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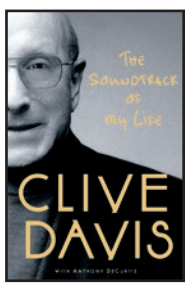

GETTING PERSONAL

Music mogul Clive Davis reveals secrets about himself and others in new memoir

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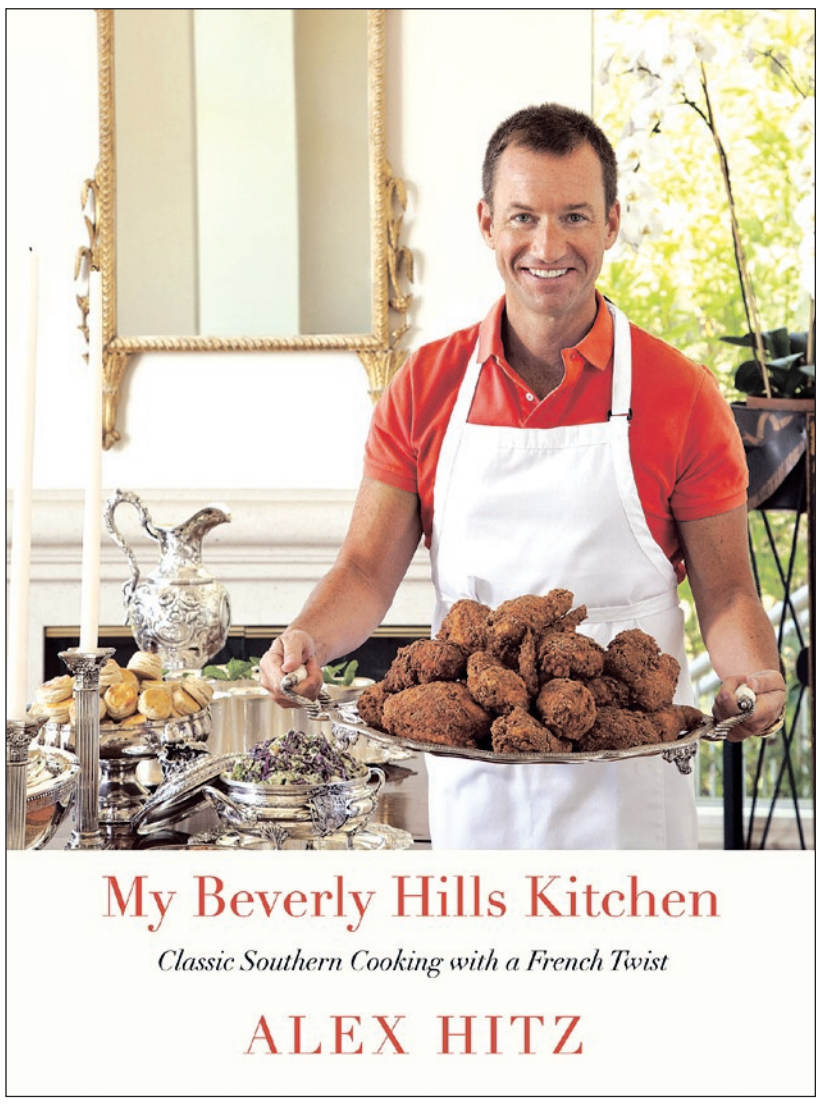
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2013

Classic cooking

Bicoastal chef to share recipes with Channel City Club members



By MARILYN MCMAHON
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

Celebrity chef and cookbook author Alex Hitz is no novice at entertaining. During the year, he hosts parties for more than a thousand guests in his homes in Beverly Hills and New York City.

"I have two buffet parties a year for 150 people each and dinners for 12 to 20 several times a month when I'm in Los Angeles. I always have a seated Christmas Eve dinner for 40," said Mr. Hitz by phone from Palm Beach, Fla.

He was there speaking at events and seeing friends before returning to California in time to make Chicken Curry for 18 guests at his traditional pre-Oscar party on Sunday.

On March 6, Mr. Hitz will be in Santa Barbara to speak to Channel City Club members about his first cookbook, "My Beverly Hills Kitchen: Classic Southern Cooking With a French Twist" (Random House, $19.98).

