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Thoughtful Food

By Susie Iventosch



This tasty, spicy pasta is perfect for a summer meal. Photo Susie Iventosch

of this program, if the student passes both the practical and written exams, he or she is promoted to "journeyman." And, with that, the students are set free to move wherever they can find a job, and in fact, the German government highly encourages these young chefs to travel and work abroad to expand their culinary skills.

Journeyman Kober, full of adventure and eager to explore, set out for Oaxaca, Mexico. "I went on a tourist visa, knew nothing about the place, had no knowledge of Spanish, and didn't even have a job!" he said.

But, it was providence, because he immediately found a job and met his future business partner at the same time. What he treasures most about his time working in Oaxaca was the ability to become fluent in Spanish and to learn all about the different kinds of chilies, something he wasn't too familiar with, being a German.

After leaving Mexico, Kober worked at different locations around the United States from Miami and New Orleans to Utah and Los Angeles, honing his skills and picking up regional influences. Eventually, he landed in northern California and was the banquet chef for eight years at Oakland's Waterfront Hotel.

Eleven years ago, Kober joined forces with Rangel and they bought Shelby's. They offer a varied and interesting menu featuring dishes from all over the world ... a menu they refer to as "European Fusion."

We are so fortunate that Kober has shared his version of Penne Pasta Arrabiata for our readers. I've usually seen arrabiata made with red chili pepper flakes, but this one is made with jalapenos, and plenty of them, but somehow, the dish is not too hot, but just perfectly flavorful and spicy.

"Our goal at Shelby's is that our guests enjoy the culinary journey through the many different types of dishes we offer," Kober said.

Shelby's recently received a full liquor license and now offers a complete bar, featuring house specialties made with Kober's homemade jams. Two that he mentioned are the Cosmo, made with currant jam; and the Purity Mule, made with kiwi jam. The jams are also packaged and available for purchase at the restaurant.

Shelby's Restaurant

We took my father-in-law to dinner at Shelby's in Orinda for his birthday last month and had the delightful experience of having one of the owners, Arno Kober, serve us. He was full of great information about the menu and the ingredients and was such a charming fellow.

Although he is the chef and runs the kitchen, he makes a point of being out in the front of the house a couple of nights each week. Normally, his business partner, Carlos Rangel, runs the front of the restaurant, but Kober really enjoys hearing what his guests have to say, and so you'll find him working in the dining room on Wednesdays and Sundays.

Kober, who hails from Hamburg and went to culinary school in Germany, said the chef programs there last three-and-one-half years and combine hands-on restaurant experience with two months each year of attending culinary school. At the end

2 Orinda Theatre Square

Orinda, CA 94563

Phone: (925) 254-9687

For menus, hours and a listing of their jams, please visit: www.shelbyseatbetter.com.

Shelby's Penne Pasta Arrabiata

(Serves 5-7)

INGREDIENTS

1 16-ounce package of penne pasta (Arno likes Barilla)

3-4 Tbsp. olive oil

1 large yellow onion, chopped

5 cloves of fresh garlic, minced

2 large red bell peppers, diced

10 spicy jalapeno peppers or 2 habanero peppers

(I used jalapeno and finely diced them before sautéing with the rest of the veggies.)

1 lb. uncooked bacon

1 large can of peeled Roma tomatoes

50 ounces (6 1/4 cups) of vegetable stock or chicken stock

1 small can of tomato paste

1 bunch of parsley, lightly chopped

1 tsp. of Italian seasoning

1 small bunch fresh basil, leaves only (can leave whole or cut up a bit)

1/2 cup of sugar (I used just a couple of tablespoons ... you need just enough to balance out the acids)

2 cups heavy cream

Salt and pepper to taste

Additionally you can use powdered chicken stock to season

Tools needed:

1 large stock pot

Chef's knife

Immersion blender or countertop blender

DIRECTIONS

Peel onion and cut in medium dice. Chop garlic very fine or use a garlic press. Sauté onions in 2 Tbsp. oil over medium heat, without taking on much color. Then add garlic and give it a few stirs.

Cut bacon into large chunks and add to onions and garlic and sauté until bacon is cooked to medium crisp. Add jalapeno pepper and continue cooking over medium low heat.

Add the can of peeled tomatoes, tomato paste, lightly chopped parsley, Italian seasoning, basil and the vegetable or chicken stock. Simmer on low heat for about 1 -1/2 hours. Add sugar as needed to balance out the tomato acids, but the sauce should not taste sweet.

Add heavy cream and blend the sauce. At Shelby's they use a commercial immersion blender for that purpose. I used a small food processor.

The finished product should be blended until very smooth and there should not be any small chunks visible.

Season to taste with salt, pepper and powdered chicken stock, if desired.

In the meantime cook pasta according to package instructions. Toss with sauce and garnish with plenty of freshly grated Parmesan cheese. Serve piping hot.

Reach the reporter at: suziven@gmail.com

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