



AUSTIN'S CLIMATE AND LEAFY NATIVE PLANTS make the patio welcoming almost year-round. Liz Lambert, second from right, provided the setting, and Paula Disbrowe, far left, cooked up the brunch.



“We call it
Cowgirl Brunch”

When Austin's hippest hotelier and a cookbook author team up for a meal, out come the guitars and ranch dogs and a Texas-size spread of huevos, fiery salsa, and killer margaritas

PRODUCER **KIM SUNÉE** PHOTOGRAPHER **RAY KACHATORIAN**
RECIPE DEVELOPER & WRITER **PAULA DISBROWE**



WHEN I MOVED TO THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY from New York City five years ago to become the chef at a guest ranch, I knew that my life was in for serious upheaval. I enticed my then boyfriend (now husband) David Norman into coming along for the wild ride, and for four years we got to play cowgirl and cowboy—riding horses; hiking canyon trails; and cooking spicy pots of chili, creamy pinto beans, and bubbling pans of enchiladas. The rustic food I prepared at the ranch and the escapades that ensued (rounding up runaway horses, showdowns with wild hogs and scorpions, weighing newborn calves) led to my first cookbook, *Cowgirl Cuisine*, published earlier this year.

We embraced our new life of dusty pickups, cactus blossoms, and fresh eggs with salsa. But cooking three meals a day was exhausting, and living in rural isolation meant forgoing many favorite pastimes: bistros, slingbacks, and parties with friends. When I found myself covered with trail dust, the dogs had tussled with yet another skunk or porcupine, or I was dangerously close to telling guests to make their own damn dinner, I yearned for an urban playground.

When David and I did get an occasional weekend off, we beat it to Austin for honky-tonks, margaritas, and nights at the Hotel San José, a former fleabag on South Congress that was renovated into a beacon of cool. One night I roomed next to Julia Roberts. Another time, for complicated reasons, I had to sneak my three ranch dogs into my room; I rented *Thelma and Louise*, drained >

PAULA SETS UP THE BRUNCH

on the screened porch next to Liz's kitchen. The recipes are adapted from Paula's book, *Cowgirl Cuisine: Rustic Recipes and Cowgirl Adventures from a Texas Ranch* (William Morrow, March 2007), \$29.95; to order call 800/242-7737 or visit harpercollins.com.



FOOD STYLIST: MICHAEL PEDERSON; PROP STYLIST: GENA SIGALA

HOME COOKING IN GOOD COMPANY



HORSE TRADER SALSA

Paula got the idea for this recipe from a friend who crushes his salsa peppers with a heavy can. Her touch, she says, is the fresh thyme, which adds a hint of earthy flavor to balance the heat.

MAKES: about 5½ cups

PREP: 15 minutes

COOK: 25 minutes

1¼ pounds red, green, and yellow jalapeño
and/or serrano peppers, stemmed and seeded
1 large tomato, chopped
1 onion, chopped (about 1 cup)
3 to 4 sprigs fresh thyme
1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste

1. Place all ingredients in a large pot or Dutch oven, and add 2 cups water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat; cover and reduce heat to low. Simmer 25 to 30 minutes, stirring occasionally and adding more water if necessary.

2. Cool mixture, and remove thyme sprigs. Pulse in blender, half at a time, 5 to 6 pulses or until desired consistency. Add more salt, if desired. Store in refrigerator in an airtight container up to 7 days.



LIZ (ON THE STAIRS) AND PAULA PICK PARTY MUSIC in the living room. Texas artifacts line the mantel of the 1920s Austin cottage.

a Dos Equis or two, and “shhh’d” the pups every time they howled at the laughter spilling from the wine bar. The person who pulled such a great place together was someone I wanted to meet.

When the ranch closed, our lives transitioned to Austin. As much as I missed riding the range, I was excited to live in a city we loved. Most of all, I was eager to make new friends and entertain again.

As luck would have it, a friend introduced me to Liz Lambert, owner of the Hotel San José and one of the influential creative forces in the city. I soon discovered that Liz’s personal style is as appealing as her public spaces. Her South Austin bungalow is quietly hip—a private refuge devoted to the art and music that inspire Liz and her partner, singer-songwriter Amy Cook—but also feels geared to entertaining.

On a recent fall afternoon, it occurs to us that we have much to celebrate: Liz has kicked off two new hotel projects, slated to open fall 2008; Liz’s brother, Lou, a talented chef, has opened Lambert’s Downtown Barbecue, where he serves such dishes as Crispy Wild Boar Ribs with Hoisin Sauce; and Amy has just released the achingly beautiful *The Sky Observer’s Guide*. Because I tend to embrace (or manufacture) any reason to celebrate, I offer to pull together a few recipes from my book, and a Cowgirl Brunch is born.

When I arrive, Liz and I crack open cold Shiner Bocks, and she tells me about her house. Like most >



LAST-MINUTE PREP IS LAID-BACK: Paula's Blackberry-Blue Corn Muffins bake in 20 minutes. (See the recipe, page 100.) And with a few simple ingredients, Liz makes margaritas that prove fresh is fast.

