

Berry good

by DEBORAH SEEBER



Few things are as delightful as berries. If you are fortunate enough to spend time where they grow perennially, or, better yet, wild, the taste of berries freshly foraged will stay fresh in your memory for years to come.

"My strongest memories of berry picking come from our summer vacations at a harbor house in a small fishing village called Crinan on the west coast of Scotland," reminisces Jeremy Hammond-Chambers, sous chef at Cork, a new restaurant on St. Armands Circle. "It would be ritualistic every morning for my sister, Lucy; brother, Rupert; and I to get up around 7 a.m. and walk over to the docks to meet the fishing boats that were coming in. Bramble and red currant bushes lined either side of the walkway, and although we would pick them every morning and the ravenous birds were good competition, there always seemed to be enough to give us a couple of pints of each a day. They would be served how the freshest of wild berries should, topped with a spoonful of clotted cream, a sprinkling of sugar and a piece of freshly baked shortbread, purchased from the tea shop at the dock."

For those of you who, like Hammond-Chambers, may have endured the long winters of northern latitudes, the wild berries that begin to arrive

in late spring are the ultimate payoff. A neighbor up the street from where we lived in western New York, not far from Canada, had a hedgerow of currants from which my mother would make jelly; and in our back yard, wild blackberries grew, perhaps not quite as tasty as Hammond-Chambers' brambles, but still a delight.

At Cork, pastry chef Heidi Nelson takes the route of the purist -- she suspends the freshest of berries in an orange-scented gelatin -- served simply, yet elegantly, in a martini glass. It is her take on the classic, often contrived, molded dish -- the chartreuse -- traditionally employed as a preparation for savories, such as game birds.

Savory is an unexpected -- but equally delightful -- route to take with berries. Hammond-Chambers, perhaps inspired by those idyllic summers past, prepares a blueberry chutney to accompany rabbit and duck terrine served at Cork. The dish is an example of the restaurant's inspired fare, combining the traditional and the innovative, that he and head chef Mac de Carle, long a mainstay at Beach Bistro, create in this sleek, lavishly redesigned venue. Jeff Trefry, who for many years ran the kitchen at Cafe L'Europe, has relinquished his cooking duties and now deftly oversees the operation, front of the house and back, as managing partner.

Summer Fruit Chartreuse Cork

Ingredients

5 sheets gelatin (or 1/2 oz. powdered gelatin)
2 c. water
4 oz. sugar cubes
1 untreated orange
Assorted fruit, washed and cut into glasses.

Method

Soak the gelatin sheets in cold water. (Or, if using powdered gelatin, bloom the gelatin in 1/4 cup of the 2 cups of water.)

Rub the orange skin with sugar cubes to soak up the essential oils. Drop sugar cubes into the water and heat to simmer, dissolving the sugar.

Drain the gelatin sheets and add to the sugar water. (If using powdered gelatin, add some of the heated sugar water to the gelatin to make it liquid, and then mix it all together.) Mix well.

Once ready, this gelee needs to be used quickly. Pour over prepared fruit in glasses and refrigerate until set. Garnish with fresh whipped cream and cookies.