"It's really more of a literary cookbook, a memoir told through 175 recipes," said the 44-year-old Atlanta native who grew up on Southern cooking. "The French twist comes from my mother, Caroline Shaw, who came from a family where women didn't know how to cook nor did they want to learn how to cook.

"But in the 1950s, she went abroad to study and fell in love with cooking in Paris. She brought back European culinary techniques and taught them to Dorothy, our family cook. Dorothy had a sixth-grade education, and she taught me more about cooking and the world than anybody I know," said Mr. Hitz, a hint of a southern drawl still discernible as he recalled the time his mother was having a luncheon for a group of her friends.

"Cheese souffle was on the menu. Unfortunately, the gas oven went on the fritz, and Dorothy finished making them on top of the stove. Nobody knew the difference. Some people just have the touch. Dorothy was one of those," said Mr. Hitz, who earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Washington and Lee University in Virginia, attended graduate programs in English and theatre at the University of London and in French culture and civilization at l'Université Paris-Sorbonne.

Please see **HITZ** *on* **D8**

FYI

Alex Hitz, author of "My Beverly Hills Kitchen: Classic Southern Cooking With a French Twist," will speak at a luncheon meeting of the Channel City Club at noon March 6 at Fess Parker's DoubleTree Resort, 633 E. Cabrillo Blvd. Tickets are $35 for members and $40, nonmembers. For more information, call 884-6636.

COURTESY PHOTO

Mushrooms Stuffed with Blue Cheese

Mushrooms Stuffed with Blue Cheese

"These are easy, quick, and gorgeous. You can substitute hollowed-out cherry tomatoes for the mushrooms, if you'd like."

12 to 14 whole medium mushrooms, stemmed
½ cup blue cheese (Roquefort, Gorgonzola, Stilton)
½ cup cream cheese
1 tablespoon half-and-half (cream)
½ teaspoon lemon juice
1/4 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
12 to 14 roasted whole pecans
2 cups water

Wipe mushrooms with a cloth dipped in acidulated water (1½ teaspoons lemon juice or white vinegar to 2 cups water) to remove the grit. Do not rinse or wash mushrooms in water as they will get soggy, bruise and generally not hold up well when stuffed.

In a small mixing bowl, use an electric hand mixer to cream the blue and cream cheeses together with the half-and-half, lemon juice and black pepper.

With a rubber spatula, transfer cheese stuffing mixture into a pastry bag fitted with a star tip. Pipe the mixture into the mushroom tops, neatly and in a pretty pattern. Place a whole roasted pecan on top and serve.

Yield: 12 to 14 bite-size hors d'oeuvres

PICKS *of the* WEEK

Cardoon

Also referred to as cardon, this member of the thistle family, and close relative of the artichoke, is a very unique farmers market find. Brought to us fresh thanks to Chris Milliken of Milliken Family Farm in Goleta, the cardoon delivers a subtle, sweet and savory flavor reminiscent of an artichoke heart. The cardoon is not commonly enjoyed raw due to its fibrous nature. It is typically fried, sautéed or steamed. This week, I did a simple sauté in olive oil with freshly sliced garlic and seasoned with salt and pepper, the Fix of the Week on age D6. You can currently find cardoons at the weekly Tuesday Santa Barbara and Saturday Santa Barbara farmers markets. Price is $2.50 per pound.

Freedom Ranger chicken

This unique variety of chicken can currently be purchased from Nadia VanWingerden of Picaflor Farm in Carpinteria at the weekly Saturday Santa Barbara farmers market. This bird was originally imported from the Burgundy and Brittany regions of France in the 1960s and bred with an American heritage bird. Currently, both non-factory farm and pasture poultry producers across Europe are raising Freedom Ranger chickens. These chickens forage actively, and are allowed to roam free in the open air throughout the day. The chickens' slow maturation process yields meat that is flavorful and firm, but not tough. The happy, pasture-raised chickens are free of hormone and antibiotic shots, a wonderful local find. Sold whole at market, price is $6 per pound.

Goose eggs

Lily's Eggs in Fillmore is currently well-stocked with the company's wonderful goose eggs. They are richer in flavor than your standard chicken egg, and have a slightly firmer texture. One goose egg weighs approximately the equivalent of four chicken eggs. Goose eggs are excellent when fried, scrambled, or incorporated into baked dishes. They can be substituted for chicken eggs in most recipes; you just need to account for the larger size. You can currently find fresh goose eggs at all weekly Santa Barbara Certified farmers markets. Price ranges from $3-$5 each.

