. Discard or save the seeds for another use. Cut the squash again in half lengthwise and then into bite-size pieces.

Put the oil, honey, merkén, salt, and black pepper in a bowl and mix. Add the squash and toss to coat. Spread in a single layer in a roasting pan. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, stirring once halfway through. Let cool to room temperature.

Make the salad: Soak the cabbage in cold water for about 15 minutes. Drain well, then add the carrots. Toss well and drop onto paper towels to pat dry and remove all the excess water, which will help ensure that the dressing is not diluted. Transfer to a container and refrigerate while you prepare the rest of the ingredients.

Prepare the pomelo by trimming the top and bottom off. Slice off the skin following the curves of the fruit. Cut out the sections one by one over a bowl to catch the juice, then cut them into bite-size pieces and return them to the bowl with the juice.

Put the squash, cabbage and carrots, pepitas, and caraway seeds in a salad bowl and add just enough vinaigrette to coat. Reserve any leftover dressing for another time.

Garnish with the pomelo and small spoonful-sized portions of goat cheese.

Note: If you like you can use a less creamy cheese to balance the acidity. Shaved Parmesan (add it to taste) would be nice.

Spatchcocked Chicken *Piri Piri*

Portuguese sailors were likely to have been the first to successfully map Florida, as documented in what historians and cartographers know as the Cantino planisphere. (A planisphere is a type of star charting device.) *Piri piri* is Swahili for “pepper pepper,” and the chiles are thought to have been carried by Portuguese sailors leaving African colonies. So let us have power in *piri piri*, and let history rest a bit.

Serves 2 to 4

For the *piri piri*:

2 tablespoons Bourbon
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 to 2 *piri piri* chiles, or 1 Scotch bonnet chile, seeded and minced
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon smoked pimentón
¾ cup diced sweet onion
1 red bell pepper, diced
Kosher salt and cracked black pepper
Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
½ cup loosely packed fresh Italian parsley leaves

For the chicken:

1 (3½-pound) best-quality chicken
Kosher salt and cracked black pepper
2 tablespoons olive oil or (even better) duck fat

For the *piri piri*: Put a small saucepan on the stove and heat it over medium heat. Carefully add the Bourbon and ignite it with a long match. Shake the pan as the alcohol burns off. Set aside.

Heat the oil in another saucepan over medium heat until it is quite warm. Add the chiles and garlic and stir for a moment. Add the pimentón. Stir. Add the onion and bell pepper. Add a bit of salt and pepper. Cook for about 8 minutes, stirring. Take care to scrape the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to keep the pimentón from sticking. (Our flat-edged wooden spoon is the favorite tool here.) We want the bell pepper to be fairly soft. Remove from the heat and let cool a bit.

Scrape the mixture into a blender or food processor. Add the lemon zest and juice, parsley, and Bourbon and blend until smooth. Check for seasoning. Put the *piri piri* in a clean container. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use, up to 2 weeks.

Make the chicken: Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Cut the wing tips off the chicken and save them for stock. Use kitchen shears to cut out the backbone and save it for stock too. Using your hands, flatten the chicken. Cut out the keel bone and add it to the stock bones. Towel off any bits of remaining organ meat that might be left from the butcher shop and discard them.

Season the chicken all over with salt and pepper and then rub with the oil.

Wrap a clean heavy brick with aluminum foil. (We didn’t have one so we used our Mexican *molcajete*, a heavy mortar. We simply made a square of foil and used it as a barrier between the bird and the *molcajete*.)

Heat a cast-iron pan (or other heavy skillet) large enough to hold the chicken flat over medium heat.



Note: The fat in the skillet in which you cooked the chicken can be poured over the chicken as soon as the bird is on the cutting board (before spooning on the *piri piri*) for an extra dose of flavor, or the fat can be strained and saved for another use.

Place the chicken *skin side down* in your pan and weigh it down with the brick. Steadily brown/char the chicken on the skin side for about 20 minutes. Do not allow it to burn; adjust the heat as needed. Turn the chicken over and cook for about 15 more minutes, until slightly charred and golden on that side, too.

Remove the bird to a cutting board. Coat the chicken on the skin side with the *piri piri*; you may not need it all (save the rest in the refrigerator for another use). Put the chicken on a wire rack with a rimmed baking sheet under it.

Place it in the heated oven and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, until an instant-read thermometer reads 165 degrees. Set aside to rest for about 5 minutes.

Cut the chicken into pieces and serve.

Mama's Zucchini Bread Layer Cake

WITH SPICED TAMARIND JELLY AND RAINBOW CARROT-CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

Like many backyard gardeners, our mother had a beautiful turn-out with zucchini. I liked as veggies as a kid, so you can imagine how much I revered her zucchini bread. I slathered mine with cream cheese after giving it a good toasting. I brought in “special forces” when creating this cake by enlisting her grandson—our son, Justin—to bring this recipe to a level we felt would impress the lady for whom we name this sweet marvel.



