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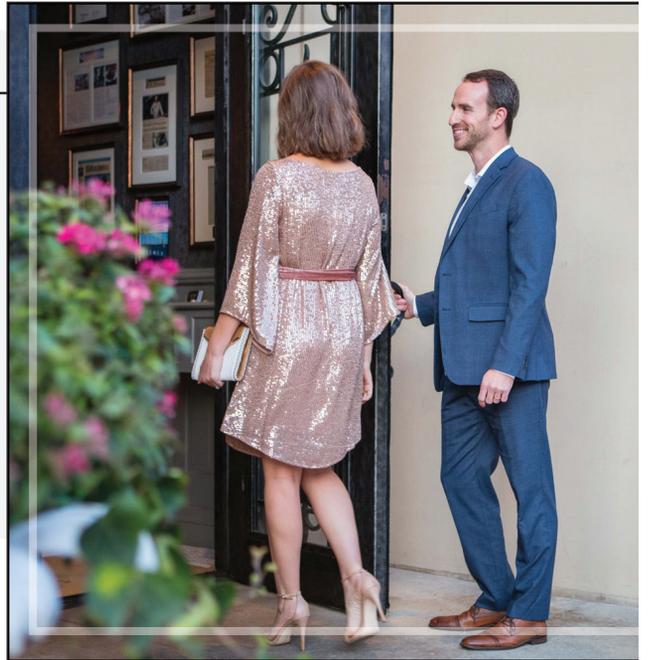
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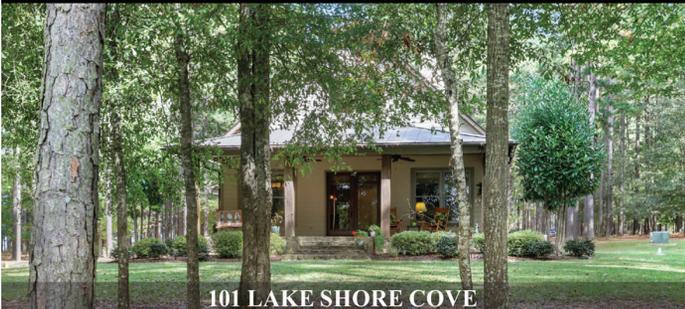
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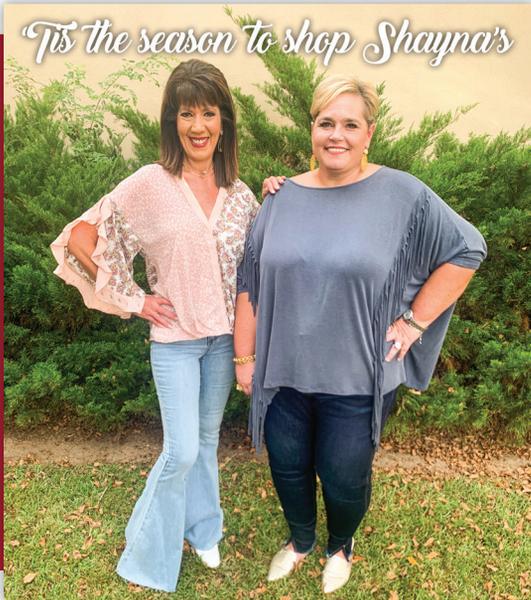
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PUBLISHED BY

The Madison County Journal

PUBLISHER

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EDITOR

Scott Hawkins

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Rachel Browning Truong

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ADVERTISING DESIGN

Godfrey Jones

Madison County Magazine is a bi-monthly supplement to the Madison County Journal designed to promote Madison County in an informative and positive manner. We welcome contributions of articles and photos; however, they will be subject to editing and availability of space and subject matter. Photographs, comments, questions, subscription requests and ad placement inquiries are invited! Return envelopes and postage must accompany all labeled materials submitted if a return is requested. No portion of this publication may be reproduced without written permission of the publisher. The opinions expressed in Madison County Magazine are those of the authors or columnists and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, nor do they constitute an endorsement of products or services herein. We reserve the right to refuse any and all advertising.

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Spirits are seasonal. Nothing says fall like whiskey, gin's botanical bouquet goes hand in hand with the rejuvenation of spring and rum is about as carefree as a summer evening.

Winter can be a little more difficult to pinpoint but in my opinion, nothing combats the cold quite like brandy, specifically American brandy.

Unlike its stuffy French cousins, American brandy often does not receive the same level of prestige and is, therefore, cheaper while still offering the same warming booziness and rich flavors.

Brandy is produced by distilling wine but can also refer to liquor produced from a mash of pomace, the mash of crushed grapes leftover from the winemaking process or other fruits.

Many American brandies hail from wine country meaning California but the brand I want to flag is produced by one of the oldest distilling families in the United States, the Laird family. They claim the title of oldest distilling family in the country and run Laird and Company in New Jersey. At this point, nine generations of Lairds have distilled the stuff. They have sales records that go back to 1780 and company lore has it that a batch of the stuff may have warmed the bellies of any number of the 5,400 troops General George Washington led across the Delaware River into Trenton, New Jersey, on Christmas Day 1776.

One of their signature products is Laird's Applejack, a tangy, sweet and smooth brandy with notes of mild wood spices and apple throughout.

So we have our Holliday spirit. What do you mix with it? Nothing portrays the decadent joy of a party held during the time between Christmas and Thanksgiving as well as egg nog. It's thick and creamy and can pack a punch depending on who you let mix it but cracking and separating eggs is just the first troublesome step on the list before you wonder if there might be a better way to get that fix.

White Russians come to mind. Every college kid has mixed equal parts vodka, Kahlua and half and half after watching "The Big Lebowski" and some of them have even been good but another cocktail with as few ingredients is the Brandy Alexander.

John Lennon was a fan and it is alleged that it may have been the cause of his infamous two year "lost weekend." Lennon said he liked the drink because it tasted like milkshakes.



BRANDY ALEXANDER

by Duncan Dent



MAKE YOUR OWN

INGREDIENTS:

1 oz. brandy
1 oz. creme de cacao
1 oz. heavy cream
nutmeg for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

Shake the brandy, creme de cacao and heavy cream over ice and strain it into a coupe glass. Grate nutmeg on top for garnish and serve.



TRENDING: *Wine*

By Jana Hoops

Since opening Madison Cellars in Madison in 1988, owner Pete Clark has seen many trends in the industry that have not only taught him much about his customers' preferences for fine wine, but he has widened his own knowledge (and that of his staff's) about wine and spirits in general.

Trends in wine consumption tend to align with events of the times and can be influenced, to some extent, by weather/climate patterns, social concerns, political turns, the economy, sustainability, packaging, technology and, of course a worldwide pandemic.

"When we first opened in 1988, we focused on selling wine that was a little better market than what was the trend in Mississippi," Clark said. "We wanted to make available products that other stores were not selling."

While he has seen many trends come and go through the decades, there are numerous classic products that continue to last the test of time. The story of wine continues to be told, and as it evolves, its immediate outlook is looking positive.

