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LAURIE DANIEL
ON WINE

Petites anything but small

Petite sirah used to have something of an identity crisis. Despite its name (and the fact that some wineries added to the confusion by labeling their wines as “petite syrah”), the grape isn’t a diminutive version of syrah. To the contrary, wines made from petite sirah are usually inky-dark, full-bodied and sometimes very tannic.

Now the variety is better understood. It has gained enough of a following to have spawned its own fan club of sorts: P.S. I Love You. And acreage in California has been climbing steadily in recent years, rising to more than 8,600 acres last year. (Not exactly huge numbers — there were 80,000 acres of cabernet sauvignon — but healthy nonetheless.) Among the coastal counties, San Luis Obispo County is by far the leader, with more than 1,400 acres. And most of that is in Paso Robles.



SHERRY LAVARS/STAFF ARCHIVES

Winemaker David Viano scored an impressive win at the Central Coast Wine Competition in the fortified wine category.

Petite sirah and Paso Robles seem to be a good fit. I recently judged petite sirahs at the Central Coast Wine Competition in Paso Robles. Although the competition is open to entries from a number of counties, the vast majority of the 20 petites we evaluated were from Paso Robles. Judging a category of 20 big, often tannic reds can be an ordeal, but this group was actually pretty exciting. Sure, there were some duds — too much tannin, oak or both were the most common complaints — but most of the wines were good or even exceptional.

The top petite sirah was the 2011 Broken Earth Winery Petite Sirah (\$22, but not yet released), from the winery’s estate vineyard on Highway 46 East in Paso Robles. Although petite sirah can sometimes be big, bruising and a little one-dimensional, this one is spicy, floral and structured, with ripe black fruit, a note of lavender, some spicy oak and firm tannins.

Chris Cameron, winemaker at Broken Earth, says he has worked with petite sirah for many years in other places (including Australia,

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Red white & blueberry

Seasonal ingredients give fare for Fourth a fresh, tasty twist

By Jackie Burrell

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It isn’t a Fourth of July celebration without a little razzle, dazzle and fireworks. So now that you’ve draped your deck with flags and bunting and donned your most festive scarlet togs, it’s time to give your buffet table the patriotic treatment, too.

No need to go all Martha, though her enormous raspberry-and-buttercream flag cake is perfect if you’re feeding the whole neighborhood. However, if it’s just family, you’ll soon be paraphrasing Dorothy Parker’s remark about ham: There is such a thing as too much cake.

That’s why this year I’m taking a different route to red, white and blueberry heaven.

I’m going to start by taking my cue from Washington, D.C., chef Barton Seaver. Everything should

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MORE BLUEBERRIES: Find a slideshow and links to five more fabulous blueberry recipes by scanning this code with your smartphone or going to www.mercurynews.com/food-wine.

MARK DUFRENE/STAFF

The Cherry-Blueberry Tart and Berry-Cherry Sangria make perfect patriotic additions to any Independence Day gathering.



GRANT CORNETT/ARTISAN BOOKS

“Top Chef” alum Edward Lee improvises a smoker. Lee forged his culinary identity at 610 Magnolia in Louisville, Ky.

‘Smoke’ goes beyond South

“Top Chef” alum Lee mixes cuisines in his new cookbook

By Gina Gotsill
Correspondent

Edward Lee is all about reinvention. Raised in Brooklyn by his Korean-born parents and grandmother, Lee traded in his English lit laurels — he graduated magna cum laude from New York University — for a cook’s smock in his early 20s.

But a pivotal visit to the 2002 Kentucky Derby sent him from the land of subways and high rises to the hills of Louisville, where he discovered the magic of bourbon, buttermilk and country ham. Soon after, he acquired 610 Magnolia from its longtime owners and here, in this tiny restaurant in the heart of Old Louisville, Lee forged the culinary identity that hit the spotlight last year on Bravo’s “Top Chef.”

Now, Lee has woven that lively, irreverent narrative through a new book, “Smoke and Pickles: Recipes and Stories from a Southern Kitchen” (Artisan, \$29.95, 304 pages). Along the way, the book takes us on a global trek with recipe twists such as Collards and Kimchi, Adobo Fried Chicken and Waffles, Edamame Hummus and Coconut Rice Pudding Brulee. Thirsty? Wash it down with a glass of Bourbon Sweet Tea or Rhubarb Mint Tea — moonshine, optional.