Sam Edelman is general manager of the Santa Barbara Certified Farmers Market Association; photos by Robby Barthelmess, News-Press

Find out when local farmers markets are held in the Culinary Calendar on page D7.

Inman Family Wines: On the balance beam

SCHAEFER ON WINE

Dennis Schaefer

There's a movement afoot in the California wine community to spotlight Burgundian varieties, both chardonnay and pinot noir, that are deliberately stylized to be lower in alcohol, presumably less intense and robust in flavor, and therefore (so the thinking goes) more balanced. The flag bearer and rallying point is the "In Pursuit of Balance" group, who, earlier this month, held back-to-back seminars and public tastings in both San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The winemakers and wineries invited to participate seem to be self-selected as like-minded when it comes to making more balanced wines than is currently the regimen in California winemaking. Among the Santa Barbara County participants: Jim Clendenen of Au Bon Climat Winery, Gavin Chanin of Chanin Wine Company, Rajat Parr of Sandhi Wines, James Ontiveros of Native9, Justin Willett of Tyler Winery and Adam Tolmach of The Ojai Vineyard.

When I visited proprietor and winemaker Kathleen Inman last year at Inman Family Wines in the Russian River Valley of Sonoma County, I wondered aloud why she wasn't included in this group, particularly since one of the organizers of the event, Jasmine Hirsch of Hirsch Vineyards, is practically her neighbor, up the road in the Sonoma Coast, a cool climate region contiguous to the Russian River Valley. Certainly when I tasted her wines — including some older library selections — at the winery and then again this past week, I was struck how balanced and true to type they were. As with other "In Pursuit of Balance" winemakers, Ms. Inman is also committed to sensitive farming, natural winemaking and environmentally responsible and sustainable practices. Inman Family Wines is a new discovery for me and one I wanted to share with to you. Some thoughts on the wines:

• **Inman Family Chardonnay, Russian River Valley 2011 ($35):** The chardonnay is made from purchased fruit from the region, fermented with native yeast strains, then aged in a mix of a little more stainless steel than French oak. On the nose, it's more mineral and saline-driven than fruit-driven. It's fairly restrained on the palate as well, weighing in at only 12.6 percent alcohol. Not made in the typical buttery, creamy and tropical fruit manner, it shows crisp green apple, pear and lemon zest with hints of beeswax and coconut on the palate. A distinct minerality, with saline and a sense of crushed sea shells, also adds to the complexity and is completed by the lovely overall mouth feel and bright, racy acidity on the finish.

• **Inman Family Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley 2009 ($35):** A blend of a couple different vineyards, this entry-level pinot noir has a light color around the rim with a savory nose of red fruit: raspberry and strawberry with a hint of rhubarb and brown baking spices. Flavors of raspberry, red cherry and spice are highlighted and change as different facets appear at different times; then a treble note sneaks in the back door: boysenberry

Please see **SCHAEFER** *on* **D7**

Dressing up popcorn for an Oscars party

Try making popcorn the old-fashioned way — on the stovetop — and flavor the hot kernels three different ways.

There are basically two ways to top popcorn — wet and dry.

Let's start with wet toppings, such as melted butter. Melted butter is always a crowd pleaser, but you have to make that version just before serving or else it gets soggy. Other wet toppings, such as melted chocolate, should be applied to popcorn spread flat on a baking sheet, then allowed to cool. Otherwise it becomes soggy.

The advantage of dry flavor toppings is that you can make the popcorn a few hours in advance, then serve it at room temperature. Just make sure to add the spices while the popcorn is hot. My three favorites are truffle salt, Parmesan cheese and a sweet and spicy barbecue rub.

STOVETOP POPCORN

2 to 3 tablespoons olive oil (depending on the size of the pot)
1/3 to ½ cup popcorn kernels (depending on the size of the pot)
Fine-grain sea salt or other seasoned toppings

Heat an empty cast-iron Dutch oven over low heat for 2 minutes.

Add enough olive oil to the pot to thinly coat the entire bottom. Add a single layer of popcorn kernels. You want them to be touching but not more than one layer thick. Increase the heat to medium and place the lid on the pot. Wait until popping begins, then turn the heat down slightly.