LOOKING BACK AT PAST TRENDS

From the sweet reds and the introduction of White Zinfandel that Clark recalled in the 1980s; to the popularity of Cabernet-Merlot (and many other blends) and the rise in interest of wines from Argentina, Chile and Australia in the '90s and into the 2000s; and now the far more diverse profile of today's market, wine has kept its rightful place as the drink that Benjamin Franklin described as the beverage that "makes daily living easier, less hurried, with fewer tensions and more tolerance."

WHAT'S TRENDING TODAY?

"People are more diverse in their wine choices today and are not as afraid to try something new," Clark said. "They want to branch out and try more new experiences."

While Baby Boomers still hold a slight edge as the top wine consumers nationally, Millennials are a close second, and fortunately, there is a wine for everyone.

TRENDING LOCALLY

- Organic wines are becoming more popular.
- More selections from Spain, Chile, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand are gaining attention. "These are the wines that are most dependable and offer the best value," Clark said.
- Familiar and "comfort" staples that continue to hold their popularity are Pinot Noir (favorite red), Pinot Grigio (favorite white), Cabernet Sauvignon (favorite dry) and Moscato and Riesling (favorite sweets).
- Packaging is becoming more eco-friendly, with the bag-in-a-box format seeing great improvement. Younger customers (and anyone else who has ever tried to pack wine into a cooler), are loving the convenience of buying wine in cans.
- Home delivery of wine has been approved in Mississippi and is likely here to stay.

TRENDING NATIONALLY

- Since the COVID pandemic, consumers have discovered the pleasure of finding a "broader range of occasions" to enjoy special wines at home, not just holidays and birthdays. Clark believes this idea goes both ways. "You can make any day special simply because you chose to open that treasured bottle of wine," he suggests.
- Sweeter and specialty wines, along with red blends, are showing the most growth, according to the International Wine and Spirits Record.
- Sparkling wines, and Prosecco in particular, are very popular.
- Interest in wines from South Africa and Portugal is on the rise.
- There is increased consumer preference for premium wines.

WHY TRY SOMETHING NEW WHEN YOU ALREADY HAVE A FAVORITE?

"Many people don't understand how much wine choices may vary," Clark said. "Wines in the same categories can taste very different and there can be many reasons for that.

"One is where the grapes are grown. California grapes have earthy tones, while the same grapes grown in Oregon or Washington state have a flavor that is more fruit-driven.

"It also depends on the winemaker and the time the grapes are picked. The grapes themselves can have different characteristics. It also depends on weather patterns, soil influence, how the grapes are facing the sun, whether they are grown on sloping or flat ground and altitude.

"Drinking wine is a sensory experience and taste is different for everyone."

HOLIDAY GIFTING

"The biggest day of the year for us is the day before Thanksgiving," Clark said. "There is a wide selection of wines that are appropriate for Thanksgiving because there is such a wide variety of food on the table, so you can't go wrong bringing a special bottle of wine."

For holiday gift-giving, he suggests bumping up your everyday wine purchase price a notch or two "to get something a higher quality than your everyday range, something they wouldn't buy for themselves," he recommends.

"For New Year's, I like to see people willing to try something other than the least expensive champagne because it makes such a difference in the quality and the taste."

PETE'S TIPS

- Don't be afraid to try something new. Ask our staff for assistance in making your selections - they are well-trained and happy to help.
- I encourage people to start a small wine group to get together and try some new things. You'll learn from each other and have a good time.
- For New Year's Eve when people are overindulging, I strongly advise them to take it easy and drink some water to stay hydrated. This is really important!

ENJOY YOUR WINE EXPERIENCE

"People can get stuck on one thing that can last a long time," Clark said.

"Your choices are so wide now. There are so many really good wines out there and it's fun to learn about what's new. Most people now understand there is a place for every wine."

WINE FOLLY PACKS A LOT OF WINE WISDOM TO EXPLORE!

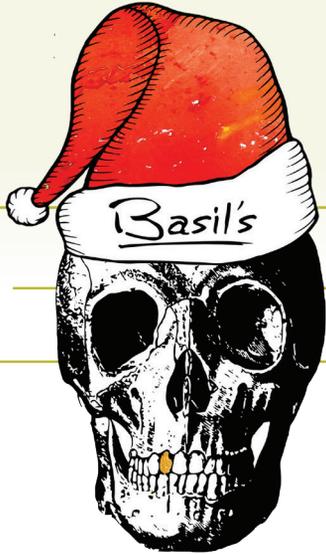
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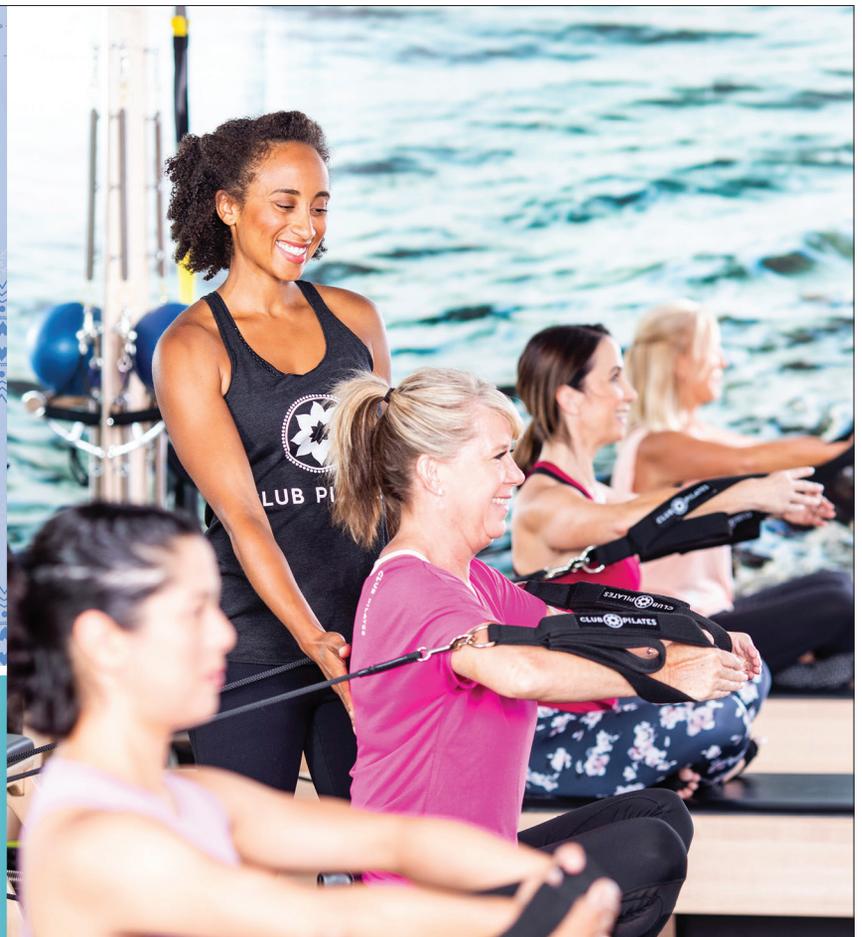
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MUSIC LEGEND LANDS IN MADISON

By Jana Hoops



After five decades in the music industry, veteran industry exec J.W. Williams has relocated from Nashville to Madison, a move he says is a “natural fit” because of the state’s significance in everything from the Blues to country music.

