



Emeril's Inspirations

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Here's the spin on chef Emeril Lagasse: He's the king of "New" New Orleans cuisine; the ruler of cooking-show airwaves; the CEO of 700 employees at six restaurants, from the red lights of the Big Easy to the bright lights of Las Vegas; the curly-haired, boxer-paced host with the absolute most—from best-selling cookbooks to seasoning mixes.

This, on the other hand, is the *real* lowdown on Emeril John Lagasse III: He's shy. And despite his flamboyant stage persona, "That's just me being a showman on TV, trying to keep people awake," he says with a soft laugh. "If I can walk away knowing I've inspired one person to start cooking, I'm happy." The single father of two girls is also still humble, despite numerous accolades and the propensity of people to call him "Emerald."

But the one aspect of his life that gets lost in the media-blitz shuffle is his constant self-education about the people surrounding him. He's learned much about Louisiana, he says, from a few people "who've shown me a lot about life, hard work, and the importance of friendship.

"Of course, I have a tremendous respect for Ella Brennan," he says of the doyenne of New Orleans' Commander's Palace, where he made a name for himself. "She gave me polish—period," he says with his Fall River, Massachusetts, accent, now mingled nicely with the similar N'Awlins dialect. "Everybody knows Ella, or should know Ella. But maybe you didn't know about these guys," Emeril says, referring to Acadian culinary folklorist Marcelle Bienvenu, fish-seller Craig Borges, and farmer Dan Crutchfield.



EMERIL'S ESSENCE

5 tablespoons
sweet paprika

¼ cup salt

¾ cup garlic powder

2 tablespoons dried
oregano

2 tablespoons dried
thyme

2 tablespoons
onion powder

2 tablespoons freshly
ground black pepper

2 tablespoons ground
red pepper

• **STIR** together all ingredients. Store in an airtight container up to 3 months. **Yield:** 1 cup.

NEW ORLEANS FISH HOUSE

High on the Hog

A hundred miles from New Orleans, organic farmer Dan Crutchfield makes silk purses, so to speak, out of the hormone-free pork and other items he delivers weekly to Big Easy restaurateurs. "I like that more people are thinking healthier, wanting quality," he says, shooing away a few curious pigs straying about on his Jayess, Mississippi, farm, Crickhollow. "That makes me happy." Emeril feels the same way. "Here's a guy from Louisiana, who after 18 years of working as a land surveyor, decided that he wanted to be a farmer—the best farmer," Emeril says.

The chef has inspired Dan to experiment, and business has blossomed. Dan grows 2 acres of specialty produce (including baby vegetables, heirloom tomatoes, and edible flowers). Another 22 acres are filled with grazing cattle and hogs, and another 16 are filled with pine trees (a future investment). "I'm just gettin' started at sowing my oats in this field," Dan says. "It's nice to have folks believe in you. It makes you believe in yourself."

That much is true, Emeril says. "In the end, you're only as good as the people with you," he says. "I feel lucky."

Fishy Business

Craig Borges has been studying, smelling, and selling fish since he was a small-fry. His father sold fish, as did his grandfather. "Craig knows fish," says Emeril, one of his first customers. "He knows fish like no one else I know."

At the bustling New Orleans Fish House, a wholesale company Craig and cousin Billy Borges founded in 1990 (the same year Emeril opened his first restaurant, Emeril's), one might imagine it to be, well, fishy-smelling. Not so; it's as clean as a Gulf breeze. "To smell fish is to smell bad fish," says Craig, "and we don't sell bad fish.



Twelve hundred customers call on Craig Borges, a.k.a. "The Fish Guy," for his dedication to finding the freshest seafood. Emeril liked Craig's business so much he named a restaurant after it: Emeril's New Orleans Fish House. "We earned that honor the hard way," Craig says.

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Emeril Lagasse

Once it comes out of the water, the clock starts ticking." And so does he, supplying the top restaurants in town with everything from shrimp to baby octopus.

