

The week before July 4th marked a vacation break for Jimmy's. Some folks headed to visit family while others crashed at home. Some of us both worked and played.

Since playing doesn't mean not eating, lets' talk about some of the goodies we had. Maybe you can get a few ideas for a celebration time of your own.

There was no better way to start than a simple yellow curry using chicken. Some Basmati rice sprinkled in the braising liquid soaked it up while becoming tender and flavorful. Curries are great hot weather food and make for such an easy late supper.

That first Sunday lunch was simple – fresh tomatoes and basil along with corn salad, slices of Cheddar and rich mayo. Pair that with sparkling Pinot Grigio from Barefoot Cellars and we had a great meal.

That night sure was a great opening to a week of vacation food – a whole red snapper. It was stuffed with tarragon and garlic and baked in foil. The fish had a red luminescence even after cooking. It was an excellent dish.

Along with the snapper was a long eggplant that was halved and then tomato and basil were laid down the center. It was wrapped in foil and baked along with the fish. It was so fragrant and perfect with the fish.

On Monday night another whole fish found its way to our table. This time it was that Gulf favorite: speckled trout. It was opened down the back and stuffed with herbs and lemon and then roasted to tenderness.

Two whole fish in two days was almost sensory overload. If you get a chance to prepare whole, fresh fish, go for it. Season as you wish and wrap in foil. Roast in the oven at 400 for about 15 minutes per inch thickness of the fish.

Otherwise ask your favorite chef to prepare one for you. You can easily feed four that way and they do the clean up.

The next day at lunch we had the left over trout. I made a mousse out of the fish and the soft roasted lemons. I spread it on cucumber slices and topped it with a tarragon leaf.

A bonus from the speckled trout was that she was a girl. So I had two beautiful roe sacks from cleaning the fish. I dusted those with flour and sautéed them lightly in butter. They were served with the mousse and some fresh tomato wedges.

Another day at lunch we had Prosciutto with cheese, olives and some fresh pickled cucumber slices. With warm bread and a bottle of cold Rosé it was a great summer lunch.

A "sardine festival" was in store at another lunch. We had three different kinds including our last can of the ones we bought in Paris. They proved to be a much better souvenir than Eiffel Tower salt and pepper shakers.

On July 4th we started the day with strawberry pancakes. I made them using ripe berries I got from Al Hooks. Lunch was sweet Gala melon, slices of rich Tuscan Salame and wedges of ripe Brie. That and some sparkling wine proved to be a proper feast.

That night we had ribs. The ones from Kurabota pork are so rich and tender. Ours were seasoned with tomato and rosemary. With them we had sweet white corn and fresh pink-eye peas.

Combine all those flavors with a full-bodied California Zinfandel like one from STG and you have a fine experience. Fresh peaches with the last of the wine were just right.

That last Sunday was a real surprise for all. I had steamed and hidden away a lobster. So nobody knew.

The day began with simple cheese biscuits. We made ours but you can use a three-cheese mix from Bisquick that is pretty good. Just use milk instead of water. We had preserves and butter, too.

Lunch was a real treat. It was that big lobster that worked for the whole table. When lobsters reach the 4-pound stage, the swimmer legs and knuckles have real meat – not just little slivers. The claws have one texture and the tail another. There's plenty to go around that way.

Along side were glistening orange slices. Also slow-roasted tomatoes rich in basil and garlic added a full flavor. Their juices and olive oil made a great dipping sauce. We had two other sauces – one of melted local butter and the other of a mayo made using the tomalley and juices from the lobster. Folks ate that last one with a spoon.

There is no better end to a warm day lunch than fresh fruit. Ours was simple – just fresh strawberries and blueberries.

The wine was a Torrantés from Crios. Its fruity fullness was so good with the lobster. It had plenty of nose to be perfect outside.

So all in all it was a good week. Lots of time was spent at my computer writing and doing Jimmy's work. But I got to read three books. That was a joy. I'll tell you about them soon.

If you want to have a vacation experience without the trip, try using food as your base. Get something special. Have a great day eating and remembering trips you have made together. Get out the pictures and look at them again. No one else really wants to see them. But you can re-live some wonderful times and have a perfect day together.

Sounds just fine to me.