

PURSUITS

CHEFS AT HOME

FOOD & DRINK



Giving Chicken a Sweet Touch

A Texas chef fries his bird with honey and adds an herb sauce for a 'global Southwestern' meal



JORRI AUSEI

THE CHEF: STEPHAN PYLES is a fifth-generation Texan and 24-year veteran of the restaurant industry. After learning the ropes at his family's truck-stop

cafe, Mr. Pyles trained at the Great Chefs of France program at Robert Mondavi's Napa Valley winery in the 1980s. He has had 14 restaurants, the most recent of which is an eponymous eatery that opened in November 2005 in Dallas's Arts District.

KNOWN FOR: Though schooled in nouvelle cuisine, Mr. Pyles gained acclaim as a champion of Southwestern regional fare at restaurants like Routh Street Cafe and Star Canyon. At Stephan Pyles, he combines the ingredients and techniques of the Old World (Spain) with those of the New World (Central and South America) into what he

calls "global Southwestern" cooking.

THE MEAL: Mr. Pyles's fried chicken and whipped sweet potatoes were longtime favorites on the menu of his now-defunct Dallas restaurant, Baby Routh. He still teaches the dishes in his cooking classes and occasionally offers them as specials at his current restaurant. "I was raised on my mother's fried chicken, and this would be my last supper," he says. The chef suggests serving it for a Saturday dinner with a chilled soup or fresh salad to start, and a traditional dessert like peach pecan crisp with cinnamon ice cream.

KITCHEN TIP: "I can't live without my small bar blender," says Mr. Pyles, who uses the appliance for everything from margaritas to purées to chilies. Don't confuse it with a food processor, he cautions; it gets a smoother consistency, and makes things lighter and more refined.

—Charlotte Kaiser Weinberg

Spicy Whipped Sweet Potatoes

Yields: 5 cups
Active preparation time: 8 minutes
Cooking time: 10 minutes

- 2 pounds sweet potatoes (about 2 large potatoes), peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 8 ounces russet potato (about 1 medium), peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 6 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ½ to 1 teaspoon cayenne powder
- 1 tablespoon pure chile powder
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

■ Combine the potatoes in a pot, cover with water, and bring to a

SHOPPING LIST

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| From the market: | Pure chile powder |
| 1 chicken, about 3 to 3½ pounds | |
| From the pantry: | Honey |
| 2 tablespoons raspberry or other fruit vinegar | Flour |
| 2 tablespoons whole-wheat flour | Cayenne powder |
| 1 quart buttermilk | Eggs |
| 1 pint heavy cream | Vegetable oil |
| Small bunch fresh mint and thyme | Salt |
| 1 lemon | Black peppercorns |
| 2 pounds sweet potatoes (about 2 large potatoes) | Chicken stock |
| 8 ounces russet potato, about 1 medium | Pure maple syrup |
| | Unsalted butter |
| | From the wine rack: |
| | Dry white wine |

boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook until tender, about 10 minutes. Drain well and transfer the potatoes to a food processor. Add the maple syrup,

salt, cayenne, and chile powder. Process for 1 minute while adding the butter 1 tablespoon at a time. If not serving immediately, reheat in a pan, stirring often, and serve.

Honey-Fried Chicken and Thyme-Mint Cream



Yields: 4 to 6 servings
Active preparation time: 50 minutes
Marinating time: 2 to 12 hours

For honey-fried chicken:

- 1 chicken, 3 to 3½ pounds
- ½ cup honey
- 2 tablespoons raspberry or other fruit vinegar
- ¼ cup flour
- 2 tablespoons whole-wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons cayenne powder
- 2 eggs
- ¼ cup buttermilk
- Vegetable oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

For thyme-mint cream sauce:

- ½ cup dry white wine
- ½ cup chicken stock
- 1½ cups heavy cream
- 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh mint
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 tablespoon reserved marinade
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

■ Cut the chicken into 8 pieces

(breasts, drumsticks, thighs, and wings), and place into a large resealable plastic bag, reserving the backbone and neck for stock if you like. Stir the honey and vinegar together and pour into the bag over the chicken and toss to coat evenly. Seal bag and let chicken marinate for at least 2 hours and no more than 12 hours in the refrigerator.

■ When ready to cook the chicken, preheat the oven to 200 degrees. Combine the flours and cayenne in a wide shallow bowl and set aside. In another wide shallow bowl, whisk together the eggs and buttermilk.

■ Remove the chicken from the marinade and drain on paper towels. Strain the marinade and reserve 1 tablespoon for the sauce, discarding rest. Dip the chicken in the egg mixture, season with salt and pepper, and dredge in the flour-cayenne mixture, coating thoroughly.

■ Pour oil to a depth of 1 inch in a large heavy skillet, and heat over medium-high heat until temperature registers 300 degrees on a candy thermometer; cooking at a low temperature will prevent the honey from caramelizing too quickly and burning before the chicken is cooked through.

■ Working in batches and starting

with the dark meat first, gently drop the chicken pieces into the hot oil for 5 to 6 minutes on the first side until browned. Turn the pieces and continue cooking, adjusting the heat so that the chicken browns evenly on both sides without burning. Turn once more and cook until well browned, and tender when pierced with a fork. The dark meat should cook for about 15 minutes, and the white meat about 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a metal rack set over a baking sheet as done and keep warm in the oven while making the sauce.

■ To prepare the sauce, very carefully ladle the hot oil from the pan into a pot (and discard once cool). Pour off the last of the oil from the skillet, leaving any bits on the bottom. Deglaze the pan with the white wine over medium-high heat, scraping the browned bits from the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon. Add the chicken stock and reduce the liquid by half, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the cream, mint, thyme, lemon zest and reserved marinade, and reduce until the sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, 5 to 6 minutes. Strain the sauce and season with salt and pepper. (Yield: 1¼ cups.)