

On Monday night a group of us gathered at Jimmy's for a real treat – a lobster festival. Four courses of lobster dishes followed by dessert is one fine evening of food fun.

As usual we started with some Chardonnay and conversation. Several first-time attendees got to know the regulars as we awaited our first lobster treat.

A treat was right. We had a gratin of lobster and sweet potato. Layers of sweet potato, lobster and Swiss cheese were covered with custard and baked until barely firm. It was loose enough to provide its own sauce.

This dish was very good. The sweetness of the lobster was accentuated by that of the potato. The nuttiness of the cheese and richness custard made for some wonderful tastes and very clean plates.

Our wine was a Sauvignon Blanc from Napa Cellars. Its firm citrus body cut the rich food perfectly.

What followed was the hit of the night – Lobster Cream. This was the pure essence of lobster. Lobster stock with all the solids removed was mixed with a slightly thickened cream. As I told the dinners, "We thinned it with some butter." This was powerful soup with so many flavors.

A Merlot from Sutton Cellars was our wine. This wine had body and spice that made it as rich as the soup. For a modestly priced wine it is a good one. One diner commented, "I would have never thought of putting a Merlot with this soup. But it's just right."

Take note that Sutton Cellars' wines are old style models. The wines are not filtered. The slightly cloudy look is not a sign of trouble, just one of style.

Now came a salad of lobster and mango that was a great combination. Chunks of lobster claws were mixed with pieces of mango, red pepper and a little green onion and parsley. These were bound together in an olive oil mayo. The salad was served on mixed greens.

Our wine was very interesting and so good with this course. It was McManis Family Viognier. It had lots of peachy fruit mixed with honey and flowers. The flavors of the lobster and mango worked really well with the wine.

McManis wines are reasonably priced and very nice ones. They make a full-bodied Petite Sirah that's good.

Our main course was of course more lobster. We had a large cold-water lobster tail with butter and lemon. It was very tender and so sweet.

Asparagus was served along side and a wedge of bleu cheese "dressing." The cheese was mixed with eggs, cream and bread crumbs and baked until set. The rich tang of the dressing brought out the sweet of the lobster that much more.

A Cabernet from B. R. Cohn was our wine. Its firm structure and great nose made it a good one for this course. The flavors of the wine and lobster lingered on and on.

OK, we broke from the trend and did not have lobster for dessert. We had chocolate mousse with fresh raspberries. This was another rich course that went down so smoothly.

We got a gift of some Port and shared it around. It was a 12 year-old tawny that was so good. It was just right for the chocolate.

So all in all we had great fun with lobster. There were four different ways to try this succulent shellfish. Each one was excellent on its own. But together they proved to be even better.

Next month is Mardi Gras time. A number of folks will be celebrating just like people in Mobile and New Orleans. We'll do our part too and have a dinner of treats for the occasion.

On another shellfish topic, the McLeods from Auburn Fine Gifts have a new book out called "Alabama Shrimp." It's about 100 pages chock full of good ideas about shrimp. There're recipes for you to follow to fix shrimp for about every occasion you can imagine.

I tried the Greek shrimp sauté and found it mighty good. The same was true for Madras shrimp. I'm looking forward to making the corn soup with shiitakes and shrimp. It's sounds unusual and good, too.

Shrimp is an affordable shellfish to have on a regular basis. Most stores have them that have usually been frozen. Sometimes you can find fresh ones. That's when to have them simply prepared so you appreciate their subtle sweetness.

Alabama wild shrimp fresh from the Gulf is a treat not to miss.