

NEW ORLEANS local + modern seafood



LOCAL + MODERN SEAFOOD

FROM CRAWFISH BOILS TO SHRIMP AND
GRITS, JAMBALAYA AND GUMBO, NOLA'S
CHEFS ARE **SOURCING LOCALLY** FOR
THE **SEAFOOD MENU**.

Corn and shrimp bisque
at Toups South.

BY AMELIA LEVIN

New Orleans has long been known for its seafood, but in recent years, chefs have taken new steps to source more of their fish straight from the nearby Gulf as a way to boost the local fishing economy. At the same time, they are using local seafood, including bycatch and underutilized species, to put their riff on the classic dishes that are traditional favorites.

SHRIMP ON THE MENU

Lenny Minutillo Jr. is chef/owner of Happy Italian Pizzeria and former director of sales for Louisiana Seafood Exchange, a local seafood wholesaler. He prides himself on the use of what he calls “chemical-free shrimp” wild-caught straight out of the Gulf of Mexico, where shrimping is allowed year-round.

“So many shrimpers use a chemical-based slush solution to give the shellfish a longer shelf life. They are only allowed a certain percentage of the solution, but shrimp naturally soak it all up,” Minutillo says. “When you go to cook this type of shrimp, it dispels some of the solution and becomes rubbery and chewy, and sometimes has a soapy taste.”

Chemical-free shrimp, of course, comes with a price, but Minutillo says it’s worth it for his pizza, pasta and salad toppers, as well as for the pancetta-wrapped jumbo shrimp and grilled shrimp with roasted garlic cream sauce entrees.

Nick Landry, culinary development chef for Southeastern Mills, Rome, Georgia, who is based Youngsville, Louisiana, also sources wild-caught Gulf shrimp for various dishes. Most



MODERN TAKES ON CLASSIC NEW ORLEANS SEAFOOD DISHES

CARROLLTON MARKET

Chef/owner Jason Goodenough is famous for his Oysters Goodenough. For the dish, he flash-fries oysters that come from where the Gulf of Mexico and Lake Pontchartrain meet and serves them atop a bed of creamed leeks cooked with Benton’s bacon and a light drizzling of bearnaise sauce. He’s also known for his housemade Creole Cream Cheese Cavatelli, which he makes by substituting equal parts creole cream cheese (a local product) with ricotta for an extra tang to balance out the richness of the butter-browned cauliflower, locally sourced crabmeat and dusting of Grana Padano cheese.

black drum seared in a cast-iron skillet and baked in a broth made from roasted mushrooms and mushroom powder. The dish is finished with fried sweet potato *calas* (savory doughnuts), along with a spoonful of pickled banana peppers. For a take on a classic Louisiana catfish courtbouillon, Prewitt breads and pan-fries the catfish and simmers it in a slightly spicy tomato/roux-based sauce. For the Louisiana shrimp roll, local shrimp caught that day are poached, peeled and mixed with mayonnaise, grain mustard, hot sauce and green onions, and stuffed into house-baked rolls

COMPÈRE LAPIN

At Compère Lapin, Nina Compton cooks up a Caribbean-inspired seafood pepper pot made with lobster stock, habanero peppers, coconut milk, escabeche vegetables and fish (Gulf grouper) with a butternut squash garnish. Also on the menu are her famous conch croquettes with a pickled pineapple tartar sauce.

SAC-A-LAIT

Husband and wife team Cody and Samantha Carroll, stars of the Food Network’s “Cajun Aces,” focus on modern takes on Acadian and Cajun cuisines at Sac-a-Lait. An example is their rendition of crawfish *tourtiere*—a traditional Acadian crawfish and mirliton (New Orleans squash) pie with Tabasco honey.

DTB

Chef/owner Carl Schaubhut, known for its reinterpreted coastal Cajun cuisine, makes his gumbo with Louisiana blue crab, collard greens and a crab-fat potato salad. He also uses the same crab for his crab-boiled chips with popcorn creme fraiche and pickled lemon.

TOUPS’ MEATERY/TOUPS SOUTH

At Toup’s Meatery and Toup’s South, executive chef/owner Isaac Toup’s and wife/co-owner Amanda Toup’s center on the Cajun rustic cookery Isaac Toup’s grew up with—dishes such as Gulf Seafood Couvillion with Louisiana Gulf fish, shrimp and crab-fat rice. On the menu at Toup’s South is Louisiana Gulf Stew made with crab, shrimp, oysters, and a crawfish/tasso gratin with cauliflower, cornbread crumb and Parmesan.



LEFT: Seafood Boil Popper Bites by Nick Landry, culinary development chef, Southeastern Mills.

TOP RIGHT: Oysters Goodenough at Carrollton Market.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: 1) Sac-a-Lait’s redfish and oysters.

2) Conch croquettes at Nina Compton’s Compère Lapin. 3) DTB’s crab-boiled chips.



recently, he put a spin on a classic seafood boil by shrinking all the ingredients and flavors into one manageable bite, similar to a hush puppy, for an appetizer.

To make the dish, he boiled the shrimp with crabmeat, fire-roasted corn, hashbrown potatoes, cream cheese and spices such as cayenne, onion, garlic and nutmeg, then blended the mixture until smooth. He formed it into balls with shredded cheddar cheese, then froze, breaded and fried them. They were served atop a small seafood salad dressed with a blend of bloody mary mix and Louisiana Gold Horseradish Pepper Sauce.

Landry has also used shrimp for a spin on shrimp and grits. For that dish, he stuffed jumbo shrimp with stoneground grits that had been cooked with Worcestershire sauce, parsley, garlic and onions. Then he breaded and fried the shrimp and served with a pimento cheese dipping sauce made using a traditional light roux base.



LESSER-KNOWN SPECIES

Gulf crawfish is another favorite of Minutillo's, which he sources primarily in May when the shellfish are bigger and have more fat and flavor. Beyond a traditional crawfish boil, he uses the shellfish for a corn chowder, and he's even paired it with kale for a stuffed cannelloni dish.

Lately, Minutillo has been exploring lesser-known fish as a way to support his local fishing community, sometimes swapping in wild-caught sheepshead from the Gulf for tuna. He sears it until rare and serves over a bed of greens with grape tomatoes, red onion, artichoke hearts and a housemade pesto vinaigrette.

He also favors species such as local yellow snapper, trigger fish, drum, mahi, amberjack, flounder and grouper, all sourced from the Gulf.

"Now that they know I will use these fish, I'll often get calls from my local seafood purveyor telling me they have seven yellow eye snapper, and do I want them," Minutillo says. "Generally, the price is more affordable, and the fish is so fresh there's little we have to do with it besides grilling."

He says he has to regularly educate his customers about the different fish options, but they're generally happy to see a rotating variety as many are regulars. Oysters are still a challenge, he adds, as the cost has skyrocketed as demand from bigger cities has risen, and the supply still suffers from the 2010 BP oil spill. ■

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