

The past Monday we gathered at Jimmy's for quick trip way down south – South America that is. Several people had requested we have that adventure. It sure turned out to be a good one.

We chatted over glasses of Chardonnay and got to know some new guests to these dinners – Neil and Judy Odom. If their clean plates were an accurate indication, I think they had a good time.

Our first course was probably the favorite of the night. It was Chicken Coxinha & Guasacaca. The chicken was simmered in aromatics and then shredded. It was mixed with a concentration of the cooking stock and cream cheese. The chicken mixture was stuffed into pastry balls, coated with bread crumbs and then deep-fried.

Guasacaca is an avocado salsa similar to guacamole. It uses chunks of fresh ripe avocado mixed with tomato, red pepper, chili pepper, onion, garlic, olive oil, mustard and cilantro.

The combination was great. It was certainly a first course that got all our juices flowing.

The wines for the night were from Chile and Argentina. The first was Casa Lapostelle Cuvée Alexandre from the Casablanca Valley in Chile. This was an outstanding Chardonnay – the star wine of the night. The flavors of this one were really good. At a low \$20's price tag, it is a real winner.

Our second course was red fish. OK, how bad could it be using one of the finest fishes you can find? Ours sautéed red fish was topped with a concoction known as Caruru.

The base of our version was ground peanuts and ground, grilled shrimp. Other items were onion, garlic, tomato and okra. The spicy and slightly sweet topping was great with the fish. This is a perfect summertime dish to try with your favorite fish – sautéed or grilled. You can also serve caruru over rice or on bread.

The wine was another one from Chile – Casillero del Diablo Reserve Carmenere. The wine was as fresh and full of flavor as the sauce for the fish. This is a good value and a perfect red for summer.

Now came Sarsa salad. This is a Peruvian dish that proved to be quite interesting. One of its ingredients is the bean we regularly use that gets its name from the capital city – Lima. Yes it's the lima bean. This bean came from Peru.

The other ingredients were things like hominy, tomatoes, green onion, garlic, roasted red peppers, Feta, cilantro and olive oil. This tasty mixture was served on a lettuce leaf and with some fresh chips on the side.

Our wine was made from another South American indigenous grape – Torrontés. The accent is on the last syllable. The winery is Crios in Argentina.

This wine reminds you of Viognier with its floral aromas and sweet fruity edge. This is a very nice white wine for summer drinking. At around \$15, it is a good value.

Our "main course" was really the red fish. Our fourth course had smaller portions. It featured the national dish of Brazil – Feijoada. As I told my guests, there are as many recipes for Feijoada as there are grandmothers.

The Feijoada we had was black beans cooked with pork sausage, pork neck bones and beef chuck. The flavors were rich and intense. It's a mildly seasoned dish that you can add your own zip with a sauce. We used Jimmy's Garlic Habanero hot sauce.

Our Feijoada was served over white rice and orange slices were set along side. Purple potatoes were also served set on top of a spicy cheese sauce.

This was a great plate. The colors were outstanding. The bright purple and orange along with red of the tomato, the black beans and a sprig of green cilantro made for happy eyes.

The taste was just as good. Any long-cooked stew can be really good. Feijoada is one of the best.

Our wine was another from Chile – Terrazas Reserva Malbec. This is a very full-bodied wine with lots of flavor. It will stand up to any grilled food you throw at it. Make sure to get the "reserve" version. It is much better than the regular one.

For dessert we had our version plantain Empanaditas. We used puff pastry rather than a traditional dough. The ripe plantains were cooked in sweetened condensed milk and cream before being wrapped in puff pastry and baked. They were topped with a chocolate sauce and served with sliced strawberries and mangoes.

This was a delightful dessert. It was light and very refreshing. You could do that same filling and put it over pound cake or ice cream. Use bananas if you wish, too. If you use plantains, make sure they are very ripe – almost black. Save the green ones for frying.

Our wine was a Cabernet Sauvignon from Argentina – Gougenheim. This is a nice medium-weight Cab at an affordable price. It was just right with the chocolate.

We sure did enjoy our evening of South American fare. It's always fun to sample what another part of the world considers as "the food we usually have." We always come away with a new favorite. I'm already working on a Jimmy's version of the chicken coxinhas. I'll have them on a menu in June.

Speaking of June, next month is our annual "farmers' market" dinner. I go to the local markets and get the best I can. That's what we'll have supplemented by Alabama seafood and probably some Georgia quail.

Make sure you visit the farmers' markets in Auburn and Opelika. They are starting right now and will keep going all summer. Don't go with preconceived notions of what you want. Just find the best and get to buying.

If you will take along you own shopping bag, you will be doing the farmers and the environment a favor. In fact take two. I'll bet you can fill them with ease.

And to my recent anonymous caller, thank you very much.