For the spiced tamarind jam:

14 ounces tamarind pulp (we use El Sembrador—brand frozen pulp)

½ cup apple jelly

3 tablespoons Pickapeppa sauce

For the zucchini bread:

½ cup golden raisins

1 cup spiced rum

2¼ cups all-purpose flour

1¼ teaspoons baking soda

½ teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon grated nutmeg

½ teaspoon kosher salt

2 eggs

1½ cups sugar

⅔ cup canola oil

2 teaspoons vanilla bean paste

1½ cups grated zucchini

¾ cup crushed pineapple, drained

½ cup finely diced candied ginger

For the rainbow carrot–cream cheese frosting:

1½ cups coarsely grated rainbow carrots

Grated zest of 3 lemons

1 tablespoon granulated sugar

1 pound cream cheese

1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

2 cups confectioners' sugar

Make the spiced tamarind jam: Put the tamarind pulp in a pot and boil for 30 minutes to reduce. Remove from the heat and stir in the jelly and Pickapeppa sauce. Return to the heat and simmer for another 15 minutes. Pour into a jelly jar with a lid, and let cool to room temperature before placing in the refrigerator to store.

Make the zucchini bread: Preheat a convection oven to 325 degrees, low fan, or a regular oven to 350 degrees. Grease three 9-inch round cake pans and line the bottoms with parchment paper.

Put the raisins in a small saucepan and cover with the rum. Bring to a simmer, then remove from the heat and set aside to plump and cool.

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt.

In a large bowl, whisk the eggs and sugar until light and fluffy. Stir in the oil and vanilla, then stir in the zucchini, pineapple, ginger, and the raisins with the rum.

Make a well in the flour mixture, pour in the zucchini mixture, and stir to incorporate.

Pour into the prepared pans and bake, rotating for even color, for about 35 minutes, until an inserted toothpick comes out clean. Set on wire racks to cool, then wrap in plastic and chill in the refrigerator for 2 hours.

Make the rainbow carrot–cream cheese frosting: Toss the carrots with the lemon zest and granulated sugar in a bowl. Set aside.

Put the cream cheese in the bowl of an electric mixer and beat to soften. Beat in the butter, scrape down, and beat until smooth. Stir in the vanilla and confectioners' sugar. Remove the bowl from the mixer and fold in the carrots.

Once the cakes have chilled, trim the top of each cake to create a level surface. Place the first cake layer on a cake stand or serving plate. Spread frosting on top with an offset spatula. Place a second cake layer on top, frost it, top with the third layer, and frost the top and sides of the cake. When the sides and top are smooth, use the tip of the spatula to create grooves in the frosting if you'd like.

The Mustachioed Swimmer

1 ounce Appleton Estate V/X rum
1 ounce apple brandy
1 ounces fresh-squeezed lime juice
 $\frac{3}{4}$ ounces simple syrup (page 000)
Lime wedge for garnish

If you read my memoir, *No Experience Necessary* (and I hope you do), you will learn that I once not only made a drink for the legendary Tennessee Williams, but he kissed me too. Mr. Williams was a common sight in the old days in Key West. He was not bothered by the locals one bit as he sauntered down to the same beach we frequented to take his routine and obviously restorative swim many afternoons. He would dry his face and then sink down on a beach towel to sun a bit before heading back to his Duncan Street home—and probably a cocktail of his own.

Makes 1 cocktail

Combine the rum, brandy, lime juice, and simple syrup in a shaker and fill with ice. Shake and strain into a coupe glass and garnish with a lime wedge.

Dance Card Darlin'

5 fresh mint leaves, plus 1 sprig for garnish
1 bar spoon of sugar
3 ($\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick) slices peeled cucumber
1 orange wedge
 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce fresh-squeezed lime juice
 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce Old Sour (page 000)
3 ounces Pimm's No. 1
2 ounces Fever Tree ginger beer

The Key West-based novel *92 Degrees in the Shade*, by Tom McGuane, features a kind of crazy-brilliant fisherman named Nichol Dance. The great Warren Oates played him in the movie version, which was one of the zanier movie sets that ever hit Florida. This is a play on this name and also about taking chances, which wild Nichol Dance did plenty of in the memorable McGuane novel. Care to dance?

Makes 1 cocktail

Chill a collins glass in the freezer. Once chilled, muddle the mint leaves with the sugar lightly in the glass. Then add the cucumber and orange, crush them, and top with ice.

In a mixing tin, shake the lime juice, old sour, and Pimm's vigorously with ice, then strain into the glass. Top with the ginger beer and stir gently.

Garnish by smacking the mint sprig gently in your palm and placing it in the drink, along the side of the glass. Serve with a straw.