Williams is widely known for his work with legendary band ZZ Top, and country music superstars Clint Black and Trace Adkins. He’s currently working with Michael McDonald, who was a member of The Doobie Brothers, Steely Dan amongst others.

Growing up in Tyler, Texas, in a household that encouraged a wealth of musical styles, Williams knew at a young age that music was his passion, and by the time he was beginning college at Texas Tech, he also knew that relying on his own skills as a singer or player would not be his best career bet — but he wasn’t deterred in the least.

Williams literally looked at the whole experience of musical performances -- specifically live concerts -- in a totally different way than most folks, and it wasn’t long before he came to realize that working on the production and management side of the business would be his ticket to a job in the industry. More than 40 years later, he still loves his job.

“The inner workings of a live show fascinated me from the first time I started attending rock concerts in the ‘70s,” Williams said. “I’d watch the box office and see the lines of people waiting to get in and wondered about how that process could go faster. I would observe the stage crews setting up, count the lighting instruments and marvel at the speaker system. I’d often try to sneak around to the back of the venue to see the loading docks and count how many trucks and busses it took to put this on. I just wanted to be a part of the show. The whole process was and is fascinating to me.

“From the first lyrics to the demo to the recording session to the promotion of the record, then to hearing the song on the radio, producing the tour to support the record through the box office and the merchandising tables, it’s all related and every part is essential. Also, my dad was a CPA, so the business side of this came easy for me.”

TOP: J.W. Williams hangs out with ZZ Top

BOTTOM: ZZ Top’s Billy Gibbons and Dusty Hill with their tour manager J.W. Williams



J.W. Williams with Trace Adkins



When he left college, Williams went straight to work at Lone Wolf Management in Houston, stepping into what would become a lifetime career of talent management and production for more than four decades.

“Working in this all-encompassing music industry is the only job I’ve ever had,” he said.

The most important lesson he has nurtured over the years of working with and observing “some of the giants of the music industry,” is the importance of the bond between the artist and his or her manager.

“The relationship between an artist and their manager is one of the most important in their careers,” Williams said. “A manager must completely understand the desires and goals of the artists, design a plan to get them there and even be able to see beyond those goals.”

After decades of building his business and representing stars like ZZ Top, Clint Black, Trace Adkins and now, Michael McDonald, Williams has moved his business and his residency from Brentwood, Tenn. (10 miles from Nashville) to Madison this past spring.

Joining him was his wife, Debra, a professional hair and makeup artist who has worked with some of the biggest names in the business.

“We both had very rewarding careers there but after the pandemic hit, we both realized we could do what we do from anywhere,” he said. “Working remotely became the rule, not the exception. We also have family here, so being closer to them and the grandkids is awesome.”

The relocation couldn’t have worked out better.



A pair of ZZ Top's Gold Records adorn the wall of J.W. Williams Madison home.

"Mississippi is a natural fit for me," Williams said. "This state has always been a very fertile ground for talent in music and the arts, and I'm thrilled to be a part of this community."

After working in Houston, Austin and Nashville, the move made sense for other reasons.

During the late '80s and early '90s Williams got a firsthand glimpse of Mississippi's commitment to its musical heritage during his tenure with ZZ Top. Through their relationship with the Hard Rock Café, he had worked to raise a substantial amount of money and awareness for the Delta Blues Museum, enabling the museum to move into its current facility in Clarksdale and expand its collection of artifacts and programs.

"That experience opened my eyes to the possibilities offered by the Magnolia State," he said.

After using his experience and his formidable relationships to aid in the creation of a performing arts center in Austin, Williams hopes to contribute his expertise in design, consultation and operations to develop a similar music venue locally.

"Madison and its surrounding area really need a state-of-the-art performing arts center that will attract quality national headline entertainers and theatrical events," he said. "I understand there are a couple in the planning stages, and I hope I can offer my experience in their design and operations."

The need is great, he notes.

"At one time, rock artists made the Birmingham-Jackson-Shreveport route part of their regular tour stops, but the Jackson market has been overlooked over the past several years. A new venue, a world-class performing arts center in the Madison-Ridgeland area, would change that."

Looking back, Williams is grateful to have grown up in an atmosphere that encouraged many different genres of music, including praise and gospel, Western swing, R & B, Chicago Blues artists - most of whom were from Mississippi - and, later, the "British invasion" that imported songs by American Blues artists that would finally be played on mainstream radio.

This exposure to such diverse musical tastes fueled his interest in sharing it with audiences who would enjoy great performances without ever realizing the planning and skills needed to produce the excitement and energy of live concerts.

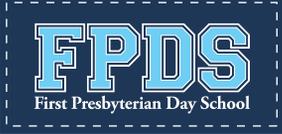
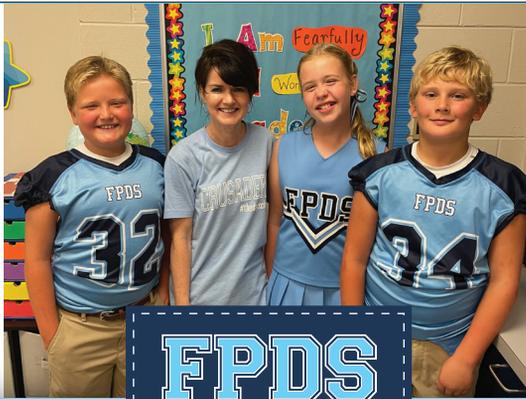
It's close to impossible not to realize how much Williams loves his work, and his enthusiasm is contagious.

"I think what I most enjoy is that moment after a show when the audience has let the artist know how much they love them and as they leave the stage seeing that glint of satisfaction and pride in their eye," he said. "Being a part of the whole process that brings them to that moment is everything. Then, my next favorite part is going to the box office and settling the show - that is, counting the money!"

"The biggest challenge these days for everyone on the artist side of the industry is how to deliver your music to the fans. Record labels have never been more challenged. Digital delivery has changed everything and it will continue to evolve.

"There is so much great music being released every day and so many incredibly talented artists, we must constantly find ways to expand their fan base and get their fans out to their shows. The live event is and always been the best way to engage the fan base."

J.W. Williams Productions is based in Madison in the Lake Caroline area. He can be reached at (512) 415-9653; email at jwwms.prod@gmail.com.



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Main Street Flora looking East

FLORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY — NOW FRIENDS OF FLORA —

GATHERING AND PROTECTING FLORA HISTORY

By Mark H. Stowers

Preserving small-town history is no easy task, but the Friends of Flora endeavors to do just that and more.

The Friends of Flora has taken on the challenge of finding, sorting and housing the town's historical record.

"We call it The Friends of Flora so we're not tied to just history," said Tracy Ward, who was recently elected as the interim president of the Friends of Flora. "We are trying to be a little bit of everything — promoter, protector of our little town and certainly our history. We actually brought back the historical society and have their charitable status and renamed it in the last 12 months or so."

