



DINNER INSTALLATION



PHOTOGRAPHER: RAINER HOSCH

Tailormade Taste

Is it an appetizer or an edible installation... or both? For French-American Chef Michel Richard in Washington, the line between fine art and fantastic food melts in your mouth. N Magazine brings you innovative delights from a culinary pioneer.



Great artists often have humble yet mythical beginnings, and Michel Richard is no exception. As an 8-year-old he was in awe of the brilliant white accoutrements abuzz in a restaurant kitchen in his native Champagne, France. Beginning his classical training at the age of 14 at a local patisserie, he quickly moved to Paris to become a protégé of the famed Gaston Lenotre. Michel left for New York City when Lenotre opened a pastry shop in New York in 1974, which he outlived and in the spirit of the frontiersmen moved westward.

After a brief sojourn with his own shop in Santa Fe, Michel was lured by the glamour of Los Angeles, where his Michel Richard pastry shop became an instant success in 1977. For the next ten years, Michel honed his particular blend of French and American tastes and opened Citrus in 1987 which Traveller Magazine voted “Best Restaurant in the United States” the very same year. Michel’s Citronelle was a more elegant variation in Santa Barbara a year later, and its renown led the Chef back East to open restaurants in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, DC over the next decade.

By the end of the nineties, the father of six children (and as many restaurants) decided to focus his energies on the Washington, DC Citronelle. Extensive renovations in 1998 culminated in the flagship restaurant at the Latham Hotel that embodies the continuing ingenuity and culinary prowess of the widely acclaimed multi-starred Chef de Cuisine.

There, a visit to the Chef’s Table allows a tailor-made taste of Michel Richard’s visionary palette. His persistent and delightful wit is channelled into unique dishes that re-create familiar ingredients into unexpected combinations – while remaining firmly rooted in the French cuisine.

“I am a French chef – creating in America,” says Michel. “If I were to put cinnamon in the vinaigrette in France I would sell approximately one salad per year!”

Michel credits the American mentality with the openness to accept innovation. Nevertheless, “there is a fine line between the genius and the fool,” he says, warning against culinary diletantism. “The basket of the past is vast; I get my inspiration from 40 years of experience, taking the classics and rethinking them.”

For now, chef Richard’s plate of projects is overflowing. His newest book, “Happy in the Kitchen, The Craft of Cooking, the Art of Eating” offers creative yet functional techniques for home kitchen artistry. At the heart of the US capital, Michel’s new Centrale is a bistro styled by restaurant designer Jimi Yui and dedicated to perfect execution of American classics (including impeccable French fries, of course!). The flagship Citronelle will undergo a cosmetic makeover. And the list goes on. “I want to lose weight. I want to write another book. And I want to be a better cook. I am not afraid of getting old – but I don’t want my food to have wrinkles!”





Eggplant Gazpacho

4 portions

1 japanese eggplant
 1 small onion, finely diced
 10 g (1 tbsp) olive oil
 2 large garlic cloves, peeled and halved
 2 g (1/4 tsp) cumin (or more to taste)
 125 ml (4.5 oz) lowfat yogurt
 50 g (3.5 tbsp) tahini
 juice of 2 lemons
 250 ml (8 fl oz) tomato water
 salt, pepper, Tabasco sauce

Bake eggplant in the oven at 180°C (350°F) for 35 minutes. Then cut in half, scrape out flesh and place in a bowl. In a small pan over medium heat, add olive oil and onion. Sauté onion until it starts to brown, add garlic. Cook for another 5 minutes. Add cumin. Cook 5 minutes more. Remove from heat. Combine onion and cooked eggplant in a blender. Add yogurt, tahini, lemon juice, Tomato Water (see below), salt, pepper, and Tabasco. Blend until smooth. Strain and adjust seasoning. Place in bowl and cover. Chill until ready.

Tomato Water

1 kg (2 lbs) tomatoes (can be old and cheap)

Purée tomatoes in food processor. Strain through cheesecloth over a colander set in a bowl. Chill and strain over night. Use the liquid for Gazpacho. Reserve solids for another use.

To Serve:

Remove Gazpacho from fridge. Place 2 tbs of cubed, steamed vegetables in each bowl. Pour in Gazpacho. Serve with Beet Chips on the side.

Beet Chips

1 or 2 beets, peeled,
 250 g vinegar
 225 g sugar

Combine vinegar, sugar and beet slices in a small pot and bring to boil. Cook for 10 minutes. Strain beets and dry. Bake beet slices on a non-stick baking sheet in oven at the lowest temperature possible overnight. The next day, remove from oven. You will have crispy, sweet/sour beet chips. Store in dry container with tight lid.

