

BOOK REVIEW

NEW ORLEANS CLASSIC GUMBOS AND SOUPS

As Mardi Gras season comes around, pull out the biggest pot in your kitchen and invite everyone over for gumbo—New Orleans' quintessential dish. For videos of the chefs, a forum, and more recipes, visit gourmet.com.



"You go messin' with my mama's gumbo, you gonna get hurt." With an opening line like that, who could possibly resist Kit Wohl's *New Orleans Classic Gumbos and Soups* (Pelican Publishing Company; 37 recipes; \$15.95)?

After Hurricane Katrina hit, in 2005, Wohl, an artist and author, was determined to assure everyone that the cuisine of New Orleans was still very much alive. And this winning book, photographed and designed by Wohl herself, pays enthusiastic homage to her beloved city. She tirelessly shakes down New Orleans' culinary kings and queens (John Besh, Susan Spicer, Leah Chase ...), combs through some of the grandest kitchens (Antoine's, Commander's Palace, Arnaud's, Galatoire's ...), and even travels outside the city limits for John Folse's and Marcelle Bienvenu's bayou specialties to come up with 37 pots of amazing gumbos, bisques, and soups.

As Wohl explains, Creole and Cajun gumbos traditionally include a roux (a fat-and-flour thickener); a Louisiana cook's "holy trinity" of chopped onion, celery, and bell peppers; a seasoned stock; and poultry, meat, or seafood. Nowadays, however, improvisation is honored, and gumbos often reflect, according to Wohl, the "fanciful thinking" of the creative multicultural residents. Seafood gumbos, chicken gumbos, turkey gumbos, pork gumbos, some with sausage, some a wild combination of the above, all parade happily through Wohl's collection. Admittedly, many of these dishes take patience to prepare; the Gumbo Ya-Ya (at right) can keep you in the kitchen for up to four hours, as can chef Kevin Vizard's River Parishes Seafood Gumbo, but they're worth the effort—and they feed a crowd.

If time is an issue, there are quick choices, too, like Billy Wohl's warming Red Bean and Sausage Soup (at gourmet.com), which can be made in under an hour. And, come summer, Mark Falgoust's lovely Chilled Creole Tomato Soup rivals any gazpacho I've ever had, and it takes only minutes to put together.

In New Orleans, gumbo appears at almost every celebration. Since this is Mardi Gras season, you could, of course, just hop on a plane and join the party there. On the other hand, you could haul out your largest pot, give one of these recipes a try, and have the party at home. —Diane Abrams

KEY INGREDIENT: ANDOUILLE SAUSAGE

With its tempered heat and lovely smokiness, this Cajun staple finds its way into many gumbos and soups. Most andouille recipes call for hand-cubed pork butt and shank scraps, a small portion of pork fat, salt, pepper, and granulated garlic, all stuffed into a casing of beef middle intestine (which happens to be the perfect size). It's then slowly smoked over pecan wood (and, in some regions, sugarcane) for hours. We like the Aidells brand, available nationwide in many supermarkets or by mail order (aidells.com; 800-546-5795). —D.A.

GUMBO YA-YA

Michelle McRaney, Mister B's Bistro

From *New Orleans Classic Gumbos and Soups* by Kit Wohl

Legend says that the term "gumbo ya-ya" was a French-based dialect spoken in New Orleans during the 1800s. Another school of thought says that "gumbo ya-ya" referred to the chattering of women while they cooked in 19th century New Orleans. Cindy Brennan, proprietor of Mister B's Bistro in the French Quarter, says the restaurant's gumbo ya-ya is the best-selling dish on the menu.

YIELD: ABOUT 6 QUARTS

- 1 pound (4 sticks) unsalted butter
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 red bell peppers, diced
- 2 green bell peppers, diced
- 2 medium onions, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 1¼ gallons (20 cups) chicken stock
- 1 pound andouille* sausage, cut into ¼-inch-thick slices
- 2 tablespoons Creole seasoning, store-bought or see recipe, page 102
- 2 tablespoons kosher or sea salt plus additional to taste
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried hot red-pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon chile powder
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 3-½-pound chicken, roasted and boned
- hot sauce to taste
- boiled or steamed rice

*Any good-quality pork sausage, such as kielbasa, may be substituted.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 102