Ward, a local architect with offices in Flora and in Atlanta, was elected interim president of the group after former president Nathan Thomas took the opportunity to expand his education at the University of Notre Dame pursuing a master's degree in architecture.

The non-profit's mission statement says it all, "to engage and cultivate interest in the town of Flora, Mississippi, and its history through historic preservation and community development. Our aim is to celebrate and protect what makes Flora unique."

Ward has been busy along with the rest of the organization's leaders and volunteers to do just that.

"We're literally still going through old paper files, electronic files, old audio tapes — we're going to spend the next few years organizing that and putting it all on an updated website. We are in the infancy of doing that and getting it all under control. The information has been in someone's home and some was stored at city hall."

Years ago, the former society got grants to refurbish the old railroad depot but it had fallen into disarray and needed a bit more loving to get back up to standard.

"It had kind of been forgotten the past 10 years or so and we just got that back in shape," Ward said. "We now meet in the depot the first Tuesday of every month. And that's where all the records are being gathered. We are always looking for more volunteers and leadership."

The group recently got a landscaping grant to update the outside of the depot.

"The depot was built in the late 1800s and had a grant to be restored about 25 years ago," Ward said.

The history of Flora begins at that same depot. In the 1880s, J.C. Clarke, general manager of surveys and construction for the Illinois Central Railroad, thought a rail line from Canton to Yazoo City would well serve the region. After getting his boss on board

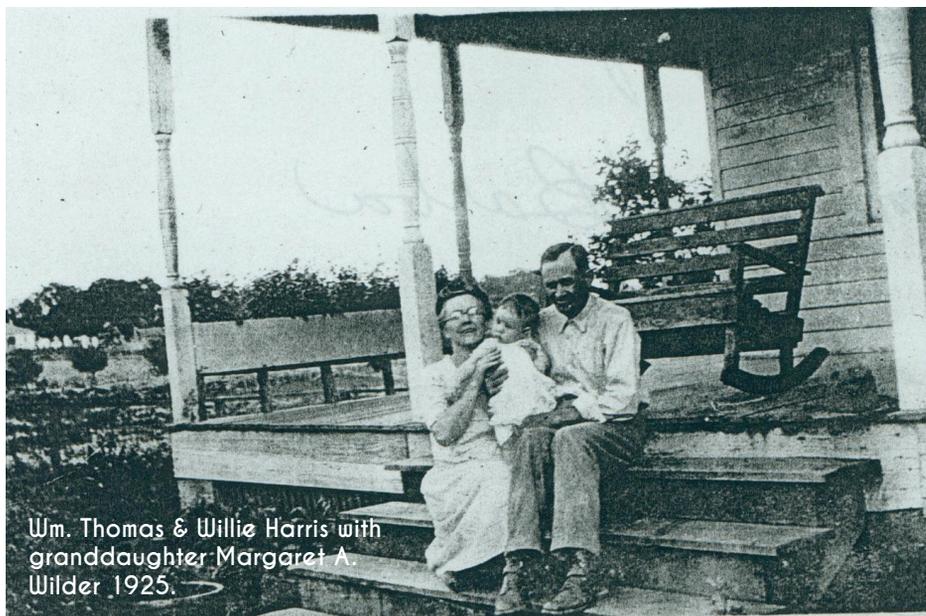


Flora Cotton Yard & Depot 1915.



Flora Depot ca 1917.

Daddy IS AGE 18



Wm. Thomas & Willie Harris with granddaughter Margaret A. Wilder 1925.



Flora before 1908.



1941 Flora Ordnance Plant

with the idea, it was decided the line would run from Jackson to Yazoo City and there would be a depot built in what now is Flora.

As was the custom in the day, train stations honored the memory of those who helped with the railway. This particular line would run through the W.B. Jones Plantation and his wife, Flora Mann Jones, was known as “a delightful personality” and Clarke decided to honor her with the “Flora” depot. It was built in 1883 and the town was incorporated three years later but there are graves in the cemetery that date the area as early as 1821.

Henry Presley Posey gathered most of the history in his published book, “The Flora Book: A History of the Town of Flora and Southwest Madison County, Mississippi.” The book can be found on Amazon.com.

Ward said the 3.33 square mile town was “quite successful” early on with several cotton gins and the railroad bringing visitors and business to the area. The population grew from 228 in 1890 and had nearly tripled by 1910. It would stagnate somewhat until the 1970s and 1980s when it hit 1,507. Today, the population hovers near 2,000 residents.

Flora has World War II history with the ordnance plant built in 1941 and shut down in 1945. The Kearney Park plant produced

propellant and igniter charges for large-caliber guns. The site also had firing ranges for sub-machine guns, rifles, anti-aircraft guns, live grenades and demolition explosives. Today, many of the ordnance buildings have been repurposed into other businesses and agricultural uses.

Flora is also home to some “ancient” history with its Petrified Forrest that has been in existence as a park since the 1800s. More has been done in the past 40 years to develop the area and open it to the public. R.J. “Bob” and Shirl Schabilion procured the “Petrified Forest” in August 1962. The couple had a foundation to work to conserve and preserve any and all of natural resources — long before such preservation efforts were popular.

Located in hills with ravines hollowed out by nature during the past century, the size of the petrified logs indicates that as living trees, these stone giants were over one hundred feet tall, and perhaps a thousand or more years old. The site appeared in a 1937 issue of National Geographic magazine as well.

Flora has an iconic but no longer in use water tower. Efforts are being made to preserve the tower.

“It was built in 1914 but it’s an icon of the town,” Ward said. “The Flora Butcher, a high-end meat market, uses the old water tower in their logo. Unfortunately, the top blew off during a tornado so it’s deteriorating fast. We really want to save it and we’re trying to gather some funds and get it cleaned up and repainted and lit up at night as a centerpiece of downtown. Mississippi Heritage Trust lists the 10 Most Endangered properties in Mississippi and these old water towers are on their list as a category and they want to save them. Our town has been too poor to put any money into it.”

To learn more about the Friends of Flora, check out their Facebook page, www.facebook.com/friendsofflorams.



Petrified Forest - Ruby Inman and friend.



Petrified Forest - 1950.



Horses in corral with Flora water tank in background.

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HOLIDAY CENTERPIECES

PERSONALIZED, SOMEWHAT EDIBLE AND DEFINITELY OUT-OF-THE-BOX CREATIONS

By Mark H. Stowers



Thanksgiving and Christmas are filled with food, fun and family, and decorating your home can be as simple or as complex as your imagination.

The holidays fill dining room tables with extraordinary and memorable food so why not match spread with an exciting, creative and incredible centerpiece? Designers from Green Oak Florist, The Prickly Hippie and Gina Diamond's Flower Shop offered a few tips, ideas and out-of-the-box thinking to make your centerpiece the most creative this holiday season.

"First, we ask if they want fresh (flowers) or silk," said Billy Ray Sigh, lead designer and manager at Green

Oak Florist. "If it's a sit-down dinner, it will be long and low. But if it's a buffet, we make it tall so it's over the food. With seasonal flowers and a seasonal direction."

