

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



December 2016 – Smoky Smorgasbord

Winter is the time of year when the smell of a fire burning in a hearth brings comforting warmth to the cold winter air. Bourbon can have a similar effect. Like fine red wine, bourbon is aged in charred oak barrels, which impart deep, smoky aromas. There seems to be something almost magical about this warm brown liquid, made from corn, that makes you want to while away the hours in the town for which it was named, Old Bourbon, Kentucky.

The quintessential bourbon cocktail, the Old Fashioned, was invented in Louisville, Kentucky. This inaugural drink is served in its namesake glass and offsets bourbon's high alcohol and smokiness with sweet sugar, complex bitters, and a twist of floral citrus rind. Pair this slightly sweet, smoky drink with smoked salmon. Each guest can create the perfect bite when you set out little rye bread rounds, softened cream cheese, chopped red onion, and herbaceous capers in accompaniment. The spice notes in the bourbon contrast the fattiness of the salmon, while the smoke in the bourbon complements it. The soda and ice cleanse the palate, and the orange twist is a bright foil to the briny fish.

As a highlight of the evening, bone-in rib-eye roast is one of the most spectacular cuts of meats to serve. Go one step further and spoon Spiced Cherry Bourbon Sauce over the top of each piece. When you flame the bourbon before adding it to the sauce, most of the bitter alcohol will burn off. Then, blend with meaty broth, tangy shallots, and sweet-spicy cherries for a sublime result. Choose premium single barrel bourbon for its powerful aromas of caramel, cocoa, vanilla, and maple syrup. It serves as a worthy adversary to the intense flavors of the meat and sauce. As for the rest

of the plate, simple, creamy mashed potatoes and your favorite green vegetable soothe your palate, and the colors of red, white and green please the eye.

Pear Spice Bread Pudding is a praiseworthy "comfort" dessert to end this winter feast. I like the addition of pears as they reinforce the sweet pear and apple flavors found in the blended bourbon you pair with it. Serve the bourbon over ice or mix with a bit of water to tamp down the alcohol levels and bring out the aromas and flavors.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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Old-Fashioned Bourbon Cocktail

INGREDIENTS

1 sugar cube
2-3 dashes Angostura bitters
A splash of club soda
2 oz. bourbon
1 Old-Fashioned glass

DIRECTIONS

Place the sugar cube (or 1/2 teaspoon loose sugar) in an Old-Fashioned glass. Wet it down with 2 or 3 dashes of Angostura bitters and a short splash of club soda.

Crush the sugar with a wooden muddler. Rotate the glass so that the sugar grains and bitters coat the inside of the glass. Add ice cubes. Pour in the bourbon and serve with a stirring rod.

Yield: 1 drink

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Spiced Cherry Bourbon Sauce

INGREDIENTS

2/3 cup bourbon
6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) chilled unsalted butter, cut into pieces
1/4 cup finely chopped shallots
2/3 cup beef stock
1/2 cup crushed spiced cherries, pitted and chopped, or left whole (your preference)

DIRECTIONS

Heat bourbon in heavy small saucepan over medium heat until warm. Remove from heat; carefully ignite with match. Let burn 30 seconds, then cover to extinguish flame.

Heat 1 tablespoon butter in a skillet; add shallots and sauté 2 minutes. Add stock, cherries, and bourbon; boil until reduced by half, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat. Add remaining 5 tablespoons butter, 1 tablespoon at a time, whisking just until melted. Spoon sauce over your favorite grilled steaks and serve.

Yield: about 1 cup

Pear Spice Bread Pudding with Bourbon Hard Sauce

INGREDIENTS

2 2/3 cups granulated sugar, divided
1 tbsp. ground cinnamon
4 large fresh pears, cored and sliced
1 loaf of Italian bread, cubed
1/2 cup melted unsalted butter
1 1/2 cups whole milk
1 1/2 cups heavy cream
9 eggs
2 tablespoons vanilla extract

Hard Sauce

1 cup butter
3 cups powdered sugar
4 tablespoons bourbon

DIRECTIONS

Mix 2/3 cup granulated sugar and cinnamon together. Toss 2 tablespoons of cinnamon-sugar mixture with pears. Set pears aside. Toss bread cubes with melted butter and sprinkle liberally with remaining cinnamon-sugar. Arrange on baking sheet, cut side up, and bake for 5 to 7 minutes or until golden brown. Cool at least 5 minutes.

Butter sides and bottom of 9X13X2-inch glass baking dish; set aside. Combine milk, cream, eggs, 2 cups granulated sugar and vanilla in mixing bowl and beat until smooth. Place one layer of bread cubes in glass dish. Arrange layer of pear slices on top. Repeat layers, ending with bread cubes. Pour egg mixture over all. Cover with foil and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat oven to 350° F. Place pudding pan with foil cover in larger pan of cold water on lower shelf in oven. Bake at 350° F for 2 to 2 1/2 hours or until sharp knife inserted in center comes out clean.

To make Hard Sauce:

Cream butter before slowly adding powdered sugar. Blend the mixture until it is light and fluffy before adding the liquor. Once thoroughly combined, chill the hard sauce until you are ready to serve it. Hard sauce can keep for several days in the refrigerator.

Yield: 8-10 servings