IT'S A TALENTED GROUP—Liz's partner, Amy Cook (above), is a singer/songwriter, and Liz's brother, Lou (in background), is a chef.



TWO TEXAS NECESSITIES: a ranch dog and ice-cold beer

things in her world, it has a quirky story. Liz bought the 1920s cottage for a whopping \$1 and moved it—collapsed beams and all—to her corner lot.

She knocked down a few walls to open up the rooms, added a second story, and salvaged the original maple and pine subfloor. “By renovating an old house,” Liz says, “you get the spirit and character of an old structure but you can have the clean lines of a modern house.”

The house is a showcase for art, books, albums, and cherished Texas artifacts like stone, antlers, cacti, candy-colored candles, and funky rock-and-roll prints. Liz's favorite objects include an “impractically long” teak bench designed by a French artist and a red sectional couch that's built to hold half a party and makes an enticing spot for after-hours music.

We set up a buffet in the screened porch adjacent to the kitchen. The enchanted space features cheery Mexican tile and sprawling vines that filter the light. Liz laments that she's been meaning to redesign her kitchen, but I hope she doesn't. I love the poured concrete counters, vintage fridge, and unexpected details: the black-and-white photograph of Allen Ginsberg, a stack of timeworn Moroccan bowls, the >

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”



LIZ BOUGHT HER 1920s cottage for the princely sum of \$1 and had it moved to its current South Austin location.

Chinese glasses she favors for wine. To get things rolling, we set out steely margaritas, tortilla chips, and fiery Horse Trader Salsa. Guests help themselves to steaming bowls of Carrot Habanero Soup, warm Blackberry-Blue Corn Muffins, and Prosciutto-Wrapped Pears with Manchego. We dig into Cowgirl Migas—a traditional Tex-Mex scramble of eggs, corn tortillas, onions, tomatoes, and chiles—and marjoram-scented Turkey Sausage.

We settle on the patio, which is landscaped with native succulents that flourish under the hot Southwestern sun. As cicadas buzz, we talk about things standard at any self-respecting Texas table: the gospel of barbecue (Lou is making his own spicy “Red Hot” links), music (Amy grabs her guitar), and ranch dogs (Liz’s border collies are sprawled at our feet).

As I relax I’m reminded of what I love about Texas: simple food that’s vibrant with heat and flavor; the frequent option to eat outdoors; and friends who agree that there are few things finer than oak trees, the unruly silhouette of agave, sad melodies, and smoked brisket. The afternoon bleeds into evening, and I never do get around to telling Liz about the time I snuck my dogs into the San José—maybe next time. >

All recipes are adapted from *Cowgirl Cuisine: Rustic Recipes and Cowgirl Adventures from a Texas Ranch* by Paula Disbrowe (William Morrow, March 2007); 800/242-7737 or harpercollins.com.



BLACKBERRY-BLUE CORN MUFFINS

If using frozen blackberries, toss with 1 tablespoon flour before adding to the batter. This will prevent them from staining the muffins and sinking to the bottom of the pan. You can also substitute yellow cornmeal for blue cornmeal, but that will affect the muffins’ color.

MAKES: 16 muffins

PREP: 15 minutes

BAKE: 20 minutes

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup blue cornmeal
- 1/2 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups plain yogurt
- 1/3 cup corn oil
- 3 tablespoons maple syrup
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 3 eggs
- 2 generous cups fresh or frozen blackberries

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Grease 2 muffin pans.

2. Whisk together first 6 ingredients in a large bowl. Stir together yogurt and next 4 ingredients in a separate bowl. Fold wet mixture into dry mixture with a rubber spatula until just combined. Fold in berries.

3. Fill muffin cups to top with batter, and bake at 375° for 10 minutes. Rotate pans, and bake 10 to 12 more minutes or until puffed, slightly golden, and a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool muffins in pans 5 minutes before transferring to a cooling rack or parchment paper.

PICK A PEPPER. Paula (below) enlivens her recipes with several varieties, from mild to spicy hot, for authentic Texas flavor.

LIZ'S BROTHER, LOU (bottom), enjoys the food and company while relaxing on the patio.



CARROT HABANERO SOUP

Our Test Kitchen suggests wearing plastic or rubber gloves when working with habaneros or other hot peppers, and wash hands immediately after handling them.