It helps if you have your own container to create the centerpiece in, Sigh said.

"That helps because they have what they like on their table or buffet," he said.

He also suggests creating a "table-escape" by adding candles or adding "fresh greenery to silk greenery to make it look more real. You also see a lot of people whose homes are more neutral with whites or grays want to bring more color in with their tablescapes."



Jenni Sivils, owner and cake and floral designer at the Prickly Hippy in Ridgeland, enjoys incorporating edible elements into centerpiece creations.

“We do both floral and edible centerpieces. We specialize in the focal point of a party which is cakes,” Sivils said. “But we make them ‘pretty out there so they can be a centerpiece and add floral pieces. We also make just floral centerpieces for weddings or parties or just for people who like to look at flowers at their house.”

When focusing on Thanksgiving, Sivils asks customers for a bit of information.

“We need a date and what the style is — for Thanksgiving,” she said. “We work with a lot of dried flowers because they can be kept and used throughout the holidays. How big is the table and how many people will be seated? I appreciate customers who say they trust my style and I go for it.”

Sivils said a flower shortage can sometimes limit the availability of what a customer wants but offers creative challenges for designers to fill the gap.

“It’s nice when customers trust their florist to create something that fits what they want,” she said.

In working with edible elements, Sivils said, “That’s my jam and I can go out pretty creatively. I love to make a cake that’s a focal point and then match the colors of the cake or the flavor of the cake with the theme of the flowers as well.”

The Prickly Hippy creates special flavored creations to add to the centerpiece such as Pop Tart-inspired “Peace Tarts” handmade by Sivils’ mother each day. They have a caramel apple pecan and a pumpkin spiced apple.

“It’s very Thanksgiving-ish when your mother is in the kitchen slaving over the cooking,” she said, with a laugh.

Christmas centerpieces tend to be more colorful and Sivils enjoys adding a lot of pine and different types of berries.

“I’ve always been someone who is drawn to classic Christmas but a little bit interesting,” Sivils said. “I like to use the dark reds instead of the bright reds. And I like to go dark with some emeralds instead of a bright, bright red rose. It’s also interesting to do a pastel Christmas where you do really soft colors and focus on snowflakes. There’s a lot of different directions to take.”

Gina Diamond has been creating centerpieces for decades at Gina Diamond's Flower Company in Madison. She even teaches workshops on the subject and she is overloaded with students, she said.

"We get ideas like is it formal or casual occasion?" Diamond said of the process. "What kind of table? How many people will be sitting at it? And that determines lengthwise what works well with it. Then we talk about colors and maybe the person brings their plates in and we coordinate."

Diamond free workshops cover a wide variety of decorations including handmade arrangements of seasonal flowers, table settings and other décor ideas.

"A lot of people bring their containers in or ask us to find something here in the store for it," Diamond said.

Diamond also works within budget constraints to get the most creative centerpiece personalized for the occasion.

"In December, we use a lot of evergreens," she said. "And we'll incorporate a lot of sparkly pieces. You can get painted curly willow. We also have a large supply of plants that are specific to Christmas like poinsettias, Narcissus, Ivy tree forms and Christmas cactus that we can make as a centerpiece. A poinsettia can be a centerpiece because it's a plant and flower. The Narcissus can be a centerpiece as well. Mostly it's the Christmas greenery and your colors and you might work in some pine cones."

For Thanksgiving, Diamond uses a cornucopia.

"We might work in feathers — pheasant feathers — and work in some bittersweet that you only get in the fall," Diamond said.

Up for any challenge, Diamond has seen plenty of them.

"One time at Christmas we had a candy theme, and we were to design a centerpiece working in these large pieces of candy worked in. Like a sugarplum. That was quite a challenge," she said.

The designers advise that if you are doing it yourself to get creative with your holiday centerpiece. Use plants, flowers and don't forget edible pieces to create a lasting holiday memory and tradition.





Photos by Chris Todd

APOTHECARY SHOP HAS LOCAL FLARE

By Lyndy Berryhill



Since opening this summer, business has been blooming for Ridgeland's CW Organics Herbal Apothecary shop.

The apothecary offers a bouquet of products including bath salts, specialty teas, soothing balms and oils. But each product has two key components in common: they are as natural and as local as possible.

"My goal is to have everything in my store from Mississippi," said Carline Warner, owner and herbalist.

Warner grew up in the Mississippi Delta on a family farm. At 19, she decided to quit college and move to the Florida Keys. Warner worked as a receptionist in a day spa. From the front desk, she learned about different therapies and products. She began learning more about herbalism and the ancient uses for various plants.

From there, she started taking classes, and the rest was history. She has now been an herbalist for more than 20 years.

In 2009, she moved to the east coast with her husband, Jack Warner, and daughter, Addison Warner. During that time, she began to transition to an organic lifestyle. When her family moved back to central Mississippi, Warner had no choice but to make her holistic products.

Three months into operating her first brick-and-mortar shop at 103 West Washington Street in Ridgeland, Warner has locally sourced nearly every product except for items like glass and porcelain teapots.

"I have to buy those wholesale from another company, but the herbs and the teas are all Mississippi," she said.

Warner's shop offers hand-curated products from small business owners around the state, whom she met while marketing her products and traveling to over 50 farmer's markets.

The macramé plant hangers are handmade in Hattiesburg. The candles, sage wraps and incense sticks are sourced from Meridian. Agate wind chimes are designed and built by a Brandon-based artist. The shop's crystal jewelry and men's self-care line, Mississippi Mane and Co., originates in Clinton. When in-season, most of the shop's herbs and flowers come from Madison's field-to-vase florist, Gertrude's Garden.

"There is a lot of local flare here," Warner said.

Warner also orders natural ingredients wholesale to make products like her best-selling bug spray, which is made with a blend of five essential oils.

Warner said the product is mild enough for children and pets but effectively repels the peskiest pests.

The spray is the shop's No. 1 product, popular for its repelling pests such as mosquitoes, gnats, no-see-ums, ticks, fleas and houseflies.

Warner also incorporates her oils and homegrown ingredients into handmade soaps,

blended to cleanse with natural fragrance from oils and plants. Each bar lacks the clinical and hard-to-pronounce components used in mainstream brands.

“You could eat the body butter if you wanted to,” she said. “Everything is food grade. Everything is pure and natural and organic.”

The apothecary shop’s products, Warner said, offer therapeutic and immune-boosting benefits while promoting overall wellness to her customers.

“I get emotional when people walk up at a market, and they’re like, ‘Your product changed my life,’” she said.

Customers profess that Warner’s skincare line has improved eczema symptoms and kept their skin hydrated.

It’s not just her products for external use that keep customers coming back into the shop. Her herbal tea blends soothe from the inside out.

She offers teas that she said support better immunity, more energy and more tranquility. Flavors incorporate different berries to add vitamins and minerals for health support. The calming flavors use dried petals of lavender and jasmine, two flowers commonly used in aromatherapy to promote relaxation.