10 Tips: Cooking for Friends

1. Make sure you know what your guests will eat. If someone has strict food preferences, it's good to know in advance. One time my best friend's 'girlfriend du jour' showed up and would eat nothing.
2. Keep your menu simple; don't play the grand chef. Even for me, at home I don't have 30 prep cooks. I keep it simple.
3. Stay seasonal. Don't serve hot onion soup on a hot summer's day.
4. Do your shopping a day or two before. Go shopping with your list in your pocket, and stick to it.
5. Don't make too many hors d'oeuvres. One or two will do. Make them small, or your guests will not eat your wonderful dinner.
6. Do your prep ahead of time. Food should be ready to just be warmed up. You want to spend time with your guests, not at the stove.
7. Don't use too many pots and pans – your spouse will love you for it. Even the maid will love you for it.
8. Serve the wine your guests bring to your home. (Remember Seinfeld and the rye?)
9. Keep your guest list small. Above 8 people, serve a buffet!
10. The best, simplest dessert: ice cream, fresh fruit and a great cup of coffee.



TART-TAR

4 portions

4 slices of potato bread
 120 g (4 oz) fresh, sushi-grade tuna,
 cut into 0.5 cm (1/4") dice
 10 g (1 tbs) olive oil
 2 g (1/4 tsp) Tabasco
 5 g (1 tsp) red wine vinegar
 pinch chives, chopped
 3 g (1/2 tsp) soy sauce
 1 small shallot, diced
 salt, pepper, crème fraiche
 caviar (optional)

Take a 7.5 cm (3") round cookie cutter and use the non-cutting side to make a perfect bread circle. With a standard can (6 cm (2.5")

diameter) make a slight depression in the middle of the bread. This will create the crust and look like a mini pizza. Place tarts on plate and cover with plastic until ready to use. Making the tarts could be done a few hours before. This is a very simple way to make a tart without making a homemade dough!

Place tuna in a bowl and mix with olive oil, Tabasco, red wine vinegar, chives, soy sauce, and shallot to make tartar. Season with salt and pepper.

Before serving, toast crusts (in broiler or toaster) on both sides. Stir filling. Fill the centre cavities of the tart with the tartar. Top with small dollop of crème fraiche and caviar.

APPLE SALAD WITH CINNAMON VINAIGRETTE

2 baskets per guest

Salad Baskets

1 yucca, 20 cm (8"), peeled and sliced paper thin into 10 "ribbons"
 1 zucchini / courgette about 4 cm (1.5") in diameter, sliced into 10 circles
 oil for deep frying

Wrap yucca ribbon around zucchini like a napkin ring to create a "basket", tucking in the ends to close. Fry in a deep fryer at 160°C (325°F) until light golden brown. Remove and cool. Drain on plate lined with paper towel at least 30 minutes before assembling the salad.

Salad Filling

3 apples, grated: 1 green, 1 golden delicious, 1 fuji
 – not peeled: we want the skin color!
 2 nectarines, sliced

1 g (1/8 tsp) cinnamon
 15 ml (1 tbs) honey
 15 ml (1 tbs) hazelnut oil
 salt, pepper
 micro herbs garnish (optional)

To Serve:

Mix together all ingredients just before serving (we do not want it to be soggy!) and carefully fill each basket with salad filling. Sprinkle with micro herbs to garnish if you like.





PORK BELLY, RED EYE GRAVY, POTATO GRITS

Pork Belly

1.5 kg smoked pork belly	60 g soy sauce
10 g (1 tbs) olive oil	8 cloves
1 large yellow onion peeled and cut	3 g black peppercorns in a cheesecloth tied with twine
2 large carrots, peeled, ends cut off, cut into large slices	1/2 litre apple juice
3 sprigs of fresh rosemary	2 star anise, in cheesecloth with peppercorns
2 bay leaves,	chicken broth
4 sprigs fresh thyme	60 g honey
2 6" (15 cm) long pieces of leek dark green part (2" (5 cm) wide)	60 g red wine vinegar
8 garlic cloves, peel does not need to be removed	salt

Brown pork belly fat-side down in a large cast-iron skillet with olive oil. Turn over when lightly browned. Continue to sauté, flipping sides for 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Take 2 leek pieces. Lay 1 piece of leek on your work surface. Place thyme, rosemary, and bay leaves on top of the leek (in the same direction) and top with the other piece of leek (like a sandwich). Bind well with kitchen twine.

Place pork belly in a large pot. Add onion & cloves, carrot, leek & herbs and peppercorn & star anise. Add honey, red wine vinegar, salt and apple juice. Fill pot with chicken broth until 5 cm (2") above meat. Bring to the boil, skimming foam off the top when necessary. Cover and bake in pre-heated oven at 120°C (250°F) for 2 to 3 hours – check meat after 2 hours by piercing meat with a sharp knife. Remove pork belly, cover and cool until ready to use. Strain remaining liquid into a bowl, cover and chill. The next day, remove the pot of liquid from the fridge and discard the fat layer that will form on top. Reserve liquid for another use.

Potato Grits

1 lb (1/2 kg), yellow potato peeled and cut to large pieces	few drops Tabasco
2 cups (1/2 l) milk	1/2 cup (50 g) grated parmesan cheese
1 stick (60 g) butter	3 eggs, beaten
1 teaspoon salt	

Blend potatoes with milk, butter, salt, Tabasco, and parmesan for 30 seconds in a blender. The mixture should be thin but with small lumps like couscous. Transfer to a microwave safe container, cook in microwave for 4 minutes. Stir with a wooden spatula. Cook in microwave for 4 more minutes. Cool for 10 minutes. Add in three beaten eggs with a spatula and mix well. Pour mixture into ovenproof dish and bake for 30 minutes at 160°C (325°F). The Potato Grits can be made the day before and reheated.