Naturally, we had questions, so we caught up with Lee on a break from his book tour.

Q In “Smoke and Pickles,” you write about how your grandmother cooked every day. What was your favorite? **A** Her greatest contribution was her kimchee. I think I do a pretty good job at it. But in her eyes, I would never make kimchee

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Whiskey Ginger Cake with Pear Salad

Serves 10

- Cake:**
 ½ cup grapeseed or canola oil
 10 tablespoons (1 ¼ sticks) unsalted butter, softened
 2 cups packed light brown sugar
 4 large eggs
 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
 1 ½ cups buttermilk
 ½ cup unsweetened coconut milk
 4 cups cake flour, sifted
 2 ½ teaspoons baking soda
 1 ½ teaspoons ground ginger
- Frosting:**
 ¾ pound (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
 4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
 ¼ cup whiskey
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 2 pounds powdered sugar



COURTESY GRANT CORNETT

A cake gets its flavor from fresh and dried ginger, as well as pears in this dessert created by "Top Chef" alum Edward Lee.

- Garnish:**
 1 Anjou pear
 Grated zest and juice of 1 lime
 Unsprayed borage blossoms (optional)

- Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Lightly grease two 8-inch round cake pans.
- For the cake: Using a stand mixer, cream the oil, butter and brown sugar for 3 minutes. Beat in eggs one at a time, beating well after each. Beat in the grated ginger, mixing until smooth, about 2 minutes. Scrape down bowl sides as necessary.
- Combine buttermilk and coconut milk in a small bowl. Whisk together cake flour, baking soda and ground ginger in a large bowl.
- Alternating, slowly add buttermilk mixture and flour mixture, a little at a time, to the egg mixture, mixing on medium-low until blended.
- Pour batter into cake pans. Bake 45 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes. Remove cakes from pans; cool completely on a rack.
- Frosting: With a stand mixer, cream butter and cream cheese until smooth, 2 minutes. Mix in whiskey and vanilla until smooth. On low speed, slowly add powdered sugar, mixing until smooth.
- Place a cake layer on a serving plate. Spread a thin layer of frosting over sides and top. Top with second layer; spread remaining frosting over top and sides. Don't worry about making it too perfect. (Homemade cakes should always tilt a little. It makes them more fun to eat.)
- Just before serving, core the pear, slice into thin rounds and matchsticks, and toss with lime zest and juice. Decorate cake top with pear and borage blossoms. Wrapped well, the leftover cake will stay moist in your refrigerator for at least 3 days.

— Edward Lee, "Smoke and Pickles" (Artisan, \$29.95, 304 pages)

Coconut Rice Pudding Brulee

Serves 6

- ½ cup long-grain white rice
 2 ½ cups whole milk
 ½ cup heavy cream
 2 ¼ cups unsweetened coconut milk
 1 vanilla bean, split
 1 star anise
 1 cup sugar
 ½ cup buttermilk
 2 tablespoons brown sugar
 18 raspberries, garnish
 Thai basil leaves, garnish

- In a heavy pot, combine the rice, milk, cream, coconut milk, vanilla bean, star anise and sugar; bring to a simmer over low heat. Simmer for 55 to 70 minutes, stirring occasionally, until rice is soft. Transfer to a bowl. Cool to room temperature, about 1 hour; it will thicken as it cools.
- Discard the vanilla bean and star anise. Add the buttermilk to the pudding, stirring gently with a wooden spoon. Divide pudding among six 4-inch ramekins. Chill in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours, and up to overnight.
- Just before serving, spoon 1 teaspoon brown sugar evenly over the surface of each rice pudding. Using a blowtorch, gently heat the sugar until it turns a dark amber color. (If you use a broiler to brulée, watch carefully as the sugar can burn quickly.) Cool briefly, until the sugar hardens. Then garnish each pudding with 3 raspberries and a few basil leaves and serve immediately.

— Edward Lee, "Smoke and Pickles" (Artisan, \$29.95, 304 pages)

Collards and Kimchi

Serves 6 to 8 as a side dish

Note: Lee makes his own red cabbage-bacon kimchi, but if you're buying kimchi from an Asian market, pick one that is well-ripened and smells pungent, even through a glass jar.