MAKES: about 7 cups **PREP:** 20 minutes **COOK:** 45 minutes

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| 2 tablespoons grapeseed or olive oil | 1 medium sweet potato, peeled and cubed (about 1/2 cup) |
| 1 large leek, thinly sliced (about 1 cup) | 1/4 cup fresh orange juice |
| 1 onion, diced (about 1 cup) | 1 teaspoon ground cumin |
| 1 (16-ounce) package baby carrots | 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander |
| 1 garlic clove, minced | 1 tablespoon honey |
| 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger | 1/2 teaspoon salt, plus more to taste |
| 1/2 to 1 habanero pepper, seeded and finely chopped | GARNISHES: fresh cilantro and <i>crema</i> , sour cream, or plain yogurt |
| 1/4 cup dry white wine | |
| 6 cups chicken stock or water | |

1. Heat oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add leek, onion, and carrots; sauté 7 minutes or until onion and leek are tender. Add garlic, ginger, and habanero; sauté 2 minutes more. Stir in wine, scraping up any browned bits from bottom of pot. Add stock or water and sweet potato; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, partially cover, and simmer 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Stir in orange juice, cumin, and coriander.

2. Remove from heat, and let cool slightly. Process in blender, half at a time, until smooth. Return mixture to pot, and stir in honey and salt; cover and warm over medium heat 5 minutes or until heated through. Ladle into bowls; garnish, if desired. >



MANCHEGO-STUFFED PEARS WITH PROSCIUTTO

We prefer this warm out of the oven with a peppery arugula salad. You can substitute dried figs for pears; simply cut a small slit from stem to bottom of fruit, and insert cheese. Wrap with prosciutto, and place on baking sheet. Proceed with Step 3. You can also use larger varieties of pear; cut them into 1-inch-thick slices.

MAKES: 8 servings

PREP: 15 minutes

BAKE: 15 minutes

- 8 Seckel pears
- Olive oil
- 4 ounces manchego cheese, cut into 16 pieces (about 1/2-inch cubes)
- 4 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Slice pears in half, and scoop out cores with a melon baller. Leave stems intact. Brush cut sides with olive oil, and place on a baking sheet, cut sides up. Bake at 350° for 7 to 8 minutes or until tender but not overly soft. Remove from oven, and let cool slightly.

2. Place a cube of cheese in core of each pear half; wrap with a 1- to 1 1/2-inch-wide strip of prosciutto (half to one-third of a normal slice). Return to baking sheet, keeping seam under pear. (Proceed with Step 3, or cover with plastic wrap and chill up to 4 hours.)

3. Bake at 350° for 8 to 10 minutes or until cheese begins to melt. Serve warm.

HOME COOKING

TURKEY SAUSAGE WITH MARJORAM

To make ahead, complete Step 1; cover and refrigerate up to one day. Proceed with Step 2 once ready to serve.

MAKES: 8 patties
(4 to 6 servings)

PREP: 10 minutes

COOK: 6 minutes

- 1 pound ground turkey (15% fat)
- ½ onion or 2 large shallots, minced (optional)
- ½ teaspoon red bell pepper flakes
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh marjoram
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

- 1. Combine** all ingredients gently with hands in a mixing bowl. Do not overwork. Shape into 8 (3-inch) rounds.
- 2. Heat** a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Sear patties until browned and just cooked through, about 3 to 5 minutes per side.



COWGIRL MIGAS

This healthier, low-fat version of migas, a classic Tex-Mex breakfast dish, is loaded with lots of fresh vegetables.

MAKES: 4 servings **PREP:** 20 minutes **COOK:** 15 minutes

- 3 (5½-inch) corn tortillas, plus more for serving
 - 2 large whole eggs
 - 6 egg whites
 - ½ teaspoon kosher salt
 - ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 - Dash of hot sauce
 - 1 tablespoon olive oil
 - 1 small red onion, chopped (about ½ cup)
 - 1 yellow, orange, or red bell pepper, chopped
 - 2 serrano chiles, stemmed and seeded, if desired, and sliced into half moons
 - 3 plum tomatoes, seeded and diced
 - ½ cup nopalitos, rinsed, patted dry, and coarsely chopped*
 - ⅓ cup chopped fresh cilantro
 - 2 ounces (about ½ cup) finely grated cojita or other aged cheese such as Parmesan or queso anejo, if desired
 - Salsa
- GARNISHES:** fresh cilantro sprigs, lime wedges

- 1. Toast** 3 tortillas over a gas flame until charred and blistered but not too dark. (If you don't have a gas range, toast in a dry skillet over medium-high heat until slightly dark and fragrant.) Let cool slightly, then chop into ½-inch squares. Set aside.
- 2. Pour** eggs and egg whites into small bowl. Add kosher salt, pepper, and hot sauce; beat lightly with a fork.
- 3. Heat** olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion, bell pepper, and chiles; sauté 4 to 5 minutes or until softened. Add tomato, and cook 4 minutes or until it begins to break down. Add chopped tortilla, and stir until moistened and any juices have been absorbed. Add egg mixture, nopalito, and cilantro. Cook, stirring occasionally with a spatula, until eggs have just set. Top with cheese. Serve warm with tortillas and salsa, and garnish, if desired.

*Nopalitos, or pickled cactus paddles, are commonly partnered with eggs in Central Texas and are a delicious addition to migas. Sold in jars in the condiment or ethnic sections of many grocery stores, they have a mild green flavor that resembles well-cooked green beans (which can be used as a substitute). ■