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Shrimp boil staple: Buena Vista Sauce

Blessey. It's an iconic name in Biloxi, but one member of the family is especially known for his culinary expertise. Although Walter Blessey is an attorney and a retired CPA by trade, he is a chef by passion.

As a young boy, he spent a lot of time in the kitchen with his French grandmother who taught him the basics of preparation for a good meal: "My passion for cooking began as a child," Blessey said. "My grandmother kept me busy chopping onions, celery and carrots. I'm convinced I knew how to make gravies before I went to school, and I've been cooking ever since."

He and his wife, Katherine, own and operate Chateau Blessey, a beachfront bed and breakfast and catering business located near the Biloxi Lighthouse. The B&B, which also serves as their private residence, offers guests a unique place and taste of southern hospitality with a French flair.

Given the couple are well known for entertaining friends and guests, it's no secret that Blessey has gained a reputable knack for savory, one-of-a-kind dishes that include a "fairly wicked seafood gumbo," a grilled oyster that has "achieved some notoriety," and a "pretty mean lasagna."

However, one of most popular that always accommodates his "wicked boiled shrimp" is the locally famous Buena Vista sauce. This condiment staple is not only delicious and highly requested, it's laced with Biloxi history that dates back to the 1920s.

The special sauce, which is best described as a white remoulade, garners its name from the Buena Vista — a grand hotel that was located north of Beach Boulevard and adjacent from where the Beau Rivage now stands. The Buena Vista opened in 1924 and became a popular vacation hotspot and host to early Mardi Gras balls, but it was especially known for its extravagant boiled shrimp buffets that featured the signature sauce.

So how did Blessey get the original recipe?

“My dad was the first delivery man for Barq’s Root Beer,” Blessey said. “He was delivering Barq’s to the Buena Vista, struck up a friendship with the chef, and got the recipe.”

Although the hotel was torn down in the 1990s after suffering damage from a fire, the Buena Vista sauce remains as a tasty piece of history for all shrimp lovers to enjoy.

“The best time to get really good shrimp is right now,” Blessey said. “Gulf shrimp has a distinctive taste. It’s actually a sweet meat, so when I boil shrimp, I don’t do a lot of heavy seasoning. To me, Gulf shrimp is the crème de la crème.”

BUENA VISTA SAUCE

2 cups mayonnaise (Blue Plate recommended)
1/4 cup Zatarain’s Creole Mustard
2 tablespoons prepared horseradish
1 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 tablespoon anchovy paste
1 tablespoon Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce
1 tablespoon ketchup
1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
1/4 cup finely chopped green onions (Cut from base of white part up to half of green part)

Combine all ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Cover and refrigerate for one hour before serving. Sauce can be stored in refrigerator for up to one week.

CHATEAU BLESSEY COCKTAIL SAUCE

2 cups ketchup
1/4 cup prepared horseradish
1 tablespoon Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce
1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
1 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 tablespoon anchovy paste
1/4 cup finely chopped green onions (Cut from base of white part up to half of green part)

Combine all ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Cover and refrigerate for one hour before serving. Sauce can be stored in refrigerator for up to one week.

Note: Each sauce serves 12 people (equivalent to 2 ounces per person)

This story is part of the Gulf Coast Seafood Fall Shrimp Celebration, a campaign by

the Mississippi Hospitality & Restaurant Association and its partners Gulf Seafood Trace and the Gulf Seafood Marketing Coalition to promote area restaurants serving traceable Gulf shrimp. Visit gulfshrimptales.com to learn more about Gulf shrimp and the celebration.