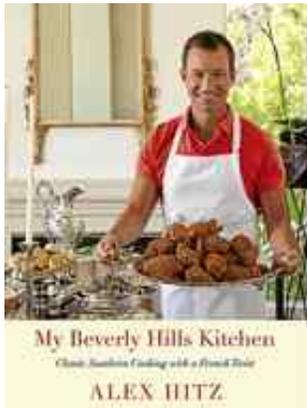


Cookbook review: Alex Hitz gives classics a sophisticated update in 'My Beverly Hills Kitchen'



By Holly Andres, Staff Writer

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Updated Southern heritage recipes get the spotlight in first-time cookbook author Alex Hitz's "My Beverly Hills Kitchen - Classic Southern Cooking With a French Twist" (Alfred A. Knopf; \$35).

The Atlanta-born Hitz discusses the privilege of growing up in a home where entertaining was genteel and the food served was a collaboration between the family cook, Dorothy Williams Davis, and his mother, Carolyn Bryans Sauls, who knew French cuisine.

The 1970s dining experience at home led to chef training in Paris after college. Hitz worked in an Atlanta restaurant, bought it, sold it and ultimately developed a line of food products he sells on TV shopping channels.

His cookbook is a deliciously entertaining recipe collection. Hitz writes that to do the book, he heeded the seductive call of Southern food - and not just moon pies, pork rinds and collard greens.

His quest was to find the lost and the out-of-favor recipes from Charleston and New Orleans, Lowcountry and Creole cooking.

He combed through older cookbooks including those from the regional Junior Leagues, especially the 1950 Junior League of Charleston's "Charleston Receipts."

Hitz found concepts to be admired in that beloved collection, but was dismayed to find that recipes in many of the older books used too many convenience foods like canned soup and mixes.

Those short cuts wouldn't do for Hitz, a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu in Paris. So he set out to capture the essence of good Southern cooking and transform the recipes into sophisticated classics.

Home cooks will appreciate Hitz's frankness about his cooking methods and philosophy in the Kitchen Notes section.

Beware, though: He uses words like "persnickety" and "control freak," so be sure to read what he has to say before plunging into "Sour Cream Corn Cakes" or "My Take on Charleston Shrimp and Grits." Take his advice to "just do it my way first," for successful recipe outcomes.

The book contains chapters from hors d'oeuvres to desserts plus a four-seasons menu guide. Most recipes, some from chefs or the jet-set crowd, have color photos and each has an anecdote or note. Intriguing recipes include: "Fried Green Tomatoes With Pimiento Cheese," "Crab Salad With Bloody Mary Aspik," "Pulled Pork With Carolina Barbecue Sauce," "Sally Lunn Bread," "New Orleans Bread Pudding With Vanilla Bourbon Sauce" "Salted Caramel Cake" and "Hummingbird Cake With Cream Cheese Icing."

This beautifully presented book will appeal to home cooks who are willing to follow directions to a T, know how to use a double boiler, aren't afraid to use table salt and make sauces and own a large cast-iron skillet.

Creamed Shrimp with Country Ham Yield: 6-8 servings

- **6 tablespoons salted butter**
- **1 cup diced onion**
- **2 pounds medium (26 to 30 count) shrimp, peeled and cleaned**
- **1/4 cup dry sherry**
- **1 1/2 teaspoons salt (regular salt; not Kosher or sea)**
- **3/4 teaspoons ground black pepper**
- **3/4 cup heavy cream**
- **4 tablespoons tomato paste (from a tube, not a can)**
- **3 tablespoons chopped fresh dill**
- **1/4 pound country ham, diced**

Directions

1. In a heavy skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. When the foaming has subsided, add the onions. Saute them until they are translucent, about 10 minutes.
2. Add the shrimp, sherry, salt and pepper and saute them until the shrimp are just slightly pink, about 4 minutes.

3. Add the heavy cream and tomato paste and continue to saute for another 2 to 3 minutes until everything is well combined.
4. Remove the skillet from the heat and stir in the dill and country ham.
5. Serve over rice or grits. Or polenta.

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