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Caribbean Classics

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(<http://gocooking.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/chris-2.jpg>)Chris de la Rosa was feeling a bit bruised and battered (but not broken!), from a traffic mishap, when I spoke to him earlier this week. But the upbeat cookbook author was effervescent in attitude and determined to see the bright side.

“Look,” he said, “I got to spend the whole long weekend sitting on the couch watching Breaking Bad and having people bring me things.”

It was probably a well needed rest opportunity for the cook, teacher, writer and researcher, photographer, web site designer, marketing consultant and — oh, did I mention it already? — cookbook author.

De la Rosa is obviously multi-talented and a whiz at multi-tasking. His main focus, however, is food: food of the Caribbean, more significantly, and the documenting thereof. His website is a work of art (<http://www.caribbeanpot.com>) with enticing photography, superb recipes and funny, vivid writing. He is quick to tell you that he has had no formal training as a chef. Growing up in the south part of Trinidad, he learned to cook from his mother and grandmother and aunt. He came to Canada in 1989 and his story is typical of the immigrant experience:

“I came on vacation to visit relatives. At that time, there was a severe economic recession in Trinidad, and my parents encouraged me to stay and go to school here. While I was going to school, I lived with my aunt who held two jobs and it was my responsibility to see that everyone in the family got fed. But I was not just learning to cook. We actually rented a garden plot in Dundas and grew our own vegetables. It was something that I was used to in Trinidad — my mom would take me to the town market every Saturday to shop and we also had a small kitchen garden there. There was nothing gender-based with mom — I learned how to cook and grow vegetables and shop for food and so, I felt as if I could speak with some authority.”

What he found in Canada, however, was misinformation or lack of information about Caribbean cooking. Most people thought Caribbean food was all about roti or jerk chicken, he notes. But there were waves of immigrants in the islands — Chinese, Indian, Syrian, Portuguese — to name a few — and all of these influences made an impact on the island cuisine. He was appalled that even second generation Caribbean people had lost touch with this complex, traditional cuisine. His mission became to correct some of these inaccuracies and to document and promote the incredible diversity of food from the islands. And his educational background as a website designer and internet marketing consultant provided a good platform for him to do that.





(<http://gocooking.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/bookcover2.jpg>)

The website showcases recipes, along with videos and a blog. It has been wildly successful getting hits from over 180 countries. An e-cookbook called “The Vibrant Caribbean Pot 60 Traditional and Fusion Recipes Vol 1.” has been so widely downloaded that it is now available in a printed version with an additional 100 recipes (available this September). The recipes on the website are made special with helpful photographs and clear instructions. For instance, the recipe that I am including in today’s blog has something called Caribbean green seasoning. A link in his recipe tells you that this is a paste unique to Caribbean that contains a bunch of cilantro, a stalk of celery, garlic cloves, green onions and thyme, blended in a food processor with half a cup of water, a pinch of salt, 2-3 shallots and 2 pimento peppers. This paste can be frozen or kept in the refrigerator to use as seasoning. But actually, de la Rosa says, most of the island ingredients can now be found at the new Nations Fresh store in Jackson Square — or they are now available at regular supermarkets such as Food Basics and Fortinos.

I am so looking forward to watching Chris demonstrate his Caribbean recipes in our afternoon patio session on August 21st: chicken drumsticks, wrapped in bacon on the grill, something called macaroni and cheese pie, a Caribbean specialty that uses béchamel sauce to add extra richness to the cheesy treat, grilled pineapple with rum sauce and coconut cream icecream. Hope to see you there!

E. Hujer



(<http://gocooking.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/curry-chicken-with-string-beans.jpg>)

Classic Coconut Curry Chicken with String Beans

from Chris de la Rosa, *Caribbeanpot.com*

Ingredients:

1.5 lbs chicken thighs
 1 lb string beans
 3/4 teaspoon salt
 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
 1 teaspoon [Caribbean green seasoning](http://caribbeanpot.com/how-to-make-the-green-seasoning-paste-thats-so-unique-to-caribbean-cuisine/) (<http://caribbeanpot.com/how-to-make-the-green-seasoning-paste-thats-so-unique-to-caribbean-cuisine/>)
 2 tablespoon veg oil
 1.5 tablespoon curry powder
 1/4 teaspoon amchar massala (optional)
 1 shallot
 4 cloves garlic
 5 birds eye pepper (aka bird pepper)
 1 cup coconut milk

Method:

Notes. I used a madras curry blend (made in the Caribbean). The chicken thighs were deboned, but feel free to use bone-in (about 2lbs).. cook a little longer. Do NOT cut the peppers, simply remove the stems and use whole. We’ll get some flavor from them, without the raw heat.

Cut the chicken into 1 -2 inch pieces, wash and drain. Then season with the salt, black pepper, green seasoning and amchar massala (you can also use ground roasted geera – cumin) and allow to marinate for about 1 hour. In the meantime you can trim the string beans (simply cut off the tips and cut into 2 inch pieces).

Heat the oil in a fairly large pan on med-high, then add the chopped shallot (you can also use onion) and garlic and turn the heat down to low. Cook this gently for about 3 minutes. Then add the curry powder and stir well. Cook for a further 3 minutes to get the raw curry taste out. It will go darker in colour and go a bit grainy.

Now add the peppers (do not break them unless you want the heat) and cook for about 30 seconds, then add in the seasoned chicken and mix well to deglaze the pan and to coat the chicken pieces with the lovely curry base we created.

Turn the heat up to medium/high and cook the chicken with the lid uncovered for about 4-5 minutes. Then add the trimmed beans and coconut milk (remember to give it a good stir) and bring to a boil. Place the lid on the pan and cook for about 10 minutes (depending on how well you like your beans cooked) on a simmer (so lower the heat).

Remove the lid and time to finish off the dish. You check for salt at this point (adjust accordingly) and you can also personalize the dish at this point. Depending if you want gravy or not, you can now turn up the heat and burn off all the remaining liquid. **OPTIONAL:** Toss in a few cherry tomatoes, turn off the heat and place the lid back on. The residual heat will soften the tomatoes so it does not go to mush and really give the dish some colour.

This is a dish Tehya simply craves (me too) and it's a great way to get children eating vegetables. But please try to not overcook the beans as it will take on a soggy texture and lose its bright flavor.

My Notes:

Check out the recipe with photographs on Chris's website. There are also cooking videos.



(<http://gocooking.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/kfc.jpg>)

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