Warner’s many flowers and herbs have been utilized for their believed medicinal qualities for centuries in Asian cultures.

Warner resurrects those beliefs and enjoys making specialty tea blends for individuals with specific needs.

A customer who deals with the symptoms associated with high blood pressure personally thanked Warner for making a tea blend that helped her relax and de-stress. At a following doctor’s appointment, the customer progressed toward health goals and came straight back to Warner’s apothecary shop for more tea.

Warner said her products had improved her life quality, and she knows they help others in various ways.

“Once (customers) start living this type of lifestyle, they start understanding,” Warner said. “They’re going to find themselves healthier and happier.”



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Cooking for a crowd can be exhausting. If you're a person who loves to host, you know this. One of the first times I ever cooked for a crowd was when I hosted my very first Friendsgiving. I volunteered to cook everything. So young. So dumb. I worked my tail off in the kitchen of our tiny apartment, roasted and carved my first whole turkey, and had a house full of some very happy tummies belonging to my much-loved friends. It was worth it, but I was so tired afterward that it took me two (maybe three) days to fully clean up.

After that, we volunteered to do the big things (my husband, George smokes a great turkey), and let everyone else bring the sides. A potluck Friendsgiving is a great way to host. But last year, along with the rest of the world, George and I found ourselves in a very uncertain place. We loved the tradition of Friendsgiving and wouldn't give it up for anything, but our friends were worried about bringing COVID home to their families. No one felt comfortable gathering like we used to. We had to pivot.

I had an idea for a very scaled-down Friendsgiving meal that worked so well, it might just be our new Friendsgiving tradition. I made a hearty turkey soup, plopped a big scoop of cornbread dressing in the middle, and garnished it with cranberry sauce. All the biggest components of the Thanksgiving meal were present: turkey, dressing, gravy, potatoes and cranberry. We ate it around a bonfire and had a great time sharing a low-effort meal with our friends, in a way that felt safe for everyone. Cleanup took 15 minutes.

Below is the recipe for our turkey dressing soup. Invite your willing friends to bring a dressing and dessert for a full meal. I recommend using a classic cornbread dressing — something you can serve with an ice cream scoop. I like my cranberry sauce straight from the can. This is also a great recipe for Thanksgiving dinner leftovers. We'll be enjoying this soup with our friends around a bonfire again. I hope you'll join us.



FRIENDSGIVING TURKEY DRESSING SOUP

SERVES 8-10

FOR THE TURKEY:

3 lbs. bone-in turkey parts
Olive oil
1 turkey neck (for the soup)

FOR THE SOUP:

3/4 c. canola oil
3/4 c. flour
2 onions, diced
3 celery stalks, diced
3 carrots, diced
1/4 c. white wine
6 c. chicken stock
2 medium gold potatoes,
diced
2 bay leaves
4 sprigs of parsley
4 sprigs of thyme
1 1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp pepper
1/2 c. heavy cream

FOR ASSEMBLY:

Cornbread dressing
Cranberry sauce
Parsley

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees
2. On a rimmed sheet pan, rub turkey parts with olive oil. Salt & pepper the turkey liberally. Cook for 35-45 minutes, or until internal temperature reaches 165 degrees on an instant-read thermometer. Set turkey aside to cool.
3. Pour canola oil into a large, heavy-bottomed pot. Heat on medium-high until the oil is hot and shimmering. Carefully whisk in the flour. This is your roux. Cook, stirring constantly until the roux is blonde and has a nutty aroma.
4. Add onions, celery, and carrots. Cook until tender, about 10 minutes, stirring frequently.
5. Once the vegetables are tender, remove the turkey from the sheet pan and set it aside. Place the sheet pan on a burner set to low. Warm the turkey drippings until they start to sizzle, then pour white wine onto the sheet pan. Deglaze the sheet pan carefully until there are no brown bits stuck to the bottom. Pour the drippings and wine into the roux. Immediately add the chicken stock and 4 c. of water. Give it a good stir.
6. Add the turkey neck, potatoes, bay leaves, parsley, thyme, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil.
7. While the soup comes to a boil, pull the turkey off the bones, and add it to the soup.
8. Turn the heat down to simmer for one hour. Add cream. Taste for seasoning.
9. To assemble, scoop dressing with an ice cream scoop into a shallow bowl. Spoon soup around the dressing. Garnish with chopped parsley and cranberry sauce.

Ann Elizabeth and George Gillespie are private chefs and owners of Supper Club Chef Service. Hire them to cook and serve a multi-course meal for your next home celebration. Visit supperclubchefservice.com for more information, and follow them on Instagram, [@supperclubchefs](https://www.instagram.com/supperclubchefs).



The greatest joy in creating food is the community and creativity that it cultivates. For this reason, the holiday season is all the more delightful for me. Crafting new dishes as well and continuing traditions is such a sweet offering. Being able to give this to folks who have allergies or conditions which limit what they can take in has been a challenge I'm eager to take on. I want to share all of the wonderful things my grandmothers made for me and my siblings with our kids. Navigating allergies and accommodating these limitations without losing the goodness can get tricky. Lucky for the little foodies in my fam, I'm pretty stubborn, so I try and try and try again.

This is an easy and very adaptable take on a southern classic. Pound cake is probably one of the most comforting, nostalgic, and always appropriate desserts that I can think of. This variation is no exception. The sweet potato and spice make it extra cozy and soul warming... and maybe even pass as healthy-ish. We'll pretend anyway. I have included substitutes to make it both vegan and gluten free for allergy and diet preference sake.



Pound Cake

CAKE

3 c all purpose or gluten-free cup-for-cup flour
 1 T gluten-free baking powder
 1 t baking soda
 1 t salt
 ½ t nutmeg
 ½ t cinnamon
 ½ t allspice
 ½ t turmeric
 1 c butter or coconut oil
 1 ¾ cup baked/mashed sweet potato (pumpkin will work just as well if this is your jam)
 4 eggs (or 3 bananas)
 1 T vanilla
 ¾ c brown sugar
 ¾ c sugar (can sub 1 c monk fruit for both sugars if preferred)
 *Optional 1 c chopped pecans or pumpkin seeds

Set oven to 350 (325 convection). Grease and dust a tube or loaf pan. Mix flour, baking powder, soda, salt, and spices in a medium size bowl. In the bowl of a mixer, beat sugars with butter/oil until fluffy (oil won't get so fluffy). Lower speed and add eggs/bananas one at a time and then follow with sweet potato/pumpkin. Add vanilla, and then slowly begin to add flour mixture one cup at a time just until well combined. Pour into prepared pan, pour topping over and bake 55-65 minutes (until knife comes out clean). *Note that vegan and/or gluten free variants may increase bake time slightly

TOPPING

½ c brown sugar
 ½ c flour
 ½ c oats
 ½ butter/coconut oil

Fork or finger mix to create a crumble. Generously top cake before baking.

