

Alex Hitz and His Beverly Hills Kitchen

December 12, 2012 | Jennifer Boles for The Peak of Chic

One of the upcoming Fall book releases about which I am most excited is Alex Hitz's *My Beverly Hills Kitchen: Classic Southern Cooking with a French Twist*. Alex, a native Atlantan whose main residence is now in Beverly Hills, is known far and wide for his dapper, classic, and elegant style of entertaining. An inveterate party giver, Alex frequently hosts buffet suppers and seated dinners for guests hailing from far and wide, just one of the reasons why Hitz's reputation has spread beyond this country's borders. And it's for this reason that I contacted him in hopes of learning more about his book and his style of entertaining. Alex was kind enough to chat with me by phone and explain to me exactly what goes on in that Beverly Hills kitchen of his.



One of the accolades that I've heard from those who have attended his dinners is that the food is always delicious. Actually, delicious is a word that may not cut it. Perhaps divinely decadent or soul-satisfyingly good is a more apt description. What makes Hitz's food unique is that his Southern roots are always evident in his menus. Hitz grew up in

Atlanta eating classic Southern dishes mixed with fine French cooking thanks to his late mother, also a noted hostess. It was this early exposure to good food both at home and during trips abroad that educated Hitz's palate and taught him that French and Southern food is "a winning combination." But good food alone does not define gracious entertaining. Hitz learned how to throw a party by watching his mother and step-father (the late, prominent symphony and chorale conductor Robert Shaw) host their Saturday luncheons with guests who included Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copeland, Leontyne Price, and Bobby Short. Frankly, I can't think of a better entertaining education than this.

But going back to the food. Alex's background includes training at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris as well as owning a popular Atlanta restaurant. All of this inspired him to try his hand at reinventing Southern food, giving it "a heritage that may never have been." Alex notes that Southern food has long been stigmatized thanks to the use of inferior ingredients. He set out to create updated Southern dishes that use fresh ingredients (though Alex notes that he isn't afraid to use canned tomatoes) and that eliminate the shortcuts that became such a part of Southern cooking, most notably the use of premade products like Old Bay, Mrs. Dash, Jiffy Mix, and Accent. Alex's style of cooking pays attention to strict standards and adherence to detail, something that is a hallmark of classic French cuisine.

Alex frequently serves his Southern food with a French twist at most of his parties, something that has helped to define his style of entertaining as "relaxed elegance." Few people set a more beautiful buffet or dining table than Alex, tables that are frequently set with Francis I sterling flatware (passed down from his late mother), beautiful sterling serving pieces and candelabra, classic linen, and traditional china. But in order to create a sense of balance, Alex will then serve something casual like Chicken Pot Pie, Fried Chicken, Stewed Tomatoes, and Caramel Cake. It's this mix of high and low that allows the party to feel both special and comfortable at the same time. Below, you can see a few photos of a dinner that Alex recently hosted for some visiting English royalty.

The table is set quite beautifully, and at first glance one might think that the menu would have been formal too. However, that was not the case. The first course was Pecan Crusted Salmon with Sauce Gribiche, the main course included Chicken Pot Pie and Spinach Salad with Red Wine Vinaigrette, and dessert was Peggy's Apricot Mousse, a recipe garnered from Alex's cousin Peggy Foreman. And you know what? The visiting English royalty and everyone else loved every bite of it! Take a look below for a few photos from the dinner. You'll also find a recipe for Alex's Tortilla Soup, one that does not appear in his upcoming book.

Tortilla Soup

Yield 4 ½ quarts

2 tsp olive oil

1 large onion diced

5 cloves minced garlic

1 medium jalapeno pepper diced, seedless

2 lbs shredded cooked chicken breasts (all white)

4 cups frozen corn 1 tsp dried oregano

1 cup fresh cilantro

2 tsp cumin 1/8 cup very strong coffee 4 tbs chopped green onions

¼ tsp cayenne pepper

¾ tsp salt

1 ¼ tsp chili powder

¾ cup dry white wine

2 quarts rich chicken stock

28 oz canned diced tomatoes, drained 1 tbs tomato paste

16 oz canned all natural low sodium tomato sauce Sauté onion, garlic, pepper in oil until soft, approximately two minutes.

Add all other ingredients except chicken and simmer for 20 minutes.

Reduce by one quarter.

Add chicken.

After 3-4 minutes, remove chicken and vegetables. In another pan make a roux out of 4 tbs flour and 2 tbs PLUS 2 TSP butter Cook thoroughly, but not much, and add to liquid then return chicken and vegetables to liquid. Garnish with fried tortilla strips, avocado, mild shredded cheddar, and green onions