



Sweets for your Sweet

BY ANGELA E. THOMAS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER FREEMAN, KYLE MCLAUGHLIN AND COURTESY OF CAPITAL HOTEL



Executive chefs Lee Richardson of Ashley's and André Poirot of Cppriccio Grill.

VALENTINE'S DAY IS THE PERFECT DAY TO INDULGE YOUR SWEET TOOTH, AND IF YOU'RE GOING TO SPLURGE, THE DESSERT SHOULD BE WELL WORTH THE CALORIES. So to help your taste buds dance, we solicited the expertise of two of the Natural States' finest hotel restaurants: Ashley's in the Capital Hotel and Capriccio's in the Peabody Little Rock.

As an added bonus, we consulted Bruce Cochran, renown wine expert, for a wine pairing for each dessert. Cochran has 30 years of experience as a retailer, importer and educator. He also publishes "Wine 102," a newsletter and produces "Bruce's eWine of the Week." Log onto brucecochran.com for more information.

Under the direction of Lee Richardson, Ashley's in Little Rock's Capital Hotel has earned a reputation for its eclectic and imaginative menu. Diners find the restaurant's meals delicious from start to finish. Sous Chef Matthew McClure shares his recipe for a crème brûlée prepared and served in a seckel pear. The dessert is beautiful to behold and to eat.

"Seckel pears are simply an heirloom variety of pear. They are available at Whole Foods or Fresh Market," McClure said. "This recipe is unique in that it's served in an edible bowl. The pear flavors the custard and adds a very tender texture in the bite."

Pear Crème Brûlée

3 seckel pears (Bosc pears may be substituted)
½ bottle of sweet wine, such as Sauternes
1 cup of sugar
Zest of 1 orange
Crème Brûlée custard base

PREPARE THE PEARS:

Carefully split the pears in half, lengthwise. It is important to make a straight cut. Then cut a thin slice off the backside of each pear, so they will sit flat on the baking tray. Using a melon scoop, carve out the inside of the pear, taking care to preserve the shape of the pear and not to puncture through the skin. Place the carved out pears in a small saucepan with the wine, sugar and citrus peel.

Simmer over medium heat until just showing signs of translucence. Remove the pears from the pan, and allow them to cool. The pears are now ready to fill with the custard.

Godiva Chocolate Cake with Vanilla Ice Cream

4 extra large eggs
¼ cup granulated extra fine sugar
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
¼ pound butter, unsalted
6 ounces dark, semisweet chocolate chips
2 tablespoons 40-percent heavy cream
10 ounces chocolate sauce
2 tablespoons powdered 10X sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
vanilla ice cream

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Use 1 teaspoon of flour, and sprinkle it inside four 6-ounce ramekins. Tap out excess flour. Set ramekins on baking sheet.

In a double boiler (or a metal bowl over a pan of simmering water), melt the butter with chocolate, cream and powdered sugar. Stir until smooth. Remove from heat. In a bowl, beat together two whole eggs, two egg yolks, sugar and vanilla until smooth. This should

TO PREPARE THE CUSTARD:

3 cups heavy cream
1 cup milk
½ cup sugar
7 egg yolks
1 vanilla bean, split and seeds removed
(1 teaspoon vanilla extract may be substituted)

In a saucepan, combine the cream, milk and half of the sugar. Place over medium heat, and cook until the liquid bubbles around the edges of the pot. Separately, place the yolks and the remaining sugar in a bowl and whisk them together thoroughly. Once the liquid comes to a boil, slowly pour a steady stream into the yolks while whisking continuously. Quickly strain the mixture into a cool container.

Place the pears in a baking dish, and pour the custard into the prepared pears. Cover the baking dish with aluminum foil and bake for approximately 20 minutes at 275 degrees. The custard in the pears should jiggle slightly, remove from the oven and allow them to sit covered for 20 minutes. Then place the pears in the refrigerator to cool for two hours.

take about three minutes. Sift 2 tablespoons of flour into the egg mixture. Fold them together. Fold the chocolate into the egg mixture.

Divide the mixture into the four ramekins. Bake until sides are set and top is still soft. This should take about 12 minutes. Remove from oven, and allow cakes to cool. Garnish the dessert plates with chocolate sauce. Unmold the cakes, and put on dessert plates. Serve with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

Capriccio Grill
3 Statehouse Plaza
Little Rock, Ark., (501) 399-8000
peabodylittlerock.com

Hours: Sun. through Sat., 6:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.,
Dinner: Sun., 6 to 9 p.m., Fri., 5 to 10 p.m.,
Mon. through Thu., 6 to 10 p.m.

BRUCE'S WINE PAIRING:

Budget: Angeline Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, \$15 per bottle

Splurge: Left Coast Cellars Pinot Noir "Latitude 45?" Oregon, \$40 per bottle

TO ASSEMBLE:

Sprinkle the top of the custard evenly with turbinado sugar. Then, with a hand-held torch, caramelize the sugar to a golden amber color. Alternately, you can place the pears under a broiler and brulée them; however, take care not to burn them.

Serves six.

Ashley's at the Capital Hotel
Markham & Louisiana
Little Rock, Ark., (501) 370-7011
capitalhotel.com

Breakfast: Sun. through Fri., 6:30 to 10 a.m.,
Sat. 6:30 to 11 a.m. Sunday Brunch, 11 a.m. to
2 p.m., Lunch: Mon. through Fri., 11 a.m. to
2 p.m., Dinner: Mon. through Thu., 5:30 to 9
p.m., Fri. and Sat., 5:30 to 10 p.m.

BRUCE'S WINE PAIRING:

Budget: Nivole Moscato d'Asti from Michele Chiarlo, \$15 per half bottle
Splurge: Far Niente "Dolce," Napa Valley, \$90 per half bottle

Chef Andre Poirot has served as executive chef for the Peabody Little Rock for nearly five years. Poirot was born, reared and trained in France.

"I cooked and traveled, which works well together especially for a French guy. I spent five years in England — that's where I learned English — and later worked in Bermuda," Poirot said.

Eventually, Poirot landed in New Orleans and later in Little Rock. His recipe for Godiva Chocolate Cake with Vanilla Ice Cream is a staple on Capriccio's menu. "This is a nice dessert. It's very popular, in fact, it's one of our best sellers," Poirot said. "It's pretty simple; you don't have to be a pastry chef to prepare it." He serves the decadent dessert with vanilla ice cream, also a favorite among diners. ■