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2019 SAN ANTONIO COCKTAIL CONFERENCE
SAN ANTONIO, UNESCO CREATIVE CITY OF GASTRONOMY



Above: Chef Steve McHugh's Mesquite Cake (Photo courtesy Cured at Pearl)
 Cover: The 2019 San Antonio Cocktail Conference Signature Cocktail "Call Me, Honey" (Photo by Jason Risner)

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TEXAS MESQUITE REVIVAL

BY TERESA MORRIS

The inaugural Mesquiteers Fest, a celebration of Texas's mesquite harvest, took place at Desert Door Distillery in Driftwood on a hot, dry day last summer. The ambience epitomized the sense of place endemic in the budding Texas Mesquite Movement.

On this Saturday afternoon, serious foodies sampled Texas mesquite-infused foods and drinks by Desert Door Distillery, Buster's Mesquite Smoked Pecans, Just Like Mama's Barbecue, Miche Bread, Two Hives Honey and SRSly Chocolate. Festival organizers are members of a movement, an informal group devoted to reintroducing the mesquite tree as an organic, locally available food source and educating people about the delicious, healthy properties of its edible parts.

Once a valued source of food, medicine and fuel for the indigenous people of Texas, the mesquite tree became the scourge of ranchers and farmers who later settled in Texas. They viewed the tree as a pestilence and sought to eradicate it. But lately, the tree's reputation has improved as people rediscover the nutritional and culinary value of the mesquite pod (bean). Mesquite pods are high in protein and dietary fiber. They contain a fair amount of iron, calcium, potassium, magnesium and zinc. It also has a unique, pleasing flavor with notes of mocha and cinnamon. Dried, ground mesquite pods create a healthy, flavorful flour.

Sandeep Gyawali, owner of Austin's Miche Bread, explained the group hopes to increase interest, appreciation and demand for Texas mesquite by getting the word out about the many ways to use the mesquite pod.

Mr. Gyawali discovered mesquite flour while looking for a mystery ingredient for a Slow Food Austin fundraiser. He sourced the mesquite flour at Whole Foods and was surprised to learn it was imported from Peru. He later discovered most mesquite flour available in Texas is imported from South America, despite the tree's abundance in the state (56 million acres of

mesquite trees, about 76 percent of mesquite grown in the US).

He recognized a rare opportunity to restore this native ingredient as part of the regional diet by providing locally sourced mesquite pods and flour. With a grant from the Austin Food and Wine Alliance, Mr. Gyawali purchased a hammer mill to process mesquite pods and recruited people to harvest ripe pods – and the Texas Mesquite Movement was born just two years ago.

"It's about eating local, a sense of place," he said.

With mesquite cooking demonstrations at local farmers markets, he teaches how to forage the pods and process dried pods in a kitchen blender. Although he coined the movement's name, Mr. Gyawali emphasizes the movement is accessible to everyone.

Chef Steve McHugh of Cured at Pearl shares Mr. Gyawali's vision of a thriving local mesquite industry. The two-time James Beard nominee discovered mesquite flour while researching ingredients for a forgotten foods theme for the Atlanta Food and Wine Festival. He was intrigued by its unique nature and enigmatic, lingering quality.

For Chef McHugh, as with Mr. Gyawali, the value of a local mesquite industry transcends its creative culinary uses. He views it as the "largest food source in Texas that no one uses" and envisions working with local foodbanks to make the local ingredient a resource to help feed everyone.

Chef Elizabeth Johnson of Pharm Table also appreciates the unique gastronomic characteristics of the mesquite bean. First introduced to mesquite flour while visiting Peru, she found its medicinal properties and pleasant flavor most interesting. Naturally gluten-free, the flour's high mineral content fulfilled her ideal of an ingredient that promotes health with an organic, preventative approach.

She also values the ingredient as a lost heritage food. She uses the flour to create gluten-free cheesecakes for special events. Mesquite flour will be a featured ingredient at Acequia,

Sandeep Gyawali of Miche Bread, founder of the Texas Mesquite Movement. (Photo courtesy)

FORAGE, HARVEST AND PROCESS YOUR OWN

BY SANDEEP GYAWALI
OF AUSTIN'S
MICHE BREAD

Texas mesquite bean pods can be harvested between May and September, depending upon region. Hotter regions in Texas have an earlier harvest. Some regions even yield two harvests in good years.

Mesquite pods (beans) should be harvested directly from the trees. Once they fall to the ground, pods should not be harvested – they may be contaminated with animal fecal matter or an invisible mold that produces a neurotoxin.

