

*Chef John Besh's perfect recipe:
a morning of fishing, a midday feast,
and friends to share both.*

great catch

"Breaded" Redfish
with Shrimp, Fennel,
and Orange Salad

BY JEFF BOOK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RALPH ANDERSON

Louisiana doesn't put "Sportsman's Paradise" on its license plates just because "Let the Good Times Roll" won't fit. "My friends and I all grew up fishing and hunting," says chef John Besh. "Dropping a line in the water is still one of my favorite ways to relax."

Thanks to southern Louisiana's web of waterways—bayous, lakes, the Mississippi, the Gulf—in one outing you can angle for grouper, redfish, tuna, and other saltwater delights, then shift course for fresh-water in search of, say, speckled trout. It doesn't take much arm-twisting to get John's gang of fishing buddies to show up before dawn at Restaurant August, his lauded New Orleans flagship, and drive to an outlying marina. The sky has turned scarlet behind a meringue of clouds as the group piles into two motorboats and heads for the Gulf, across Lake Borgne. But rising wind and chop force a detour to calmer waters.

That's how we've come to be bobbing on vast Lake Pontchartrain, which only levees and luck keep from sluicing fish through the French Quarter like so many Mardi Gras mermaids. A hot sun burns off the morning mist as we cast into the shadows beneath a railroad bridge. "We're going with the 'big bait, big fish' theory," says J. B. Mahoney III, who's been angling with John since they were kids, as he puts a jumbo shrimp on his hook. "Ten



Buster Crab,
Lettuce, and
Tomato Sandwich



dollars for the first fish," offers August "Duke" Robin, John's chief financial backer (and the restaurant's namesake).

Sure, they like to catch fish, but for these old friends the camaraderie of good-natured ribbing and reminiscing is reason enough to wet a hook. John talks a bit about his time as a Marine in the Gulf War, which helped later,

when he worked under European chefs who had all the patience of drill sergeants. Duke tells tales of his fisherman father and his gator-hunting uncle, of finding his family's house underwater after it was swept away in a hurricane and diving down to peer into the windows. Someone swears he knows a rich Cajun who ran a heating duct from his home to his duck blind, which all

agree is too good a story not to be true.

Meanwhile, we're hauling in fish, but not many "good eatin'" ones. That's all right: John has brought the makings for a succulent lunch. We stow our rods and speed to J.B.'s house, on a canal fed by the lake. "Hey Besh, I hope you can cook better than you can fish," Duke says. No one doubts John's mastery of fish once they've been landed; when chefs from 15 states met for a culinary battle royale, he was the one crowned King of Seafood.

As fishermen and friends relax in the kitchen or on the covered dock, John produces a series of mouthwatering dishes. A grilled fig, prosciutto, and



John
Besh

chèvre salad offers a palate-pleasing harmony of tangy, sweet, and smoky flavors. The restaurant's BLT sandwich swaps bacon for "busters" (local soft-shell crabs), and adds fine greens and tomato for a refined take on a local standard, the soft-shell po' boy.

John "breads" redfish in thin layers of brioche and enhances it with a shrimp, fennel, and orange salad and citrusy hollandaise sauce. Next comes a signature Restaurant August entrée: speckled trout with a crabmeat-stuffed piquillo pepper. The soft, red cornucopia rests on a slightly crunchy edamame salad. Later, the chef says, "I like to use savory notes in desserts"—which explains the subtle bay-leaf seasoning in the Bay Anglais cream puddled beneath a soigné strawberry shortcake.

Anglers like to say that the worst day fishing beats the best day working. For these Louisiana sportsmen, paradise is fishing followed by feasting, especially if John's the cook.

Buster Crab, Lettuce, and Tomato Sandwich

Buster crabs refer to those caught halfway through the shedding process, so they appear to be literally "busting" out of their shells.

- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 2 garlic cloves, pressed
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon minced fresh chives
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 1 cup grape tomatoes, halved
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup cornmeal
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 4 soft-shell crabs, dressed
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 4 slices brioche or thick white bread, toasted



Grilled Fig, Prosciutto, and Chèvre Salad



1/4 cup micro greens, or broccoli or alfalfa sprouts

Stir together mayonnaise and garlic; cover and chill until ready to serve.

Whisk together olive oil and next 4 ingredients for a vinaigrette; add tomatoes, and toss well.

Combine flour and next 3 ingredients. Dip crabs into egg, and dredge in flour mixture. Sauté crabs in hot vegetable oil in a large skillet 2 to 3 minutes on each side or until golden. Drain on paper towels.

Spread 1 tablespoon mayonnaise mixture on each toasted bread slice; top with crab and 1/4 cup tomato vinaigrette. Dollop with extra mayonnaise mixture, if desired, and top with micro greens or sprouts. Makes 4 servings.

Grilled Fig, Prosciutto, and Chèvre Salad

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 tablespoon sherry vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt

- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 12 fresh figs, halved
- 3 ounces chèvre (goat cheese)
- 1/4 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1 teaspoon fresh lime juice
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh chives
- 8 cups spring mix salad greens
- 3 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, chopped

Whisk together first 5 ingredients until blended. Drizzle 3 tablespoons vinaigrette over fig halves, and reserve remaining dressing. Grill figs, covered with grill lid, over medium-high heat (350° to 400°) for 2 to 3 minutes on each side or until tender. Remove from heat, and cut fig halves in half. Cover and chill 30 minutes.

Combine chèvre and next 3 ingredients in a food processor. Process until well blended, stopping to scrape down sides.

Toss greens with remaining vin-

aigrette. Spoon chèvre mixture in the center of each plate. Top with figs, prosciutto, and greens. Makes 4 servings.

