



## In the Kitchen with Rick Olivier

01 November 2009 — by [Elsa Hahne](#)



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I was kind of an afterthought in my family. My parents were both 43 when I was born and I have three older sisters. Consequently, my mom spoiled me. Did not have to cook for myself at all. Then I went to college and ended up getting really hungry. ‘Wow, I have got to learn this,’ and it didn’t take long. Food is such a big deal here and my mom was just an amazing cook, but very classical Cajun country cooking the way it always has been done. I grew up in a little town called White Castle, which is an hour north of here, on the river. My dad would go hunting and get squirrels or rabbits or whatever, bring them home. My mom would cook them and we always had great food around the house. Not the healthiest food, because the Cajuns are into their fat, but I grew up eating some really good food.

We eat jambalaya all year round, a lot of gumbo in winter, and we eat a little lighter; I’m 52 now and I can’t digest the roux like I used to. I’ll make a little bit to put in the gumbo because you have to have it, but I do my gumbo more with okra and file now. I love me some gumbo, but it’s a cold weather thing for me. I’m big on the okra; I like okra.

Culturally, south Louisiana is just a goldmine. You grow up eating great food; you grow up hearing great music. It’s all mixed up. The local music used to be played on AM radio all the time. The Irma Thomas, the Ernie K-Doe, you grew up hearing it. To me, it seems like a cool thing to play these songs, I just love these songs. All of the R&B stuff and the swamp pop. The guys in my band, we all realize that we really cannot write songs as good as Allen Toussaint and as good as Earl King and we don’t have time to learn and study that. Fortunately, the songs are already written. We just have to dig them up. Mix in the really well known numbers with some obscure numbers. If people really haven’t heard the obscurities before, then I don’t think it matters that much whether you’re playing original songs. I want to do the great songs, and I don’t think we’re going to run out of material any time soon.

Now, I want to make sure I don’t cook something other than the recipe. Left to my own devices, I’ll be throwing other stuff in. Who knows? I’d be putting some bay leaf or something. My mom did not cook with cilantro—parsley only. You never saw cilantro in the supermarket prior to 1985, or 1979 maybe. I just happen to love the taste, but it also relates to this idea of creolization. If something is Creole, it means that it’s been adapted to the province. The way I see Creole is that you’re free to improvise. It means that you can be in touch with the tradition, but put your own thing on it right now, which is cool. Anything that had parsley in it before, I feel totally free to use cilantro now.

To a lot of people, the idea of making shrimp-stuffed mirlitons is real exotic. But not to me. I grew up watching my mom make them. Stuffed artichokes, or whatever. They’d sit there, stuff the damn artichokes. It was just an everyday thing. But that is just very exotic to some people. My wife, the first date we ever had, I invited her over to eat with me and I made stuffed mirlitons with shrimp and she jokingly says that, well, that pretty much sealed the deal for her. They were good.

Our love for sweets in South Louisiana; you’re in sugarcane country. And so, sugar is a big deal here. In my own hometown it was considered treasonous to not eat sugar. You ate sugar because you were surrounded by sugarcane fields. It was good for the economy. I love sweets. I have a terrible sweet tooth. This is the most traditional Cajun dessert ever. Steen’s is the brand that I like, Steen’s cane syrup, and you don’t clean the plate off or anything. You put some of this on your plate and then you take your sliced white bread—this was my dad’s favorite dessert, he ate it every night—and there you have it. It’s called syrup and bread. It’s good too.”

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### Rick's Creole String Beans

“These are not your five-dollar bag of pretty beans. Real snap beans.”

- 1 pack (14 oz.) smoked beef sausage
- 1 yellow onion, chopped 1/2 red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/2 cup fresh chopped cilantro
- 1 large Creole tomato 1/2 jalapeño pepper
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper juice of 1 lime 1 tablespoon Steen's cane syrup
- 1/2 cup Chimay ale
- 1 1/2 pounds fresh string beans

Slice and brown sausage; remove from skillet. Add seasonings (onion through jalapeño) and sauté for 10 minutes. Add sausage back in along with Worcestershire, salt, pepper, lime juice, cane syrup and ale. Simmer for 15 minutes and stir to prevent sticking. Add string beans. Stir, cover and simmer to your preferred “doneness.” If mixture begins to dry out, add a splash more of the Chimay. Serve over rice.

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