Ripe beans look tan and may have purple and pink striations (striated pods have the best flavor). Beans should pluck off stems easily, dried seeds make a rattling sound when the pods are shaken.

Not all trees produce good tasting beans. Bean foragers should taste a few beans from each tree. If they all taste sweet and not bitter, the entire tree can be harvested. The beans should look clean with no black spots.

After harvesting, roast or freeze beans right away to prevent any bruchid beetles inside the beans from hatching. The beetles are harmless, but undesirable. Freezing or roasting prevents beetles from developing.

Roasting develops more complex flavors, like warm spices and mocha. Place beans (on sheet pan) in a 250-300°F oven until they change from beige to medium brown. The beans should feel dry and snap when bent. This could take 20 minutes to two hours depending on temperature, moisture and sugar content. Check frequently to make sure they don't burn.

Once roasted, cool, store in an airtight container and freeze. Process dried or roasted beans into flour with a spice grinder or blender. Sift out coarse bits. Store flour in freezer. Add silica gel packs to mesquite flour to prevent clumping. Leftover coarse bits are useful for making extracts, syrup or coffee.



(Photo by Victoria Cappadona)

her restaurant concept for one of a trio of restaurants that are part of the redevelopment project at La Villita.

The menu at Acequia will include foods made with native heritage ingredients Canary Islanders would have encountered here 300 years ago.

Ramon Juan Vasquez, executive director of American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions (AIT-SCM) in San Antonio, explained that more than 300 years ago, American Indians viewed the mesquite as “el Arbol de Vida,” the tree of life. They traditionally used all parts of the tree for life-sustaining purposes. The AIT-SCM is currently working toward purchasing a hammer mill to process mesquite pods and participate in a state mesquite industry.

Today, only rancher Victoria Cappadona and Mr. Gyawali offer locally harvested mesquite flour for sale – perhaps because harvesting mesquite pods is very labor intensive. Despite the tree's abundance, supply is the barrier to success for the domestic mesquite industry, according to Ms. Cappadona.

Mesquite pods ripen during the hot Texas summer and must be harvested before they fall to the ground. Workers are scarce, and the cost of labor is often financially unfeasible. Despite these obstacles, Ms. Cappadona is optimistic about the future of a Texas mesquite industry.

“I see a lot of potential for growth. It's all about education – teaching people about the value of this holistic, organic food.”

To learn more about mesquite flour and other local mesquite products, visit www.michebread.com and cappadonaranch.com.

MESQUITE CAKE

Serve with *Horchata Ice Cream*,
Local Blackberries, *Marcona Almonds*
By Chef Steve McHugh, Cured at Pearl (Yield: Serves 8)

FOR THE MESQUITE CAKE

INGREDIENTS

6 tablespoons sunflower oil
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1½ cups sugar
½ cup mesquite powder
8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
3 eggs, large
2 egg yolks, large
½ cup plain whole-milk yogurt
½ cup horchata
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 325°F. Grease 10-inch spring form pan with 1 tablespoon sunflower oil. (Set aside the remaining sunflower oil.) Whisk the flour, baking soda, salt and cinnamon together in a medium bowl. Set aside.
Using mixer on medium-high speed, cream sugar, mesquite powder, butter and the remaining sunflower oil in large bowl until light and fluffy.
Reduce speed to medium-low and add eggs one at a time, followed by egg yolks, beating well after each addition.
Add the whole-milk yogurt, horchata and vanilla extract, beating to blend.
Slowly add the flour mixture, beating to blend.

Pour resulting cake batter into pan and lightly tap the pan to eliminate air pockets.
Bake for 1 to 1¼ hours until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. The cake should pull away from the sides of the pan and appear golden brown. Let cool completely.

FOR THE CARAMEL SAUCE

INGREDIENTS

½ pound sugar
1 cup heavy cream
3 tablespoons butter
3 tablespoons honey
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
1½ teaspoons maple syrup

DIRECTIONS

Combine sugar, ½ cup of heavy cream, butter and honey in heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil. Once boiling, stir with a whisk until sauce turns a light golden brown.
Remove from heat and stir in ½ cup of heavy cream, vanilla extract and maple syrup.
Return to medium heat. Continue to stir with the whisk until sauce reaches a deep brown color. Reserve warm.

TO PLATE

INGREDIENTS

fresh blackberries
Marcona almonds
mesquite cake
horchata ice cream

DIRECTIONS

Cut mesquite cake into portions and heat slightly. Drizzle with caramel and top with almonds, berries and horchata ice cream. Enjoy!



*Chef Steve
McHugh's
Mesquite Cake
(Photo courtesy
Cured at Pearl)*