Amy Bouyett, a 2002 Madison Central grad, is the pastry chef/food manager at Coffee Prose in Jackson (locations are 1619 N West Street and southeast corner of Highland Village courtyard next to Aplos). I also do commission work for weddings, events and parties. I have a small portfolio of this work which can be viewed on Instagram @sweetamibakes

*Mississippi Metropolitan Ballet opens
29th season with holiday favorite*

THE NUTCRACKER



Mississippi Metropolitan Ballet, based in Madison since 1992, opens its 29th season Dec.4-5 with the holiday favorite “The Nutcracker,” featuring a cast of over 150 local dancers and guest artists from Ballet Memphis. Attending a performance of the ballet at Jackson Academy Performing Arts Center is an annual tradition for many in the metro area. In addition to witnessing the exciting choreography, sparkling costumes, beautiful sets and artistic feats of the production, patrons will have the opportunity to begin a new tradition this year as MMB introduces its Land of Sweets VIP Tour.

“The Nutcracker” follows the story of Clara as she attends her family’s Christmas party, where she receives the gift of a nutcracker from the mysterious and magical Herr Drosselmeyer. After the party, Clara’s nutcracker comes to life, battles the evil Mouse King, and takes Clara on a magical journey. Clara and the Nutcracker Prince are awed by the Snow Queen and her corps of Snowflakes in the snowy forest before meeting the Sugarplum Fairy in the land of sweets. There Clara and the Nutcracker Prince enjoy dances or divertissements from around the world presented for their entertainment.

Emily Garner of Madison will dance the role of Clara this season. Emily is a senior MMB company member and a freshman at Rosa Scott High School. She is the daughter of Elizabeth and Andy Clark and Adams Garner.

MMB principal dancer Madeline Page of Madison will dance a number of roles including the Snow Queen and Dewdrop Fairy. Page is a senior at Jackson Prep and the daughter of Audrey and Jeremy Page.

Both Garner and Page have dreamed of these roles since they first performed in “The Nutcracker.” Garner looks forward to the acting required of her this year. “The role of Clara is not only about the dancing but involves portraying to the audience all of the different emotions a young girl experiences and telling the story of the Nutcracker to the audience in an exciting way.”

Of dancing the role of Snow Queen, Page says, “The snow scene is easily my favorite part of the ballet because the exquisite scenery and music make the performance absolutely magical! I am so excited to have been cast to dance this beautiful role.”

Artistic director Jennifer Beasley notes that many of the roles in the production, such as the Snow Queen, Dewdrop Fairy and divertissement leads are split cast. A split cast means that more than one dancer performs the role over the course of the production. “We have so many strong dancers among our principals,

soloists and senior company members. Challenging each dancer with new, varied and appropriately-difficult choreography helps them develop their artistry and technique. Our four performances over the course of Nutcracker weekend will give them all an opportunity to shine.”

Sharing the role of Snow Queen with Page is Hallie Young. Young is an MMB soloist and a senior at Northwest Rankin High School. Page shares the role of Dewdrop Fairy with fellow principal dancer Brelyn Binkley. Binkley attends Northwest Rankin High School and is a junior. Young and Binkley also split the role of Mirliton lead.

Other soloists and senior company members in the cast are Annalee LeDuff, Hart Maley, Sydney Sanders, Rebecca Trowbridge, Southern Callahan, Brooke Carter, Mari Finseth, Grace Gardner, Sophia Huang, Amelia McCaughan and Emma Raush all of Madison County and Eleanora Ellis and Annalyse Bin-



kley of Rankin County.

Joining the local cast are Cecily Khuner, Oscar Fernandez and Joey Dlearo of Ballet Memphis. Khuner and Fernandez will dance the roles of the Sugarplum Fairy and her Cavalier with Dlearo appearing as the Nutcracker Prince.

Cecily Khuner began her dance training at Berkeley Ballet Theater and then attended San Francisco Ballet School. She joined Ballet Memphis in 2010. Her favorite works/roles with the company include Juliet in Steven McMahon’s “Romeo and Juliet,” Sugar Plum and Dew Drop in “Nutcracker,” George Balanchine’s “Square Dance,” Trey McIntyre’s “The Reassuring Effects of Form and Poetry,” Matthew Neenan’s “Water of the Flowery Mill,” Julia Adam’s “Devil’s Fruit,” Gabrielle Lamb’s “Manifold,” and Helena in Mark Godden’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” Cecily is a National YoungArts Foundation award winner for ballet.

Oscar Fernandez is from the village of Santillana de Mar of the state of Cantabria,

in the North of Spain. He trained in classical, contemporary and Flamenco dance at the Real Conservatorie of Dance Mariemma in Madrid before joining San Francisco Ballet School on scholarship. He joined Ballet San Jose as Corp member in 2014 where he performed in George Balanchine’s “Theme and Variations,” Ben Stevenson’s “Cinderella” and Ohad Naharin’s “Minus 16” among others. He joined Ballet Memphis in 2016 and performed in Steven McMahon productions, including Romeo in “Romeo and Juliet” and the Scarecrow in “The Wizard of Oz,” Cavalier in “Nutcracker,” as well as Spanish, Russian and Arabian. Oscar also has performed in George Balanchine’s “Square Dance,” Reggie Wilson’s “I Am a Man,” Matthew Neenan’s “Water of the Flowery Mill,” and Mark Godden’s “Midsummer Night’s Dream.” Oscar teaches Adult Ballet and Latin Dance in the Ballet Memphis School.

MMB’s “The Nutcracker” will be held on Saturday and Sunday, December 4 and 5 at 2 and 7 p.m. at the Jackson Academy Performing Arts Center. Following the matinee performances, step into Clara’s slippers and travel to the Land of Sweets in the MMB’s Land of Sweets VIP Tour. In this immersive experience, guests will have their personal passport stamped as they visit Clara, the Snow Queen, the Dewdrop, the Sugarplum Fairy, and more. Travel stops will offer character photo opportunities and souvenirs including a miniature nutcracker. The afternoon’s activities will be capped with “Spanish” hot cocoa and light refreshments from Nothing Bundt Cakes.

Tickets for the performance are \$30-\$35. VIP tour tickets are \$25 and are sold separately. Both are available at msmetroballet.com or by calling 601-853-4508.

An honor company member of Regional Dance America, MMB is a pre-professional, non-profit ballet company based in Madison. Members of the company and the cast of “The Nutcracker” are selected by audition from the students of Mississippi Metropolitan Dance Academy, with locations in Madison and Brandon. Supporters of MMB’s 29th season include the Mississippi Arts Commission; Gertrude C. Ford Foundation; Jackson Optimist Club; Ergon; Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi; Eventful; Harper, Rains, Knight and Co.; Hilton Garden Inn Jackson-Madison; Larry and Michael Johnson Family Foundation; and The Pig & Pint. For more information on MMB or MMDA, visit www.msmetroballet.com and follow us on Instagram @msmetroballet and @msmetrodance.



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A HOLIDAY BUFFET

The Holidays mean holiday get togethers for many of us. Although spending time with family and friends is the main event, food always runs a close second. These are some ideas for a relatively hassle-free dinner buffet for a large group. No matter what you choose, try to make it easy on yourself. Use what is seasonal and easy to find. The last couple of years have had their challenges when it comes to shopping. It reminds me of a story when the great Chef Auguste Escoffier had to come up with a New Year's Eve dinner menu during the near famine conditions in Paris during the first World War. His simple solution, build your menu around what is available.