- 1 tablespoon lard or bacon fat
 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
 1 cup chopped onions
 1 ½ cups diced country ham (about 10 ounces)
 1 ½ pounds collard greens, washed, stemmed and coarsely chopped
 2 ½ cups chicken stock
 2 teaspoons soy sauce
 1 ½ tablespoons apple cider vinegar
 8 ounces (1 ¼ cups) kimchi, chopped



COURTESY GRANT CORNETT

Collard greens and kimchi is a flavorful twist on Southern food. The side dish is delicious with fried chicken or roast lamb.

- In a medium pot, heat the lard and butter over high heat. Once the butter starts to foam, add onions; saute for 5 minutes, or until they get a little color. Add ham; cook 3 minutes, until crispy but not too brown.
- Add the greens, chicken stock and soy sauce; cook, covered, over medium heat for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. The collards should be tender but still have a little chew to them.
- Add the vinegar; cook for 1 minute.
- Toss the kimchi into the pot with the greens. Mix together, and serve immediately, juices and all, with roast lamb or fried chicken.

— Edward Lee, "Smoke and Pickles" (Artisan, \$29.95, 304 pages)

PRODUCE PICKS by Michael Marks



DAVE JOHNSON/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Berries bursting with sweetness

Remember those warm temperatures in April? Berry vines throughout California got an early start on their summer production, and we have been seeing tremendous supplies of raspberries and the many varieties of blackberries, including the olallieberry, boysenberry and Triple Crown. Berries are coming in now from local farms and major growers from Oxnard to Watsonville. Because of their high sugar content, these tiny jewels tend to decay fast, so buy them and enjoy them within the next day or two. And when you spot blackberries at the farmers market, grab them. Blackberries have a very short season. Chances are, the next time you're at the market, they'll be gone.

IN THE BINS

- Mushrooms**
 Local farms, Watsonville
 \$2.99 to \$3.99 per pound
Tips: You may start seeing tiny cracks in the caps of your mushrooms. It's a sign of slight dehydration because of warmer summer temperatures, but it does not affect eating quality.
- Red cherries**
 Local farms, Hollister, Washington
 \$2.99 to \$3.99 per pound
Tips: Why the generic name? There are many varieties of red cherries, including Bing. If a store doesn't know if they can get full supplies of Bings, they simply call them "red cherries."
- Korean melons**
 Local farms, San Joaquin Valley
 \$3 to \$4 each
Tips: Try these oblong, grooved yellow melons, which are particularly popular in Asian markets. These sweet, juicy melons are crisp, with a floral aroma.
- Corn**
 Local farms, Dixon
 20 cents to 33 cents each
Tips: This is the very peak of summer supplies, just in time for Fourth of July celebrations, county fairs and the state fair. Keep them ice cold, and enjoy them within three days of picking.

Michael Marks is the marketing manager for FreshPoint.

Lee

Continued from Page 1

like hers. Growing up in New York and experiencing such a melting pot of cuisines, what flavor of the American South surprised you most?

The diversity of food in the South was probably the most surprising thing. There's a traditional dish called Country Captain that uses curry, and I thought that was interesting. We think of Southern food one way, but when you get into it, there are global influences in many of the dishes. If you look at cakes, coconut has become a beloved ingredient in a lot of Southern recipes. It isn't indigenous to the South — it's more tropical.

Give us an example of a dish that blends Korean and Southern cuisine.

The one I love most is Collards and Kimchi. It's such an iconic dish, a really great pairing symbolically, and it tastes great, too.

How did your stint on "Top Chef" change your culinary identity?

I don't think it changed it. The show gave it a platform and extension beyond Louisville. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. Probably wouldn't do it again, but I'm glad I did it once. It's

an amazing franchise and brand, very high class, and now we all have our names attached to it.

Speed is everything on "Top Chef." What's it like — not having a lot of time to experiment before serving a new dish to someone?

It's stressful. You don't really have a lot of time to think it through. Some people do better than others, obviously. It's great entertainment, but it's the exact opposite of what we do in the restaurant, where we have a slow, methodical way of introducing new dishes. I'd never come into the kitchen two hours before service and say, "OK, here's what we're doing."

When you're thrust into a situation where you don't have time to think and experiment, you rely on instinct. Sometimes your instincts are good, and sometimes they're not. You win or lose based on the decisions you make in the first few minutes.

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