"What gave me the courage to keep at this game was that Emeril believed in us from the start," Craig says. "He's a perfectionist; he's taught us to be too. 'This is nice,' Emeril might say, assessing a fish. 'But I'm looking for something better.' Now I find myself saying the same thing."

Music to Emeril's Ears

With a French last name meaning "welcome," it's fitting that Marcelle

Bienvenu's smile and her cozy home near Lafayette are just as inviting. Sipping a mint julep outside her St. Martinville cottage, Marcelle surveys the Bayou Teche setting: moss-draped oaks, small pier, husband Rock's fishing boat, a plaster alligator sunning near the water, an iron fish-fry skillet drying on a fence. The only thing missing is Acadian folk music. It comes in Marcelle's buttery voice and melodious laugh.

These days Marcelle—a respected food writer and historian (*Who's Your Mama, Are You Catholic, and Can You Make a Roux?* and its sequel) and contributor to several of Emeril's books—spends a lot of time testing recipes for him "and just being a friend—he's family now," she says. When they first met, she



"Emeril likes cuisine that has a lot of passion and heart—much like his mother's Portuguese food," says cookbook author and longtime friend Marcelle Bienvenu. "We're determined not to let food traditions fall through the cracks."

worked in catering at Commander's and he worked in the kitchen. They hit it off immediately. But Marcelle admits that before Emeril ever arrived there in 1983, she did have her doubts about what the New Englander could bring to the table. "I told Ella, 'You can't turn Commander's over to a 26-year-old Yankee boy!' But she did. And we were amazed by his never-ending creativity."

Sharing a love of good food and good humor, they later worked together in 1996 on Emeril's second book, *Louisiana Real and Rustic*. "Marcelle's an excellent sounding board," he says. "Say, if I'm doing an

eggplant dish and want to put bell pepper in it, she won't let me get off the page. 'It might be nice, Emeril, but most people wouldn't do that; it wouldn't be authentic,' " he mimics her saying. "That's the kind of thing we really believe in—preserving folklore. She's like filé powder to a great gumbo—beautiful."

For more recipes, see page 190. For more on Marcelle Bienvenu, call (318) 394-7674; the New Orleans Fish House, (504) 821-9700; Crick-hollow Farm, (601) 684-4940; and Emeril Lagasse, (504) 524-4241. Also, check out southernliving.com for the latest dish on chef Emeril.

MARCELLE'S BOUILLABAISSE

"Since my father loved to fish, our family enjoyed many fish dishes, but this is a personal favorite," she says. To "kick it up a notch," add a dash of Emeril's Essence just before serving.

- 1 pound unpeeled, medium-size fresh shrimp**
- 2½ pounds trout or redfish fillets**
- 1 teaspoon salt, divided**
- 1 teaspoon ground red pepper, divided**
- 3 medium-size yellow onions, coarsely chopped**
- 2 medium-size green bell peppers, coarsely chopped**
- 2 celery ribs, chopped**
- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- ½ cup butter**
- 2 (28-ounce) cans crushed tomatoes**
- 4 bay leaves**
- ½ cup dry white wine**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley**

- **PEEL** shrimp, and devein, if desired. Set aside.
- **SPRINKLE** fish fillets with ½ teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon red pepper; set aside.
- **TOSS** together remaining ½ teaspoon salt, remaining ½ teaspoon red pepper, onion, and next 3 ingredients.
- **MELT** butter in a 6-quart Dutch oven over medium heat; remove from heat.
- **ARRANGE** half of fish fillets in Dutch oven; layer with half of vegetable mixture, half of tomatoes, and 2 bay leaves. Repeat procedure with remaining fillets, vegetable mixture, tomatoes, and bay leaves. Arrange shrimp on top, and add wine.
- **BRING** mixture to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and cook 1 hour. (Do not remove cover.) Sprinkle each serving with chopped parsley.

Yield: 12 cups.

Prep: 20 min., Cook: 1 hr.

*Marcelle Bienvenu
St. Martinville, Louisiana*



Craig Borges's Lemony Pecan-Crusted Snapper With Crabmeat Relish is a richly indulgent nod to the creative flair of New Orleans.