"Breaded" Redfish with Shrimp, Fennel, and Orange Salad

- 1 loaf brioche*
 - 4 (6-ounce) fillets redfish or mild white fish
 - Pinch of salt
 - 1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon
 - 2 tablespoons butter, softened
 - 1 cup fresh orange juice
 - 1 cup rice vinegar
 - 3 egg yolks
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - Pinch of cayenne pepper
 - 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
 - 1 cup unsalted butter, cut into pieces and divided
- Shrimp, Fennel, and Orange Salad*
Garnish: fresh herbs

Cut four 3/4-inch-thick slices of brioche large enough to cover the fish. Roll bread with a rolling pin to about 1/8-inch thickness. Sprinkle fish with a pinch of salt and chopped tarragon.

Spread half of the softened butter on the brioche slices. Place brioche, butter side down, on fish. (If necessary, turn over and trim the bread so the edges are even with the fillets.) Spread the remaining softened butter on the top of the bread; set aside.

Bring orange juice and vinegar to a boil in a saucepan; simmer until reduced to 3 tablespoons. (Mixture will be syrupy.)

Whisk egg yolks, 1 teaspoon salt, and cayenne pepper in the top of a double boiler; gradually add lemon juice and orange syrup, stirring constantly. Add 1/2 cup unsalted butter to egg mixture; cook over hot, not boiling, water, whisking constantly until butter melts. Add remaining butter, whisking until well blended. Cook until temperature reaches 160° and mixture is thickened. Remove sauce from boiler; set aside and keep warm.

Place fish, bread side up, in a buttered oven-proof skillet or baking sheet. Bake at 400° for 10 minutes or until golden brown and fish flakes.

Spoon sauce onto center of plates and top with fish. Top with Shrimp, Fennel, and Orange Salad. Garnish, if desired.

Makes 4 servings.

**If a loaf of brioche is unavailable, substitute a good-quality unsliced white bread.*

Shrimp, Fennel, and Orange Salad

- 1 quart water
- 1/4 cup kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 1/4 cup fennel seed
- 1/2 pound jumbo fresh shrimp, unpeeled
- 1/4 cup rice vinegar
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 fennel bulb, thinly sliced
- 2 oranges, peeled and sectioned
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives

Bring water and next 4 ingredients to a boil; add shrimp, and cook 3 to 5 minutes or just until shrimp turn pink. Drain, and rinse with cold water. Peel and devein shrimp; chill.

Stir together rice vinegar and next 3 ingredients in a medium bowl. Set aside.

Combine fennel, oranges, chives, and shrimp. Add dressing mixture; toss well.

Cover and chill thoroughly.
Makes 4 servings.

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Speckled Trout with Crab-stuffed Piquillos, Edamame, and Truffle Vinaigrette

- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon white truffle oil
- 2 cups fresh edamame
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1 tomato, peeled, seeded, and diced
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons butter, divided
- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) speckled trout fillets

Crab-stuffed Piquillos
Garnish: fresh herbs

Combine first 3 ingredients in a large bowl, whisking well. Stir in edamame and next 4 ingredients. Set aside.

Heat 2 tablespoons butter in a skillet over medium-high heat. Cook 2 trout fillets, skin side down, 5 minutes or until skin becomes crispy and lightly browned. Turn fish and cook an additional 5 minutes or until done. Repeat with remaining butter and trout.

Spoon edamame salad on each of four plates. Top with trout and Crab-stuffed Piquillos. Garnish, if desired. Makes 4 servings.

Crab-stuffed Piquillos

Piquillo peppers are fire-roasted, spicy-sweet peppers imported from Spain, and are available in specialty stores or online (see page 172). If unavailable, substitute a small roasted red bell pepper.

- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ½ tablespoon Dijon mustard
- ½ teaspoon prepared horseradish
- 1½ tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh tarragon
- ¼ teaspoon ground red pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ½ pound fresh lump crabmeat
- 4 whole piquillo peppers, roasted and seeded



Combine mayonnaise and next 7 ingredients in a medium bowl; gently stir in crabmeat. Fill peppers with crabmeat mixture, and place on a baking sheet. Bake at 375° for 5 to 7 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Makes 4 servings.

Frozen Strawberry Shortcake

Bay Anglais

- 3 cups sliced strawberries
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2½ tablespoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons poppy seeds
- 1 tablespoon grated orange rind
- ½ cup cold butter, cut into pieces
- 1½ cups plus 1 tablespoon heavy whipping cream
- 1½ tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 cup chopped strawberries
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint

Powdered sugar

Garnish: fresh mint

Prepare Bay Anglais. Cover and chill until ready to serve.

Process sliced strawberries and sugar in a blender or food processor until pureed; pour strawberry mixture through a wire-mesh strainer into a bowl, discarding seeds. Stir 1 cup chilled Bay Anglais into strained strawberry mixture. Pour into a 13- x 9-inch pan; cover and freeze 2 hours or until firm.

Combine flour and next 4 ingredients in a bowl. Cut butter into flour mixture with a pastry blender until crumbly; add whipping cream, stirring until dry ingre-



dients are moistened. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface, and knead 3 or 4 times. Pat or roll dough to a 1-inch thickness; cut into eight 2-inch rounds, and place on a baking sheet. Brush tops of dough with

melted butter.

Bake at 425° for 12 to 13 minutes or until golden. Let cool on a wire rack.

Combine chopped strawberries and



Frozen Strawberry Shortcake

mint; set aside.

To serve, pour about ¼ cup Bay Anglais onto each plate. Slice biscuits in half, and place bottom half on plate. Top with about 2 tablespoons chopped strawberries. Spoon about ½ cup frozen strawberry mixture over berries, and top with remaining biscuit half. Sprinkle with powdered sugar.