

Spike up your supper

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When we meet early one morning for coffee, Ryan Jennings and David Steele are looking decidedly wan.

They've been travelling across the country to promote their new book, and over the past 10 days they've had, perhaps, just a tiny bit too much to drink.

That's what happens when your book is called *Cooking with Booze* (Whitecap, \$29.95): The bar is always open, and how can you possibly resist? After all, it's research.



CREDIT: Tim Fraser, Calgary Herald
 Caribbean Pork with Corn and Papaya Salsa is among 96 food recipes in the newly released *Cooking With Booze*.

Cooking with Booze is a high-spirited compendium of 96 recipes for dishes that range from the simple to the sophisticated. Each dish is also paired with a recipe for a signature cocktail -- say, a Deer in the Headlights, a Poire Noir or a Spiked Gazpacho.

The book is unique in the culinary annals, but to Jennings and Steele, the idea was a natural.

"No. 1, Ryan and I are liquor enthusiasts," says Steele, who works as a marketing director and events co-ordinator in Toronto.

"We've been friends for a number of years now. I like to cook, David likes to cook," says Jennings, also from Toronto, where he is photo editor and "resident gourmet" at *Elle Canada* magazine.

"One day we sat down, had a few drinks, and decided to cook together to see if we could collaborate together."

It was Steele who first thought of doing a cookbook "that explained the liquor cabinet as an extension to your spice rack."

The guys thought this was such a great idea, they figured that someone else must already have thought of it. But to their surprise, they discovered no one had.

"There's no other books about cooking with booze like this," Jennings says. "There's beer and vodka and wine cookbooks, but nothing that brings it all together."

So they got to work concocting such recipes as B52 Cupcakes, Remy Martin Risotto, Bloody Caesar Steamed Mussels and Jennings' favourite, the Cuba Libre Back Ribs, inspired by the classic rum and Coke.

"They get all sweet and caramelized from the Coke and the rum sauce is all spicy and sweet and smoky," he says.

As they experimented, they quickly discovered that many flavours found in the liquor cabinet are unique, nothing you could ever mimic with the spices in your cupboard.

"In some cases, the distilling process is thousands of years old and heavily guarded," Steele says.

How, for instance, could you possibly recreate the taste of a Cognac or a Chambord or the herbal bitter Jagermeister, which is made from some 50 different herbs and spices? As Jennings notes, "It's almost like a curry, it has so many flavours."

Since the booze has so much complexity, the authors kept the dishes quite simple. As Steele says, "We wanted a book that appealed to the everyday cook."

They do offer some tips for cooks who are new to the whole idea of cooking with booze.

"Start with a dish that you're familiar with, then start exploring the liquor cabinet," Steele says. "Start with very small amounts and sample along the way as if you were seasoning."

"It's like adding salt," Jennings says. "You can always put more in, but you can't take it out."

Jennings also suggests cooking with booze you actually like -- not, for instance, using this as an excuse to get rid of all those half-drunk bottles of Advocaat and Midori and Chartreuse in your liquor cabinet.

"We always say if you won't drink it yourself, don't cook with it," Jennings says, then adds thoughtfully, "That doesn't mean you need to go out and buy a \$40 wine and add it to your marinara sauce."

Although the tips are practical and the recipes delicious, the book is meant to be cheeky and fun, right from the cover, with its photo of a lobster claw holding a classic martini.

"We were going to get a whole lobster toasting, but it's amazing how ugly a lobster looks when you shoot it," Steele says regretfully.

But there is one cautionary note the guys need to offer their readers.

Although heat does make alcohol evaporate -- leaving behind the flavour the drink is infused with -- some of it will always remain in the dish. (To let you know how much booze will be left in, say, your poached pears, the book contains an alcohol burn-off chart.)

"It depends when you add it and how much you add. It's still a small amount, but it's something to keep in mind if you're cooking for people with a low tolerance for alcohol or for children," Jennings says.

He winces slightly and squints in the harsh morning light. "And," he says, rubbing his forehead gently, "moderation is key."