PHOTOGRAPH: CHARLES WALTON IV / STYLING: CINDY MANNING BARR

ture through a wire-mesh strainer, discarding pulp. Stir in parsley, and serve immediately. **Yield:** 2 cups. Prep: 10 min., Cook: 18 min.

CRABMEAT RELISH:

- ½ pound fresh lump crabmeat, drained
- ½ cup pecan halves, toasted
- 4 green onions, chopped
- 2 tablespoons minced roasted sweet red peppers
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper

• **TOSS** together all ingredients. Chill up to 8 hours. **Yield:** 2 cups. Prep: 15 min.

Craig Borges

New Orleans Fish House
New Orleans, Louisiana

Friendship on the Menu

When it comes to fine dining, superstar chef Emeril Lagasse certainly knows how to please (see “Emeril’s Inspirations,” page 72). But so do the friends he calls his inspirations. We recently joined two of them in their kitchens and got their recipes. Savor what Emeril gets treated to when visiting them. *Denise Gee*

LEMONY PECAN-CRUSTED SNAPPER WITH CRABMEAT RELISH

“Relish” is what South Louisianians call a chunky topping. Don’t worry—no pickles are in sight.

- 4 (5- to 6-ounce) red snapper fillets
- 3 tablespoons Emeril’s Essence (page 73), divided
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup toasted ground pecans
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup milk
- ½ cup olive or canola oil
- Lemon-Butter Sauce
- Crabmeat Relish

- **SPRINKLE** fillets evenly with 1 tablespoon essence. Set aside.
- **COMBINE** 1 cup flour and 1 tablespoon essence; set aside. Combine remaining 1 tablespoon essence, remaining 1 cup flour, and pecans.
- **STIR** together eggs and milk until well blended.

- **DREDGE** fillets in flour mixture; dip in egg mixture, and dredge in pecan mixture, shaking off excess.
- **FRY** fillets in hot oil in a large ovenproof skillet about 3 minutes on each side. Place skillet in a 375° oven, and bake 8 minutes or until browned and crisp.
- **SPOON** Lemon-Butter Sauce evenly on individual plates; add fillets, and top with Crabmeat Relish. **Yield:** 4 servings. Prep: 15 min., Cook: 14 min.

LEMON-BUTTER SAUCE:

- 1 cup dry white wine
- 3 lemons, peeled and quartered
- 6 to 8 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- ⅓ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- ⅓ teaspoon hot sauce
- ½ cup whipping cream
- ¾ cup unsalted butter, sliced
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

- **COOK** first 3 ingredients in a non-aluminum saucepan over medium-high heat 5 minutes, whisking to mash lemons. Stir in salt and next 3 ingredients, and cook 10 minutes or until texture of syrup.
- **STIR** in whipping cream; cook 1 minute. Reduce heat to low, and gradually whisk in butter. Pour mix-

CRICKHOLLOW ROAST PORK

- 1 (4-pound) boneless pork roast
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon Emeril’s Essence (page 73)
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 6 slab bacon slices, rind removed
- Crickhollow Barbecue Sauce

- **RUB** roast with garlic and essence.
- **MELT** butter in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add roast, and cook 4 to 5 minutes on each side or until browned. Wrap bacon over roast, and pour 2 cups Crickhollow Barbecue Sauce over top.
- **BAKE** at 350° for 1 hour and 45 minutes or until a meat thermometer registers 160°. **Yield:** 12 servings. Prep: 20 min.; Bake: 1 hr., 45 min.

CRICKHOLLOW BARBECUE SAUCE:

- 2 cups red wine vinegar
- 1 cup lime juice
- ½ cup dried parsley flakes
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon Emeril’s Essence (page 73)
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon pepper

• **STIR** together all ingredients. Store in refrigerator. **Yield:** 4 cups. Prep: 10 min.

