

Memorial Day Weekend 2009

Jim Sikes for 052909

Once again we had the chance to celebrate a Memorial Day weekend with what else – food and wine – and plenty of them. I was excited. Saturday was my first real day off from Jimmy's in almost four years.

Let's take a look at the goodies we had, so that you can get some ideas for a weekend feast of your own.

Friday dinner was sort of late after serving lunch and dinner at Jimmy's. After my friends David and Susan Housel left, I sneaked out early to start our little celebration.

When I asked Aimée what she wanted for dinner, she answered, "something yummy." "And some toasted bread would be good, too." Perfect idea I thought.

Between lunch and dinner service, I had made a trip to Wright's Market to get some provisions for the weekend. Susan and the princess were next to me in another line stocking up for their festivities.

Shrimp came to mind. So we had some lightly sautéed shrimp and sliced asparagus sauced with Dijon and Herbsaint in cream. That mixture was served over grilled herb bread. That sure fit the bill as yummy.

Along side came a bottle of Santomé Prosecco. This is a great little Italian sparkling that goes so well with food. Its slightly sweet edge is just right.

The next morning a guest surprised us with a bag of fresh herbs - thyme, oregano, sage, parsley and mint.

A chunk of Prosciutto Picante from my Christmas stash provided the base for lunch that day. Thin slices of the Prosciutto, ripe grapes along with asparagus and cheddar omelets seasoned with fresh thyme and parsley rounded out a great lunch plate.

A reserve Chardonnay from Frei Brothers made for a good choice for wine. It was crisp with good fruit. The reserve bottling is worth the extra expense.

When dinnertime came, slices of alligator sausage started us off. Its slightly smoked flavor set off the rich meat perfectly. What followed was chicken that was slow-cooked with roasted red peppers, garlic, fresh oregano and bay. Along side we had large slices of zucchini.

Wine found its way on to the table. A Carmenere was perfect. It had plenty of fruit and was not too heavy for the chicken.

Sunday lunch consisted of sautéed sea scallops with thick slices of ripe tomatoes topped with fresh tarragon. A splash of tarragon vinegar that we made last summer and olive oil made them just right.

A really nice Rosé – Domaine de Couron - was so good. This wine was pale in color but full in flavor. It is made from 100% Grenache. Look for this one or other Rosés for a treat this summer. They are perfect picnic wines.

Soups are always popular at our house. Since I had saved the scallop pan from lunch, why not make some soup using those flavors as a base? I added some chicken stock and a touch of tomato and cream. With swirls of those fresh herbs all around, it made for a great start to our dinner.

For our main course, we went down the beef road. A beef shoulder roast slowly cooked in stock and onions was just the thing for a cool evening meal. With that we baked purple potatoes. We have some at Jimmy's right now. They are really good. You get a full rich potato flavor and a brilliant purple hue to the flesh.

Our wines were nice and straightforward. A simple Chardonnay and Petite Sirah did the trick. McManis family wines are usually very good and are an excellent value. The Petite Sirah and Viognier are particularly good.

The next morning we actually had breakfast. Crisp toasted herb bread, fresh fruit and a wedge of Port Salut went well with rich chicory-laced coffee. Somehow orange juice seems better in Champagne flutes.

We were back to the oven once again to prepare our main Memorial Day meal. Most ovens are neglected as a regular cooking option. Some folks use it so rarely that their oven becomes additional cabinet space. Take out a rack and a box of cornflakes fits just fine.

This time it was a pork shoulder that was cooking. It rested on a bed of orange peels from breakfast, onions and rosemary. After four hours it was fork tender and so full of flavor. The pork taste was right there.

As for sides, corn and coleslaw hit the spot. The corn was cut fresh from the cob and simmered in cream until tender – about ten minutes. Sprinkling with fresh chives toward the end of cooking, is all it took for a great dish.

Always resist the temptation to over-cook young corn. Bite into a kernel raw. If it's sweet and tender, cook it as little as you can.

The coleslaw was made with fresh olive oil mayo and Dijon mustard. Some Gorgonzola crumbles gave it that special something different.

There's nothing like sparkling wine for a holiday. The one we had was Barefoot sparkling Pinot Grigio. I know it sounds strange. But it's fruity, tasty and quite good. For a casual bubbly it's perfect. A price tag of around \$11 isn't bad either.

That evening was a time to wind down and prepare for a short week. I had placed a food order that morning for delivery on Tuesday. That way we could have food to prepare for lunch at Jimmy's

Dinner was made from the things that didn't get used yet. A slab of Kurabota pork ribs would have to wait. What called out to me were more of that tender sweet corn and the rest of the chicken. The corn straight off the cob was mixed with Dijon, mayo and fresh herbs. Along side we had asparagus with oil and vinegar. Some more of that herb bread finished off the meal.

A cold plate is so satisfying and leaves you cool and refreshed for a nice sleep. A bottle of Riesling proved to be a perfect match for the food. When in doubt, a dry or slightly sweet Riesling will be good company to most food needing white wine. There are a number of them out there at a reasonable cost.

Someone remarked that many people spent their holiday cash on gasoline for boats and wave runners. We were pleased to have used ours to get wine. The fish and wildlife were happier and so were we.