



The Science of Scrumptious

Olive Oil Poached Shrimp with
Horseradish Bubbles and
Cocktail Sauce Consommé

EXPERIMENT WITH RECIPES FROM CORDÚA RESTAURANTS' CULINARY R&D TEAM OF CHEFS DAVID CORDÚA, JONATHAN JONES AND RANDY RUCKER

Americas is changing — big time. In fact, a unique evolution of the whole collection of Cordúa Co. restaurants — Americas, Artista, Amazon Grill and Churrascos — looms on the horizon as three young hip chefs merge their varied expertise with the tried-and-true values and ethics of this hometown-grown organization.

In an unprecedented move, head honcho Michael Cordúa, who burst on the Houston restaurant scene 20 years ago blazing a trail of New World cuisine, now looks east and south for culinary inspiration. With son David, Cordon Bleu Paris grad and the company's corporate chef,

Michael joined the fabled Ferran Adria in Barcelona for a cooking experience of a lifetime. "Fifty guests, 50 chefs," says David. "We made the reservations a year ago!"

Next, Houston's "foam" guy, Randy Rucker of laidback manor, hopped aboard the Cordúa team as research and development chef. "When I found Randy's resume on my desk, I got goose bumps," recalls David. "While I was working in California, I kept reading about laidback manor and this guy Randy. I could not believe my luck that he wanted to work for us."

South went that team, to Peru, researching and exploring the exquisite, multi-ethnic cuisines of the region.

Then Jonathan Jones, self-described as being best known for the giant Kobe Beef burgers and foie gras slabs at Max's Wine Dive, joined the group as exec chef for the soon-to-open Americas in The Woodlands.

This Americas will be the public premiere of months of research by the three chefs who have been working behind the scenes in the Cordúa research lab/kitchen above Artista. Here, liquid nitrogen has flash-frozen corn kernels, emulsions have been blended, horseradish bubbles popped and sous vide cooking techniques refined.

Here, New World ingredients have merged with the latest and most innovative Old World and Peruvian techniques (an evolved food attitude that is slated for integration into the entire corporation). Here, dishes have been prepared and presented for final menu approval. And here, food and cooking philosophies have been endlessly discussed.

While the techniques are avant-garde, the respect for ingredients remains classic.

"Our food is driven by ingredients — products first, then technique. It's all about flavor, flavor, flavor," says Rucker.

Jones adds, "The food is a celebration of the here and now. Of what is in season."

They won't take the food too far too fast. Collectively they are smarter than that.

"When people don't understand, they become intimidated. That's not our goal," says Rucker. "But if we can use science to make our food come out better, then...it's worth the risk."

He believes that once you stop learning, you might as well take your chef jacket off. "It takes time to gain your customers' trust...to know your audience," he says. "Some want a three-course meal, some 12. Everything needs to have integrity. We need to make everyone feel comfortable."

Jones adds, "We need to walk the walk, be in our kitchens all the time, to lead by example, to reach down to the waiters to make sure they understand the food so they can effectively communicate to the customers." Jones believes that a restaurant cooks with more than just the food. "Everything is an ingredient in the dining experience — the chairs, the forks...."

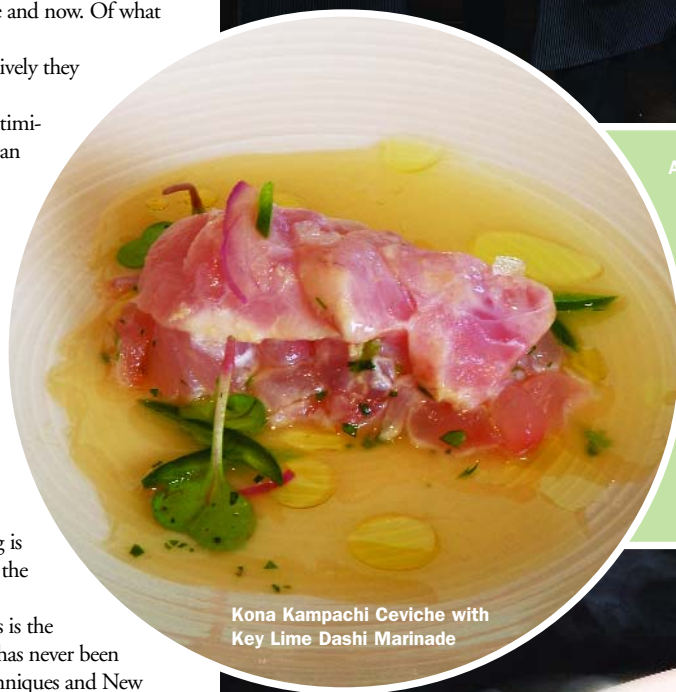
David Cordúa believes The Woodlands Americas is the perfect restaurant to initiate change. "At Americas it has never been just one way. We opened in '93 with Old World techniques and New World food. Americas reflects the melting pot attitude of America. Now we are going to update the original mission. Add Peruvian, Japanese. Maybe even some interior Mexican dishes. We have always strived to change Houstonians' perception of Latin foods." The Post Oak Americas, after renovation and relocation to the new Boulevard Place later this year, will feature the new Americas menu as well.

Rucker, inspired by dishes he tasted while in Peru, created the following recipes during his R&D for the new Americas menu. Each recipe has several components. Rucker advises to make all items separately and in the sequence presented. Also following standard cooking practices, be sure to assemble necessary equipment before commencing cooking.

All foods were photographed at ARTISTA, 800 Bagby, 713.278.4782.