Dan Crutchfield
Jayess, Mississippi

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The Dish on Emeril

For a behind-the-scenes look at three people superstar chef Emeril Lagasse calls "inspirations," read "Emeril's Inspirations," page 72, in the August 1999 issue of *Southern Living*. But for some additional scoop on New Orleans' culinary kingpin, read on.

EMERIL TIDBITS:

- **The origin of his television mantra, "BAM!":** "In the beginning, before live audiences, he used to film late at night," shares friend/cookbook author Marcelle Bienvenu. "Saying 'BAM!' was his way of keeping the camera crew awake. It just kinda stuck."
- **He's a talented drummer:** As a teen, Emeril turned down a scholarship at the New England Conservatory of Music to follow his real dream: to be a chef. He worked his way through a culinary program at Johnson and Wales University, from which he holds his doctorate degree.
- **Mom, Sis won't share!** As a child, Emeril loved to play with his sister's E"Z Bake Oven.
- **Cheeseburger in paradise:** Emeril's favorite place for burgers is Melvin's in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina.
- **How 'bout a little something on a stick?** "He once told me his dream is to push a food cart, like those Lucky Dog carts you see in the French Quarter," laughs Marcelle. "Except in his case, Emeril would sell exotic corn dogs."
- **Grab that bib and go:** One of his favorite places to eat in New Orleans is the R&O's Restaurant near Lake Ponchartrain (216 Old Hammond Highway, Metairie; (504) 831-1248). "He can sit there all day and go through 10 pounds of their crawfish, no problem," Marcelle says.
- **But you won't catch him eating . . .** tilapia or soft-shell crawfish, says New Orleans Fish House wholesaler Craig Borges. "It just doesn't



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*"Gothic" revisited down
of Emeril Lagasse hams
farmer friend Dan
and his dog, Piglet, at
ow Farm.*

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move him." American red snapper and blue-fin tuna are favorites.

- **"Boss" pie:** Bruce Springsteen finds Emeril's luscious Chocolate Banana Cream Pie music to his mouth. (By the way, Emeril likes his music, too. He also likes Billy Joel and Roy Orbison.)
- **Ragin' Cajun':** Emeril's not crazy about the term "Cajun" (slang for "Acadian"). "In my mind, it's a slur. I like the term Acadian better. It's more respectful."
- The power of positive thinking: One of his favorite books is *The Magic of Thinking Big* (David J. Schwartz Ph.D.; Fireside, 1987). Accordingly, you may see his restaurant staff running 'round the block before opening the doors for dinner. It gets their adrenalin flowing for the big game with Coach Emeril.

DESSERTS

MORE DISH . . .

READER INPUT

ON HIS 'NEW' NEW ORLEANS CUISINE: It's a fusion of Creole, Southwestern, Asian and New England Cooking-say, a stir-fry of crawfish over fried noodles with sesame and ginger sauce.

ON CABLE TELEVISION: Check out his two Food Network shows-"Emeril Live" and "The Essence of Emeril." For related details, access www.foodtv.com.

ON BOOKSHELVES: Cookbooks: Emeril's *New New Orleans Cooking* (1993), *Louisiana Real and Rustic* (1996), *Emeril's Creole Christmas* (1997), and *Emeril's TV Dinners* (1998). His fifth book for William Morrow and Company, *Every Day's a Party* will be released this October.

ON THE RESTAURANT FRONT: In New Orleans: *Emeril's* (1990), *NOLA* (1992), and *Delmonico Restaurant and Bar* (1997); In Las Vegas: *Emeril's New Orleans Fish House* (1995), *Delmonico Steak House* (1999); in Orlando, *Emeril's* (1999).

ON THE FUTURE: Emeril-son of a Portuguese mother (his cooking inspiration) and French Canadian father (a farmer)-has come a long way from his first job washing pans in a Portuguese Bakery in Fall River, Massachusetts. His new mantra? "No more restaurants!" He tells us. "It's time for me to slow down, to start perfecting what I've built. Then, one day, I might retire to a little 40-seat restaurant somewhere where people have to wait six months for a table. It's important that I keep good food in focus."

Denise Gee

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