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Caribbean Pork with Corn and Papaya Salsa

If you don't have Xante, you can use another cognac in this dish, but Ryan

Jennings and David Steele, authors of *Cooking with Booze* (Whitecap, \$29.95), insist the Xante adds a unique flavour all its own. They've paired it with a Xante Lemonade, recipe below.

Pork

2 pork tenderloins, 3/4 lb (375 g) each

1 tbsp (15 mL) extra virgin olive oil

1 tbsp (15 mL) packed brown sugar

1 tsp (5 mL) allspice

1 tsp (5 mL) ground cardamom

1 tsp (5 mL) ground cumin

1 tsp (5 mL) turmeric

1 tsp (5 mL) Xante Poire au Cognac

Salsa

1 cup (250 mL) corn, fresh or frozen

1 cup (250 mL) diced papaya

3/4 cup (175 mL) red onion, chopped

1/2 cup (125 mL) chopped cilantro

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced

1 tbsp (15 mL) fresh lime juice

1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt

freshly ground black pepper

Remove any excess fat from tenderloins and brush with olive oil. Combine brown sugar, allspice, cardamom, cumin and turmeric in a small bowl and drizzle with cognac. Rub mixture evenly over pork, cover, and refrigerate for 3 hours or overnight.

Meanwhile, make salsa: In a medium-sized bowl, combine corn, papaya, onion, cilantro, jalapeno, lime juice, salt and pepper. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use. This will keep in the refrigerator for up to two days.

Preheat grill to high.

Grill tenderloins for 5 to 6 minutes per side or until internal temperature reaches 150 degrees F (65 degrees C) for medium. Remove from grill, tent with aluminum foil and let rest for 5 minutes. Slice pork into medallions and serve with salsa. Makes 6 servings.

Xante Lemonade

3/4 oz Xante Poire au Cognac

1/2 oz Absolut Kurant vodka

8 oz pink lemonade

Combine cognac, vodka and lemonade in a Collins glass filled with ice. Garnish

with a lemon wheel if desired.

Serves 1.

White Chocolate and Raspberry Panna Cotta

Ryan Jennings and David Steele have paired the panna cotta -- which literally means "cooked cream" -- with a White Chocolate Raspberry Martini, recipe below.

1 cup (250 mL) heavy cream (see Cook's Note below)

1/4 cup (50 mL) white creme de cacao

3/4 cup plus 1 tbsp (190 mL) granulated sugar, divided

1 package unflavoured gelatin (2 1/4 tsp / 11 mL)

3/4 cup (175 mL) milk

1 1/2 cups (375 mL) fresh raspberries, divided

2 tbsp (25 mL) Triple Sec orange liqueur

1 tsp (5 mL) fresh lemon juice

Combine cream, creme de cacao and 1/3 cup (75 mL) sugar in a medium saucepan over medium heat, stirring constantly until sugar dissolves and mixture becomes slightly frothy around the edges. Remove from heat and set aside.

Sprinkle gelatin over milk in a small saucepan and set over low heat until dissolved. Stir into cream mixture. Pour into 4 ramekins and refrigerate for 4 hours or until set.

Meanwhile, combine 1 1/4 cups (300 mL) of raspberries with remaining sugar, Triple Sec and lemon juice in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir until sugar dissolves and raspberries soften.

Remove from heat and pour raspberries through a fine sieve to remove seeds. Stir in remaining raspberries and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Place ramekins in a hot water bath for about 10 seconds to loosen panna cotta. Invert onto plates. Spoon raspberries over panna cotta. Serves 4.

Cook's Note: Heavy cream, which is also called heavy whipping cream, has a butterfat content of 36 to 40 per cent. Most, if not all, the whipping cream in Calgary supermarkets is light whipping cream, which has a fat content of 30 to 36 per cent fat.

You can substitute regular whipping cream for heavy cream in almost all recipes; it won't be quite as rich, but it will still taste delicious.

White Chocolate and Raspberry Martini

2 oz raspberry vodka

1 oz creme de cacao

Combine vodka and creme de cacao in a cocktail shaker filled with ice and shake vigorously. Strain into a chilled martini glass and garnish with a sprig of mint if desired.

Serves 1.

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