Shake the pot every 30 seconds or so. Start shaking a bit more when the popping starts to subside. When the kernels stop popping in unison and you only hear one pop every couple of seconds, it is done.

Pour the popcorn into a large bowl. Season generously with one of your favorite toppings. Toss the popcorn in the bowl and sprinkle with additional seasoning several times to make sure you have an even coating. Serve immediately or let cool.

Yield: ½ cup corn kernels will produce about 12 cups popcorn.

— Associated Press

Chef's philosophy is 'simpler is better'

Alex Hitz preps for a party.

Butternut Squash Soup

COURTESY PHOTO

Fried Green Tomatoes with Pimiento Cheese

HITZ

Continued from Page D1

He also holds degrees from Le Cordon Bleu Paris and Peter Kump's New York Cooking School, now the Institute of Culinary Education.

From 1995 to 2009, Mr. Hitz was a stage, television and movie producer; a clothing designer and a real estate developer.

When he realized he missed being in the kitchen, he launched The Beverly Hills Kitchen, a gourmet frozen food line that debuted on QVC, a home shopping network.

"The first offering was Beef Bourguignon, a boil-in-a-bag concoction packed with fresh carrots and pearl onions, generous hunks of meat and an aromatic sauce with hints of red wine and subtle spices," Mr. Hitz said, adding that the No. 1 seller became Pecan Crusted Salmon With Dill Butter.

The food line is currently on hiatus while the chef explores expanding into cookware, kitchen appliances and tabletop designs.

He has also been named food editor for House Beautiful Magazine in addition to writing the cookbook that was released last October.

"All of my recipes are properly done, There are no shortcuts. For example, I don't say 'Salt to taste.' I give the exact amount of salt to use. Salt is one of my essential ingredients. It can make bad dishes good and good dishes great. Never, ever be afraid of salt." said Mr. Hitz, a firm believer in the philosophy that "simpler is better.

"There's nothing better than Chicken Pot Pie. The first time Nancy Reagan came to my house in Beverly Hills eight years ago I was nervous about what to serve. I read that she liked Chicken Pot Pie, so that's what I made. She loved it."

At one of the "chicest" dinner parties he ever went to in New York City, the hostess served meatloaf and mashed potatoes for the main course.

In his book, Mr. Hitz has recipes and stories from famous friends who were known for their "simple but fantastic" food such as Bill Blass's Sour Cream Souffle, Nan Kempner's Bacon Sticks, Connie Wald's Penne with Vodka Sauce and Betsy Bloomingdale's Peach Ice Cream.

"People think that making fancy food is better, but it's not, which is why I have never been a fan of nouvelle cuisine. It's pretentious, busy, and there's never enough food for me," he said, noting that he is also wary of foods that are organic and gluten-free.

"I'm all for the freshest, best ingredients, but remember marketing is everything," Mr. Hitz said. "As for the gluten issue, there are four people who seriously have celiac disease. The number of people who actually suffer is a small fraction. Most of the others wonder why their stomachs ache after they eat a bag of doughnuts. It's not because they are allergic to gluten.

"The dietary restrictions of today are the sun-dried tomatoes of the (past few years)," he chuckled.

Mr. Hitz said he has had his share of calamities while entertaining.

"Last August, I was trying a new recipe for cold corn chowder. I had to strain it three times over a period of two days. The final procedure was just before the party for 16 people, and as I held the bowl over the sink, it gave way and the entire batch went down the drain.

"I turned to my trusty Avocado Soup recipe, which took three minutes. One day, I'll have the strength to try the corn chowder again, but not yet," he said with a sigh.

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Butternut Squash Soup

"I'd be utterly delighted to eat this soup all year round. It's a fragrant, pungent combination — a magnificent synthesis of flavors, sweet and savory, with just the right hint of richness. The apples in it, combined with the squash and onions, are a diametrically opposed but balanced delicacy, and the underlying aromas of oregano and rosemary distinguish it among squash soups, which often rely on the accent of milder and more lemony thyme to carry them through. I recommend this soup as a first course for Thanksgiving dinner, or, for that matter, for any lunch or dinner during the fall. I think you'll find it addictive, unexpected, and oh-so-easy."