Red Eye Gravy

125 g slab bacon, cut into 1/4" (0.5 cm) dice	125 g sugar
1 small onion, diced	10 g water
1 tablespoon flour	40 g red wine vinegar
1/4 litre coffee	20 g butter
10 g (1 tbs) rum	salt, pepper
	50 g chicken stock

In a large sauté pan, sauté diced bacon until it starts to release its fat. Add onion. Cook for 10 minutes until onion starts to brown. Remove fat and sprinkle in flour, mix well over heat for a few minutes. Deglaze with coffee and rum. Cook for 15 minutes over medium / low heat. Meanwhile, combine sugar and water in a small pot. Heat to make a light brown caramel. Add red wine vinegar. Continue cooking until sugar is dissolved. Add this to the bacon and onion mixture. Cook for another 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, add butter.

To Serve:

Remove pork belly from fridge. Cut off the edges of each pork belly piece to make straight edges. Discard edges. Cut pork belly into 4 pieces. Place in baking pan skin-side up with chicken stock. Cover and warm in oven at 150°C (300°F) for about 20 minutes. Remove cover and broil until skin is crispy but not burned. Place one piece on each plate and top with your favourite sautéed vegetables (such as sautéed chanterelles, mixed vegetables), Red Eye Gravy and Potato Grits.

Apple Napoleon

0.5 kg (1 lb) pate sucre (1/2 portion) between 0.3 to 0.6 cm (1/8" to 1/4") thick, 8 fuji apples, peeled, cored and sliced to make 16 oz (400 g) cut apples total	250 g (8 oz) salted butter 150 g (5 oz) sugar 40 g (5 tbsp) cornstarch 10 g (4 tsp) gelatine powder
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Set oven to 160°C (325°F). Roll out pate sucre on lightly floured surface to 30 x 40 cm (12" x 16"). Using a sharp knife, cut into 6 long rectangles, 8 x 30 cm (3" x 11"). Make all edges straight. Place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Prick holes in dough with fork. Heat in oven for 15 minutes. Remove from oven. Cool.

Combine sugar and butter in large pot. Once it has melted and started to brown, add apples. Simmer on low heat for 15 minutes. With a ladle, Remove about 250 ml (8 fl oz) of apple liquid – not solids. Cool the juice and whisk in cornstarch. Continue to cook covered apples for 15 minutes. Do not let it caramelize. Remove from heat and blend in blender. Add the cooled juice and cornstarch mixture and blend until well combined. Place mixture in a bowl and whisk in gelatine while warm. Continue to whisk until mixture cools.

To Assemble:

Cut a piece of wood / cardboard / Styrofoam just a little longer than the pate sucre rectangles. Place roll of plastic wrap 0.5 m (1-1/2 ft) in front of you on your work surface. Pull out plastic wrap towards you, laying it flat on surface (one side is still connected to the roll in front of you). Place piece of wood on plastic horizontal across plastic approx. 15 cm (6") from you. Place 1st layer of pate sucre on wood. Spread the apple mixture onto the pate sucre with a spatula to about 0.6 cm (1/4") thick. Add 2nd layer of pate sucre. Repeat with apple. Continue until the last pate sucre piece is on top. With a spatula, fill the gaps between the layers with the leftover apple puree, blending the pate sucre and layers with apple puree. Take flap of plastic and wrap it over the Napoleon towards you. Wrap the entire napoleon in 3 or 4 layers of plastic, rolling it towards you. Pull out more plastic wrap as you need it. Cut plastic and wrap the short ends of the Napoleon as well. Chill in fridge for 2 to 3 days.

To Serve:

Remove from fridge. Trim short ends to make straight. Cut into slices. Make Caramel Sauce. Place one slice of Napoleon flat on each plate. Sprinkle with sugar. Caramelize top with blowtorch. Serve with Caramel Sauce surrounding the Napoleon.

Caramel Sauce

100 g (4 oz) sugar
180 ml (6 fl oz) heavy cream
2 sprigs rosemary juice of 1/2 lemon

Heat sugar in small pot until it turns a caramel colour. Remove from heat for few seconds. Stir in heavy cream and rosemary. Heat again for 15 to 20 seconds, stirring to mix ingredients well. Remove from heat. Stir in lemon juice. Serve at room temperature.

Pate Sucre

500 g (1 lb) pastry flour	70 g (2.5 oz) almond flour
180 g (6.5 oz) sugar	2 eggs
300 g (1/2 lb) butter, softened	pinch of salt

Mix sugar and almond flour using a blender fitted with a paddle. Add eggs one by one. Add one third of pastry flour. Mix well, then add rest all at once. Mix until just combined. Turn out onto lightly floured surface and combine with hands. Roll out to a rectangle shape less than 2.5 cm (1") thick. Wrap in plastic and chill to firm. Should yield a little more than 1 kg (2 lbs).