ABOVE: Taking Old World foods into a Brave New World of cooking techniques are Cordúa chefs, left to right, Randy Rucker, Jonathan Jones and David Cordúa.



Kona Kampachi Ceviche with Key Lime Dashi Marinade



At The Woodlands Americas, the Kampachi Ceviche will be served with dried corn dipped in liquid nitrogen. When the corn hits the Key Lime Dashi Marinade, the sauce vaporizes into smoke.

See Page 38 for recipes. Visit houseandhomeonline.com to download or print recipes.

Olive Oil Poached Shrimp with Horseradish Bubbles and Cocktail Sauce Consommé Serves 12

- 12 MEDIUM SHRIMP** (21 to 25 count to a pound), peeled and deveined
- 2 TABLESPOONS EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL**
- 12 BAMBOO SKEWERS**

Skewer shrimp head to tail. Place shrimp tail-side down with olive oil in a Ziploc that has all the air squeezed out. Fill a pot with water, place a candy thermometer in the pot and heat water to 125 degrees.

Place the Ziploc bag of shrimp in the water bath with the water temperature at 125 degrees for 8 minutes. (If you don't have a candy thermometer to determine the proper water temperature, stick your finger in the water as long as it can stay — that's the approximate heat you need to cook the shrimp, says David Cordúa.)

Remove shrimp and shock in ice bath. Reserve and keep cold.

Cocktail Sauce Consommé

- 3 1/2 CUPS SHRIMP STOCK**
(Clam juice can be substituted.)
- 1/2 CUP COCKTAIL SAUCE**
- 1/2 CUP EGG WHITE**
- 12 SHOT GLASSES**, for serving

Whisk all ingredients together while cold until frothy. Place in a saucepot over medium heat until a raft (clump of foam) begins to form. Lower the temperature. DO NOT STIR.

Cook until clarified. Remove from heat and slowly ladle into a coffee filter set into a fine chinoise (a finely meshed sieve). Fill each shot glass half full with filtered consommé. Place one shrimp with skewer in each shot glass with consommé.

Horseradish Bubbles

The bubbles need to be used immediately. To serve this dish, Rucker suggests you place consommé in glass, place one shrimp in consommé and wait to the last minute to top with horseradish bubbles.

- 4 TABLESPOONS SHALLOTS**, sliced
- 1/2 TABLESPOON EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL**
- 1 GARLIC CLOVE**, sliced
- 1 CUP SHELLFISH STOCK**
(or substitute commercial clam juice)
- 1 CUP WHOLE MILK**
- 1/3 CUP FRESH HORSERADISH**, grated
- 1 CUP PREPARED HORSERADISH**
- 1 TABLESPOON SOY LECITHIN***
- 6 TABLESPOONS BUTTER**, diced

Heat olive oil in a saucepot and add shallots. Caramelize shallots over low heat. Add the garlic. Be very careful not to burn the shallots and garlic. Sauté until garlic aroma is present. Add the horseradish, shellfish stock, milk and prepared horseradish.

Kona Kampachi with Key Lime Dashi Marinade

Kona Kampachi is a succulent, sashimi-grade version of Hawaiian yellowtail. It has one of the highest levels of omega-3 fatty acids, is free from internal parasites, has no detectable levels of mercury or PCBs and is environmentally sustainable. The flavor is rich and buttery, and the fish is available year-round. You can often find it in Houston at Central Market. The fish can be substituted with firm, fresh white fish such as flounder, striped bass, snapper or farm-raised Texas redfish. "Choose whichever fish is freshest," advises Jones.

This multistep recipe is the result of collaborative efforts of Randy Rucker and Jonathan Jones.

- 3 OUNCES KAMPACHI FILET, SMALL DICE**
- 2 TABLESPOONS KEY LIME AND DASHI MARINADE**
(recipe follows)
- 3 1/2 SERRANO PEPPER**, cut in half, thin bias
- 1 TEASPOON CILANTRO**, chiffonade
- 1/2 TABLESPOON CANNED WHITE HOMINY**, rinsed and drained
- 1 TABLESPOON RED ONION**, fine julienne
- 2 TEASPOONS EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL**
- FLEUR DE SEL SALT** to taste

Place all ingredients, except olive oil, into a bowl and fold until well coated. Marinate in the refrigerator at least 1 hour and no more than 6 hours. Place on plate and finish with sea salt as needed and drizzle of olive oil.

Key Lime and Dashi Marinade for Ceviche

- 1/2 CUP KEY LIME JUICE**
- 2 TABLESPOONS GRANULATED SUGAR**
- 2 TABLESPOONS DASHI BROTH****

Place all ingredients into a blender and mix on high until emulsified. Pass through a fine chinoise into a plastic storage container, cover and refrigerate.

** Instant Dashi broth packets maybe purchased at Daido, 11146 Westheimer Road, 713.785.0815, or at select Fiesta markets.

Place soy lecithin in a blender; add liquid and blend on high for 2 minutes. Place in a plastic container with lid and allow to steep for 20 minutes.

Pass through a fine chinoise or sieve into a tall thin container.

Place an immersion blender just underneath the liquid and blend on high until a froth forms. (If you don't have an immersion blender, wash and dry the regular blender bowl, then pour the liquid into the regular blender and blend on high until bubbles form on top of the liquid.) Immediately spoon the froth on top of the shrimp cocktail.

* Soy lecithin, which helps sauces emulsify, may be found at Kroger, Whole Foods and Central Market.