

# The Real Frank's Place

"That was some great Cajun food!" says Frank Parrish to the head cook at Chez Louisiane after a sumptuous meal of filé gumbo, shrimp Creole, and bread pudding in the first episode of *Frank's Place*. Frank's compliment is not well received. As the cook glares at Frank, his assistant explains: "That ain't Cajun food, Frank. That's Creole!"

That might be a fine distinction, even for those gullible Americans who think they know what Cajun cuisine is because they've paid a premium at some trendy tavern to swill down burnt and badly seasoned seafood. But in New Orleans the difference is considered fundamental, and a Creole chef might very well take offense at the mislabeling.

Feature films and television programs are not noted for attention to detail. The distinction made above was clearly lost on the producers of a recent Hollywood release, *The Big Easy*, who seemed to confuse New Orleans with Lafayette, its Cajun neighbor to the west. But the producers of *Frank's Place* were uncommonly meticulous.

The show's creator, Hugh Wilson, and its star, Tim Reid, visited New Orleans to search for a restaurant to use as a model for the show. They found it in Chez Helene, an award-winning black Creole restaurant on the outskirts of the French Quarter.

The restaurant's decor and its staff and clientele are faithfully recreated in the television program: Tony Burton, who plays the cook, bears an eerie resemblance to Chez Helene chef and proprietor Austin Leslie. Leslie, who serves as a consultant to the program, personally prepared the mouthwatering dishes shown in the opening episode. He also catered that first taping and claims with justifiable pride that "the food made everybody act good."

The recipe below is reprinted with Austin Leslie's compliments. The official Chez Helene Cookbook is available in paperback for \$5.00, plus \$1.25 for postage and handling, from Chez Helene, 1540 N. Robertson Street, New Orleans LA 70116. ■

— F. R. D.

## CHEZ HELENE'S FILÉ GUMBO

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1/2 lb. margarine                | 6 crabs (cleaned and quartered)  |
| 1 rib celery, chopped            | 1/2 lb. hot sausage (1/4 in. slices)                                       |
| 4 sprigs parsley, finely chopped | 1/2 lb. smoked sausage (1/4 in. slices)                                    |
| 1 onion, finely chopped          | 1/2 lb. shrimp (peeled and deveined<br>heads and shells reserve for stock) |
| 1/2 cup flour                    | 1 tbsp. thyme  |
| 4 toes garlic, finely chopped    | Salt and pepper to tast  |
| 1/2 green pepper, finely chopped | 2 tbsp. Filé powder  |
| 3 bay leaves                     | Fresh cooked rice  |
| 1 gal. shellfish stock or water  |  |
| 1/2 lb. smoked ham, diced        |  |

Place margarine at bottom of a large soup pot, add celery, onion, parsley, green pepper and garlic. Sauté and then simmer for 15 to 20 minutes over low heat. Add flour and stir constantly for 15 more minutes. Add stock or water and bay leaves. Heat over medium flame for 20 minutes. Stir in ham, crabs, sausages and cook for 30 minutes. Bring to a boil and keep stirring to prevent sticking. When pot returns to boil, add shrimp, salt and pepper. Return to boil. Remove from heat and add salt and pepper if needed. Finally, stir in filé powder. Serve over fresh rice. Serves 10 to 12.