Food and Wine: Shrimp bisque and viognier make music together

by Ron James

Tyler Florence is a far more complex young man than you see on his Food Network shows like "Food 911" and "Tyler's Ultimate."

The 34-year-old, baby-face hunk is adored by a vast audience of female foodies, and is a popular pitchman for pots and pans and Applebee's restaurants. Florence speaks his mind in interviews with both praise and scorn for certain chefs, but mostly to tout the virtues of healthy, home-cooked food.

TYLER FLORENCE - Tyler Florence, standing, cookbook author and a popular pitchman for pots, pans and Applebee's restaurants, is host on â€œFood 911â€• and â€œTyler's Ultimateâ€• cooking shows on the Food Network. CNS Photo.When the topic is cooking, Florence is the salt of the earth, calling for hearty meals from the freshest products and using his media savvy to lure Americans back into their kitchens. He feels that fast-living, fast-food families are missing out on not only great, nutritious home-cooked meals, but the tradition of wonderful fragrances from the kitchen that should be a part of all of our memories.

Florence has a powerful platform from which to preach his cook-at-home message; his television show can influence 750,000 people three times a day. He also influences thousands of cooks across the country through his cookbooks, the latest of which is "Tyler's Ultimate: Brilliant Simple Food to Make Anytime" (Clarkson Potter, $35).

With all of that culinary talent and dedication to improving the dining habits of a nation, it's OK for the young chef to be a bit complex. Aren't we all?

THE DISH

"Every time I make this soup I can't get over how delicious it is," Florence says in his cooking notes for Shrimp Bisque. "The intense flavor comes from the shrimp shells simmered with leeks and orange, and the cream gives it a silky texture. This is a classic soup. I'm definitely putting it on the menu at my next restaurant."

SHRIMP BISQUE - Tyler Florence says the powerful flavor in his creamy Shrimp Bisque comes from the shrimp shells simmered with leeks and orange. CNS Photo.Shrimp stars in this dish, so make sure they are flavorful and sweet when purchased. They will usually be flash frozen and then thawed at the supermarket. Smell them to make sure they aren't fishy or have a hint of ammonia. It's best to buy from a trusted fishmonger, specialty food market or some big-box stores like Costco that take pride in selling good-quality seafood.

THE WINE

Choosing a wine to match the Shrimp Bisque can be as delicate as the soup itself. The best choice is a light wine that won't overpower the subtle flavors of the bisque. Even a sauvignon blanc with its bold passion fruit flavors might be too much here.

Choose a semi-dry sparkling wine or a fruity white wine with good acidity to contrast with the richness of the bisque, like the 2005 Pride Mountain Viognier ($39). It's one of California's best viogniers and a great match for Tyler's wonderful dish.

Pride Mountain Vineyards was founded in 1990 by Jim and Carolyn Pride at the old Summit Ridge ranch, the site of winemaking since 1890. The vineyard is located on more than 200 acres on the crest of the Mayacamas mountain range which runs through Napa and Sonoma counties. Carolyn, her daughter, Suzanne, and son, Steven, now run the winery along with winemaker Bob Foley. The wine has the elegant aromas of pears and peaches with hints of orange honey, balanced by a solid natural acidity.

SHRIMP BISQUE

1 1/2 pounds medium shrimp, in the shell

1 orange

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 leeks, trimmed, halved lengthwise and rinsed well

1 onion, trimmed, peeled and halved

2 celery stalks, cut into big chunks

2 carrots, peeled and cut into big chunks

3 fresh thyme sprigs

1 bay leaf

2 tablespoons tomato paste

1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1/4 cup brandy

3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

2 to 3 cups water

4 cups heavy whipping cream

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Finely chopped fresh chives, for garnish

Yields 4 to 6 servings.

Peel and devein shrimp, reserve shells; refrigerate shrimp.

With vegetable peeler, strip off a couple pieces of orange zest. Grate remaining zest. Cover and refrigerate grated zest for garnish.

Heat olive oil and butter in large pot over medium heat until butter melts. Add shrimp shells, leeks, onion, celery, carrots, thyme, bay leaf, strips of orange zest, tomato paste and cayenne. Cook, stirring every now and then, until shells are red and vegetables begin to soften, about 10 minutes.

Take pot off heat and carefully pour in brandy. Return pot to medium heat, cook 1 minute, then sprinkle in flour. Give it a stir, cook 2 minutes. Add water to cover and deglaze, scraping up all browned bits on bottom of pot with wooden spoon. Add cream and bring to a boil. Immediately reduce heat to low and simmer gently

until soup is reduced and thickened, 30 to 40 minutes.

Strain into clean pot and season with salt and pepper.

To serve: Return bisque to a simmer, add shrimp and heat 2 to 3 minutes, just to cook shrimp through. Give bisque a final taste for seasoning, pour into warmed soup bowls and serve garnished with reserved orange zest and chives.

From "Tyler's Ultimate: Brilliant Simple Food to Make Anytime."

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