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Corny Concoction

Old-fashioned hominy gets a place at Cypress' table

BY SARAH O'KELLEY

Diver Scallop and Bacon with Hominy Fricassee and Pork Reduction

\$16

Cypress
167 E. Bay St.
(843) 727-0111
Available daily 5:30-untill

Hominy might have been relegated to antiquity if it hadn't been for Cypress Chef Craig Deihl, who put this historic corn product on his menu four years ago.

Truthfully, Deihl took a bit of a risk spotlighting hominy on his scallop and bacon appetizer. Younger diners probably don't even recognize the ingredient, and older diners probably remember the mushy, white kernels that come from a can. Only a serious foodie or someone raised close to the land would likely know that genuine hominy comes from soaking dried corn kernels in a lye solution until the tough, outer hull falls away.

Hominy's anonymity seems surprising considering that it predates the appearance of Europeans in North America and served as a staple in the American diet into the 20th century. Grain purveyor Glen Roberts of Anson Mills suspects that many Americans' reliance on hominy during the Great Depression led to its poor reputation. Roberts himself loves hominy and actually inspired Deihl to make his own. Heirloom products happen to be the great passion of Roberts, and his mill, located in Columbia, has gained the praise of top chefs around the nation.

Cypress already bought grits from Anson Mills, and their wood-burning grill happened to catch the attention of Roberts. He knew that the ashes could be used to create the lye solution for making hominy, and he pointed this out to Deihl. He also pointed out that Deihl could be one of the first chefs in the country making his own hominy.

Deihl took the challenge and made a first batch. Looking back, he remembers the early results as just "alright." The corn remained toothsome because the lye solution was not strong enough. On the third attempt he achieved success, and he now knows the key happens to be the strength of the lye. At present, he has a lye solution that is over three years old, and he can make the hominy in under four hours.

Of course, to be truly authentic in the mind of Roberts, the hominy had to be made from an heirloom variety of corn



BEN WILLIAMS

CHEF CRAIG DEIHL MAKES THE HOMINY THAT ANCHORS HIS DIVER SCALLOP APPETIZER

with ties to the region. Luckily, Roberts had just such a product. He had been growing a variety called Henry Moore and trying to mill it for grits with limited success. Upon consulting Native Americans, Roberts found that this corn should only be used for hominy. The wide yellow kernels proved perfect, and the fact that it was grown in South Carolina until the middle of the 19th century gave it the appropriate historic ties.

Deihl likens the flavor of his hominy to that of a fresh, yellow corn tortilla, and it's an apt description. The hominy has an earthy sweetness that really comes out when Deihl sautés it with butter beans, crowder peas, and edamame, and the entire combination provides a heavenly bed for the seared scallop and bacon. Here, Deihl uses the word "bacon" a bit playfully as he serves not a simple slice of bacon but a nice chunk of pork belly. He finishes the dish with a smoked pork reduction, and the hominy soaks up all of this rich goodness.

The scallop and bacon appetizer now seems like a Cypress classic to Deihl, and he features it in his recently published cookbook. To make the dish at home might prove a bit of a challenge unless you happen to have ample ashes and dried corn kernels on hand, but then that's not really the point. The importance of the recipe lies in its link to the past. If only history could always taste so good. ■