1½ pounds butternut squash
1½ pounds Red Delicious apples
1½ cups diced onions
2½ cups chicken stock
2 teaspoons salt
1 tablespoon dried rosemary
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 cup heavy cream

Peel and chop squash into approximately 1½-inch cubes. Peel and core apples, and chop them into pieces the same size as the squash. In a medium-sized stockpot over medium heat, combine squash, apples, onions, chicken stock, salt, rosemary, and oregano. Bring them to a simmer and cook until vegetables and apples are tender (you can pierce them with a fork), approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Remove the stockpot from heat and, in a food processor fitted with a metal blade, puree all ingredients until smooth. You may need to do this in batches. Pour the whole mixture into a medium mixing bowl, and stir in heavy cream. Cover and refrigerate it overnight. When it's time to serve, reheat the soup to a simmer and serve hot.

Yield: 8 cups or 6 to 8 servings

Fried Green Tomatoes with Pimiento Cheese

"As you know, a green tomato is an unripe tomato, not a special variety of its own. In the summer, they are readily available in grocery stores and farmers' markets in the South, and at Whole Foods or farmers' markets in New York. In some parts of the country, like Los Angeles, they are not as easy to find. I order them from the produce guru at my local grocery store, and it usually takes him a day or two to find them. They are worth it. This unlikely combination is an hors d'oeuvre that will knock guests' socks off. I never had fried green tomatoes growing up, and, in fact, only when the movie with Kathy Bates came out did I start thinking about them. Nothing sounds more Southern, except when you add pimiento cheese."

2 large green tomatoes
3 cups vegetable oil
2 large eggs, beaten
½ cup all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
½ cup Italian seasoned bread crumbs

Cut tomatoes into ½-inch slices, and then take a 1-inch biscuit cutter and cut sliced tomatoes into 1-inch rounds. You will get approximately 3 to 4 rounds per ½-inch slice. Pat tomatoes dry with a paper towel. In a large, deep skillet, heat the oil to 375 degrees, using a candy thermometer to measure the temperature because a meat thermometer won't get that hot.

In three medium bowls — one for the beaten eggs, one for the flour, salt, and pepper, and one for the bread crumbs — dredge the individual tomato slices — first in eggs, then in flour, shaking off the excess, and last in bread crumbs.

Immediately after dredging — they will get too soggy if you wait—fry tomatoes in batches in the skillet until they are golden brown on both sides, approximately 2 to 3 minutes per side. Remove the first batch of fried tomatoes from the skillet and drain them on paper towels. Repeat this with the second batch. Garnish them with a generous dollop of pimiento cheese and serve them warm.

Pimiento Cheese

"This Southern staple, in one form or another, is a very easy spread to make and a true crowd-pleaser. I've served pimiento cheese to many a finicky gourmet who greets it skeptically, tastes it reluctantly, savors its deliciousness in shock and then asks for the recipe. There are endless variations — pickles, pecans, currants, onions, and so on — but this recipe, with fresh roasted peppers and Worcestershire sauce, is the one I always like the best."

¾ pound red bell peppers (2 to 3 large peppers)
½ pound sharp cheddar cheese, preferably orange in color, grated (and weighed before grating)
½ cup mayonnaise
⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 ⅛ teaspoons salt
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Roast peppers on a baking sheet in the oven for 15 to 20 minutes, until the skins begin to blacken and blister. When the skins are fully blistered, remove peppers from the oven, let them cool for 2 to 3 minutes, and then cover them with plastic wrap and let steam for 15 minutes (the steam will loosen their skin). Remove the plastic wrap and peel skin off of each pepper. Chop peppers in half, discard the seeds, and dice the remaining pepper strips.

Place cheese, diced peppers, mayonnaise, cayenne, salt, pepper and Worcestershire sauce in a large bowl and mix them together. Let cheese mixture chill in the refrigerator, covered, for several hours, or overnight for the best flavor. Pipe the cheese mixture with a pastry bag over the warm fried green tomatoes and serve. There will be leftover pimiento cheese that you just won't be able to stop eating!

Yield: About 1 pound (enough for all of those fried green tomatoes, plus an extra sandwich or two for the cook . . .)

Yield: 36 to 44 bite-size hors d'oeuvres

Source for all recipes: "My Beverly Hills Kitchen: Classic Southern Cooking With a French Twist," by Alex Hitz

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