IN THE KITCHEN

With International Chef David Raines
The Flora Butcher & Dave's Triple B Restaurant



SMOKED BRISKET WITH FIGS

Having lived in so many countries and experiencing their cultures, I have noticed that figs are somewhat of a constant. In culinary school, I even wrote a paper on figs and their history. The pharaohs were buried with them, they are part of Greek and Roman mythology, Buddha would meditate under a fig tree to attain enlightenment, they add a sweet touch to Hannukah and are mentioned often in the Bible.

This recipe combines the smoked brisket, that we are so well known for in Flora, with a sauce you may see at a Passover feast. Smoking the brisket and preparing the sauce the day before makes this a breeze on the day of the party

- 6 pound prime brisket Flat, smoked and sliced
- 1 cup olive oil
- 10 shallots, sliced
- 1 yellow onion, sliced
- 1 red onion, sliced
- 4 ribs celery, large dice
- 4 carrots, large dice
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 2 cups red wine
- 1 quart beef stock
- 1 cup Balsamic vinegar
- 1 orange, zested.
- 1 cup dried figs
- 1 cup dried apricot
- 1/2 cup slivered almonds
- 5 large stems of rosemary

Season your brisket with any classic "salt and pepper" style rub you like. Smoke at 220 degrees until the internal temperature reads 185-190 degrees. Allow to cool. (wrap halfway through if you don't like a lot of "bark" on the outside of the meat)

In a large roasting pan, add the olive oil, shallot, onions, celery and carrots. Sweat the vegetables over medium high heat for 5 minutes and then add the garlic and cook an additional 5 minutes. Stir often. Add the cinnamon, wine, 2 cups of stock and the balsamic vinegar. Cook gently until the sauce has reduced by half. Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper.

On the day of the party, use a slotted spoon to get the majority of the vegetables out and spread evenly in the bottom of a large casserole dish. Slice the brisket and place it over the vegetables. top the brisket with the dried figs, apricots, almonds, orange zest and rosemary.. Pour your reserved sauce over the top to evenly glaze and add the other two cups of stock. Cover tightly and bake for one hour at 350 degrees or until hot and the sauce has reduced by half again.

SAUTEED BRUSSELS SPROUTS WITH BACON AND PARMESAN

Brussels sprouts are a great winter vegetable. In the United States, we eat them all year around but it is specific to the season in a lot of the countries that I have cooked in. They are versatile enough to use any cooking method, but I like to blanch and then sauté them for parties as they really brighten up the table as a side dish.

You may see these little cabbages on the stalk at nicer grocery stores. I like to incorporate them as a decoration on the table

3 pounds of small brussels sprouts, trimmed
1/2 pound applewood smoked bacon, julienned
1 stick of salted butter
Parmesan for grating

In a large pot of salted, boiling water cook the brussels sprouts until slightly tender and bright green (5-10 minutes) Drain and then dunk them in ice water to set the color. Drain and store them in the fridge until the party.

In a nonstick skillet, gently render the bacon until firm but not crisp. drain the fat and reserve for another use. In a large sauté pan, melt the butter over medium heat. When it just starts to brown, add the brussels sprouts and bacon and sauté until heated through. Adjust the salt and pepper to taste. Pour over into a large serving bowl and grate a healthy amount of parmesan cheese on top

HERB ROASTED POTATOES

These are a go to at my house for any event. They are easy, delicious and can be par cooked ahead of time and finished the day of the party.

3 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, quartered
Olive oil to coat, about 1 cup
3-4 tablespoons granulated garlic
1 tablespoon minced rosemary leaves
3 tablespoons minced thyme leaves
1 tablespoon rubbed sage
Salt and pepper to taste.

Set your oven to 350 and line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or aluminum foil. Mix everything in a large bowl and try to get the potatoes coated as evenly as possible. You want the herbs to get plenty of oil on them as well so that they don't burn. Pour the mixture on the baking sheet and spread them out evenly with the skin sides down Scrape the bowl to get the remaining olive onto the potatoes. Bake until the potatoes start to brown and are tender when you poke them with a fork. I always taste one or two to see if it needs more salt.

SMOKED SALMON SALAD WITH GREEK TZATZIKI AND SALMON ROE

We always incorporated smoked salmon for holiday parties because, inevitably, someone would send us a side as a holiday gift. The fennel and citrus help to lighten it up while the tzatziki adds a fresh, rich, creaminess. Remember to reserve the fennel fronds for garnish

2 large fennel bulbs, sliced very thin
Juice from 1 lemon
2 oranges, cut into "supremes"(skin and pith removed)
1 ounce Extra Virgin Olive oil
1 clamshell of Salad Days mixed greens, torn into 2 inch pieces
1 pound sliced, smoked salmon
2 cups tzatziki
1 ounce tin of salmon roe
Fennel fronds for garnish, 1 inch pieces from the tips

FOR THE TZATZIKI

Mix 1 pint full fat, Greek yogurt with 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil, 1/2 a grated(peeled) cucumber and 2 cloves finely minced garlic. Salt and pepper to taste.

In a bowl, combine the fennel, lemon juice, orange segments and olive oil. Season with a little salt and pepper and stir well. Place in the refrigerator, covered. Tear your Salad Days greens up and place in another bowl. Right before the party, pour the liquid from the fennel over onto the salad greens and toss to coat. Add a little salt and pepper to the greens if needed. On a large platter, spread out the greens and sprinkle the fennel mixture evenly over the top. lay slices of salmon over the salad. Use a small spoon to dot the tzatziki on the salmon. Try to get at least one small dollop per slice. Add one or two salmon eggs to really make it pop and evenly garnish the finished dish with the fennel fronds

HOT CHOCOLATE WITH GRAND MARNIER

A great way to start or finish your meal. Hot chocolate is a classic but something about orange just reminds me of the holidays. Oranges were usually involved with the preparation of a ham or the filling for a roasted goose. My mom used to enlist my help to stud an orange with whole cloves during the holidays to make a decorative air freshener for Christmas parties. That smell still takes me back. My wife is from Denmark so we have special glass mugs for drinking mulled wine(or glogg) at our house. If you like the idea of using glass snifters or stemware for presentation, be sure that your hot chocolate is warm put not hot. The glass may shatter, for one, but people still need to be able to pick their drink up!

1 pound high quality milk chocolate
3 cups heavy cream
5 cups whole milk
2 cups Grand Marnier
Orange for zesting
Baby marshmallows

In a large, heavy saucepan over medium heat, melt the chocolate and heavy cream together. Stir often and make sure that the cream never comes to a boil. Once the chocolate is incorporated, add the milk and continue to cook until the hot chocolate is just at a simmer

To serve, place 1.5 ounces of Grand Marnier in a festive mug and add 4 to 5 ounces of hot chocolate. Add a few baby marshmallows and grate a little orange zest on top with a microplane.

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