

The soup is on and the wine is poured

By Beverly Boehm

As the air turns crisp and the temperatures start to drop like the autumn leaves, our dining choices change from light fare to hearty ones. Soups and stews replace salads and sandwiches, and the wine glass comes out to replace the ice tea and beer.

If soup is your preference for a winter warm up, then Preston's Restaurant should be one of your top choices to dine. Preston's Restaurant, located at The Inn at Virginia Tech, is the perfect place for a warm bowl of soup. Known for their Bistro-style and house-made signature ice cream, the restaurant uses fresh ingredients to prepare their entrees.

Preston's Chef, Jason Smith, who has a fourteen year culinary background, is passionate about his cooking. "My specialties are fusion style, Island-American style, and French and Italian style cooking. Mostly, I'm big into spices. I love the Caribbean flavors and Asian style cooking. My biggest passions are soups and sauces," stated Smith. "My greatest loves have been art and cooking. Being a chef gives me the chance to combine both. Cooking is truly a form of art."

"I don't like following recipes," Jason added. "Creating soups and sauces gives you a wide variety of opportunity to shoot from the hip, to make something simple turn into something special."

Jason's Autumn Harvest Butternut Squash Bisque is truly something special. His recipe warms you up nicely without losing the flavor of the squash. "You can substitute pumpkin for the squash, if you want. I like to use cumin and cayenne pepper in this soup. The after-warmth of the cayenne is not as assertive up front – it doesn't overpower the rest of the flavors. The spices give the soup a little bit more depth," says Smith. "I use toasted slivered almonds and dried cranberries as a garnish, but dicing fresh apples into small chunks on top works well too."

As for the right wine to serve with his soup, Jason recommends a dry white wine like chardonnay. "The 'oaky' notes of this wine will pair well with the spices of the soup."

Autumn Harvest Butternut Squash Bisque

Ingredients:

5# cleaned & diced butternut squash
¼ cup minced fresh ginger
2 tablespoons fresh chopped garlic
1 quart apple cider
2 quarts vegetable stock
2 teaspoons granulated onion
1 teaspoon cumin
1 teaspoon cayenne
1 teaspoon coriander
1 teaspoon cinnamon
¼ cup vegetable oil
Salt to taste

Directions:

In a large sauce pot, start by adding vegetable oil, butternut squash, ginger, and garlic, lightly sautéing on medium heat until garlic and ginger starts to color. Then deglaze with apple cider and vegetable stock. Once contents start to heat up, add spices and whisk to prevent clumping. Let simmer on medium low heat for one hour; then thoroughly puree with hand blender. Finish by adding salt to taste. Yield: 1 ½ gallons

Serve the bisque with spiced rum reduction sauce.

A reduction sauce is made with the juices released from oven roasted or stove top cooked foods. The released juices become the base for the sauce, to which other ingredients may be added. Gravies, meat sauces, wine sauces, and fruit sauces are all examples of reduction sauces that are used to enhance the flavor of foods being served.

Spiced Rum Cream Reduction Sauce

Ingredients

1 quart heavy cream
5 shots of spiced rum
½ cup sugar
2 cinnamon sticks
½ teaspoon nutmeg

Directions:

In medium sauce pot, start by adding spiced rum, cinnamon sticks, and nutmeg on medium low heat letting reduce half way. Always add liquor to cold pan, then place on heat to prevent fire! Once reduced, add heavy cream and sugar. Continue to let reduce until half the volume again. Remove cinnamon sticks and serve over bisque. Yield: 1 pint

Note: Additional garnish option includes toasted slivered almonds and dried cranberries.



On Sept. 20, 2011 Preston's fine-dining restaurant unveiled a Preston's private label merlot and a chardonnay produced at Prince Michel Vineyards and Winery in Madison, VA.



Chef Jason