

ON FOOD: B&B breakfasts prove best treat in Taos

[TERESA FARNEY](#)

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You might think that the best perk involved with judging the Southwest Wine Competition in Taos, N.M., held in June, would be tasting hundreds of wines.

While that's nice, a bigger perk is getting to stay at one of the many bed-and-breakfasts in the little town.

They are fun for me because I love how creative the innkeepers are with the main event: breakfast.

A regular breakfast recipe I've used, Gourmet Stuffed French Toast, was courtesy of host and chef Charles Clamurro of the American Artists Gallery House Bed and Breakfast Inn, where I stayed last year.

This year, I stayed at La Posada de Taos B&B, where Michael Carter amazed us each morning with some great taste sensations. He's a self-taught cook who relies on Susan Purdy's "Pie in the Sky" cookbook to adjust recipes for high altitude. It's one of my favorite cookbooks for high-altitude cooking, too.

The recipes that I came home with, however, were his own creations: Red Chile Piñon Scones and Herb-Baked Eggs. He had adjusted the recipes with tips from Purdy's cookbook.

The scones had just a hint of chile heat, which made for an interesting morning treat. Though they were not served the morning we had the herb eggs, I personally like having them with the egg dish. The egg dish is mildly flavored with Italian seasoning and the combo with the chile flavor is a winner to me.

The eggs were prepared in individual ramekins for the four of us staying at the inn. But if you are making this for a larger group, it can be prepared in a 13-by-9-inch glass baking dish.

To do that, melt a stick of butter in the baking dish. Carefully break one dozen eggs into the baking dish, and pour 1 cup of half-and-half around the edges and in between the eggs. Sprinkle with ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese, 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning, salt and pepper. Place the baking dish into a larger dish, and fill the larger dish with boiling water about halfway up the sides of the smaller dish. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 to 30 minutes, until the eggs are slightly firm. Dust with paprika and serve.

Another variation of the recipe is to substitute tarragon for the Italian seasoning, place cubes of the Brie cheese on top of the eggs instead of the Parmesan and omit the paprika.

Carter served the egg dish with chicken breakfast sausage links. We started the meal with fresh fruit and glasses of blueberry and pomegranate juice, my new favorite breakfast juice. He said it was a Minute Maid product, but I could not find it in our local stores. But I did find a blueberry and pomegranate juice by Old Orchard Premium at King Soopers that was just as delicious. It's in the freezer section of the grocery store.

Here are the scone, egg and French toast recipes.

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Reach Farney at 636-0271 or teresa.farney@gazette.com.
She appears Tuesdays on KOAA's Comcast Channel 9 at 4 p.m.

RED CHILE PIÑON SCONES

Yield: 16 scones

6 tablespoons cold unsalted butter
2 cups flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
3 tablespoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1 tablespoon mild red chili powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup toasted pine nuts
1 cup buttermilk
1 egg white, lightly beaten
1/4 cup turbinado sugar

Procedure:

1. Line baking sheet with parchment. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2. In food processor, cut butter into dry ingredients until it is small pea-size. Remove to medium bowl and add nuts and buttermilk. Combine with a fork.
3. Turn out onto lightly floured surface and knead 2-3 times. Divide dough in half, pat each into a 1/2-inch-thick circle and cut into 8 triangles. Place on baking sheet. Brush with egg white and sprinkle with sugar. Bake 13 to 16 minutes.

SOURCE: Michael Carter of La Pasada de Taos in Taos, N.M.

GOURMET STUFFED FRENCH TOAST

Yield: 12 servings

TOAST:

18 slices sourdough bread
8 ounces cream cheese
1/2 cup sour cream, softened
5 ounces raspberry preserves
2 ounces Chambord liqueur
1/4 cup half-and-half
1 tablespoon grated orange peel
1 tablespoon cinnamon
1/2 tablespoon nutmeg
6 large eggs, beaten

TOPPING:

2 cups fresh or frozen raspberries
3/4 cup brown sugar
3 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon cinnamon
1 1/2 tablespoons Chambord

Procedure:

1. For the toast, match the slices of bread into pairs. Mix together cream cheese and sour cream. Spread on each slice of bread.
2. Mix raspberry preserves with Chambord. Spread a layer of raspberry mixture between two slices of bread and make a sandwich. Set sandwiches aside. (Sandwiches can be made and refrigerated the night before.)
3. In medium bowl, with wire whisk, beat together half-and-half, orange peel, cinnamon and nutmeg. Add eggs and beat together until mixture is smooth.
4. Spray large frying pan with nonstick cooking spray and turn on medium heat until hot. One at a time, dip each sandwich in egg wash. Grill until golden brown. Finished French toast can stand in a warm oven until ready for serving.
5. For the raspberry sauce topping, cook together raspberries, brown sugar, butter and cinnamon over low heat in nonstick pan until it becomes a consistent syrup. Add Chambord.
6. Cut finished sandwiches on bias. Arrange 3 halves on plate and sprinkle with powdered sugar. Spoon raspberry sauce over corners of French toast and serve immediately. Garnish with fresh fruit, such as melon, pineapple, kiwi and/or orange slices.

SOURCE: American Artists Gallery House in Taos, N.M.

HERB-BAKED EGGS

Yield: 1 serving

1 tablespoon butter
2 eggs
1 tablespoons half-and-half
2 teaspoons grated Parmesan cheese
Salt and pepper, to taste
1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning
2 tablespoons grated sharp cheddar cheese
Paprika

Procedure:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Melt butter in ramekin in microwave.
2. Break eggs into ramekin. Pour half-and-half around eggs. Sprinkle with cheese, salt and pepper, Italian seasoning and cheddar. 3. Place ramekin in hot water bath in oven-safe dish. Bake 20-30 minutes, or until eggs are slightly set. Sprinkle with paprika.

SOURCE: Michael Carter of La Pasada de Taos in Taos, N.M.