

Kevin Belton's *Cookin' Louisiana: Flavors from the Parishes of the Pelican State*

Kevin Belton

Denny Culbert, Photographer

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Television chef Kevin Belton's *Cookin' Louisiana* is an exuberant tasting tour of the state's sixty-four parishes. Seafood is king here, but there are numerous other beloved local ingredients, from andouille to citrus to tasso, described in colorful photographs, words, and recipes.

With sincere appreciation for the cultural melange of its distinctive culinary heritage, the book introduces the delights of Cajun country, river parishes, the Sportsman's Paradise region, New Orleans, and the regions tucked in between. Its recipe introductions are warm and personal, relating tales of fishing trips, food festivals, and even the Beltons' wedding ceremony. A friendly, conversational style prevails in both the text and the cooking instructions.

The unfussy recipes showcase iconic flavors and ingredients. There's French-steeped Cajun cooking, but also influences from Hungary, the Philippines, Africa, and Spain. Iberia Parish sugar cane is featured in unusual grilled pork and shrimp on cane skewers and Cane Syrup Cake, while Zwolle Hot Tamales from Sabine Parish on the Texas border show off Latino roots.

Simplicity reigns, though knowing how to fry and stew is a given. This is joyful party food meant to be shared with others, hearty and layered with flavors. Recipe introductions evidence a strong love for Louisiana heritage and appreciation for the abundance of locally harvested ingredients. As the book notes, "Living in Louisiana is like living in a pantry," and the recipes here include creative takes on traditional dishes and new ways to use the local bounty, as with Stuffed Mirlitons, Boudin-Stuffed Pork Chops, and Breakfast Paella.

Kevin Belton's Cookin' Louisiana is a great resource for anyone wanting to learn more about regional American food traditions or who may be contemplating a foodcentric road trip to the Pelican State. Its endearing storytelling, tempting recipes, and evocative photographs are a beguiling combination.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2021)

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