

GOODlife



Chef Steve LaCount's new restaurant, Chiara, is a family endeavor. His wife, daughters, brother — even his niece and brother-in-law — all play a part.

Backyard *bistro*

WESTWOOD CHEF COOKS UP A GARDEN PARTY

BY LAUREN BECKHAM FALCONE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TARA CARVALHO

Steve LaCount knows a good outdoor party.

As the executive chef at The Country Club in Brookline, he created plenty of al fresco feasts for the glitterati, including presidents, movie stars and golf and tennis stars. But last June, the 47-year-old chef left the club (he'd worked there for 34 years) to pursue his

longtime dream: owning his own restaurant.

In December, LaCount opened Chiara, a sophisticated bistro in Westwood, named for his grandmother. He's got the rest of the family on his team, too: his daughter Tricia, is the wine director; his niece, Jennifer Higgins, works as garmange (cold food prep cook);

his brother-in-law, Kevin Walsh, opens the place; his brother, Bill LaCount, is a server; and his wife, Michelle, is resident jack-of-all trades when she can spare time from her full-time gig as a food broker. LaCount's other daughter, Kristen, is an assistant clubhouse manager at The Country Club, but helps out whenever she can, and

her boyfriend, Dan Kerrigan, is the restaurant's general manager. So it's no wonder LaCount, who lives in Norwood, likes to break bread with the family. We've got his menu (at right) for gourmet garden party; recipes begin below.

LANDSCAPING BY **MAHONEY'S GARDEN CENTER**. **MEADOWCRAFT CAMBRIDGE DINING TABLE AND CORTES DINING CHAIRS; NAPA TERRAZZOLITE TABLE, BENCHES AND PLANTERS; ALL AT MAHONEY'S** (CALL FOR PRICES AND AVAILABILITY). LIGHTING BY **CAST LIGHTING FIXTURES**.



SPRING GARDEN PARTY FOR 8

Chilled Fresh Pea Soup with Truffled *Crème Fraîche*
Arugula and Frisée Salad with Heirloom Tomato and Avocado Timbale

THREE TASTES OF SALMON:

Classic Salmon Rilette on Brioche Toast with Fried Capers

Cilantro-Cured Gravlox with Yellow Baby Pear Tomato Salsa

Mustard-and-Tarragon Crusted Salmon Fillets with Lemon Aloli

Dessert:

Lemon Mascarpone Tart with Blueberry Coulis

WINE:

Domaine Reverdy, Sancerre, 2004

COCKTAIL:

Spring Tea-ni

A LITTLE MOOD MUSIC

Great parties need great food, a great setting — and great tunes. Here's Chef Steve LaCount's suggested playlist for your garden party:

1. "La Dona," Gipsy Kings
2. "Cabaret," Louis Armstrong
3. "The Very Thought of You," Nancy Wilson version
4. "Me & My Gin," Dinah Washington
5. "Into the Mystic," Van Morrison
6. "Makin' Whoopee," Dr. John
7. "Moonglow," Tony Bennett with k.d. lang
8. "My Cherie Amour," Stevie Wonder
9. "That Sunday, That Summer," Natalie Cole
10. "You Don't Know Me," Ray Charles with Diana Krall

Three tastes of salmon: Classic rilette on brioche toast, far left; cilantro-cured gravlax on yellow tomato salsa, center; and mustard-and-tarragon crusted salmon fillets with lemon aioli.



CILANTRO-CURED GRAVLAX WITH YELLOW BABY PEAR TOMATO SALSA

For the gravlax:

2 oz. fresh cilantro
1 lb. fresh salmon fillet
6 oz. kosher salt
4 oz. brown sugar

For the salsa:

¼ small red onion, finely chopped
½ red pepper, finely chopped
juice of 1 lime
3 T. olive oil
¼ bunch fresh cilantro, chopped
¼ pint yellow pear tomatoes, quartered
salt and pepper
½ jalapeño pepper (optional)

Prepare the gravlax (NOTE — The salmon needs to cure for at least 24 hours; 36 hours is optimal): Press the cilantro onto the salmon fillet. Mix salt and sugar together and press onto both sides of the fish. Wrap in cheesecloth and weigh down with a grate overnight. Turn the fish over and weigh down again. Total pressing time of 36 hours is best.

Unwrap and wash off excess salt and sugar, but try to leave cilantro on the flesh. Slice paper thin as needed. Serve with red and yellow baby pear tomato salsa.

Prepare the salsa: Mix ingredients in a bowl. Yields 1 c. salsa.

MUSTARD-AND-TARRAGON CRUSTED SALMON FILLETS WITH LEMON AIOLI

For the salmon:

1 lb. fresh salmon fillets, cut into 2 oz. cubes
2 T. dijon mustard
½ bunch fresh tarragon, chopped
salt and pepper
4 T. olive oil

For the aioli:

¾ c. pasteurized egg yolks
½ c. lemon juice
zest of 4 lemons
2 c. corn oil
2 c. olive oil
salt and pepper

Prepare the salmon: Brush the top side of the fillets with the mustard and press the tarragon onto them. Season with salt and pepper. Place olive oil in non-stick skillet and heat till it is very hot. Place the salmon pieces in the oil top side down and sear quickly until golden brown. Turn over and repeat. Cook only until center reaches medium-rare. Chill before serving.

Prepare the aioli: Place egg yolks and lemon juice in food processor. Run on high speed and pour oils into feed tube in a slow stream, until mixture is emulsified. Season to taste and add lemon zest. The final product should be thick like mayonnaise — if too thin, stream in more oil.

To serve: Spread a pool of aioli in the center of each plate. Top with chilled salmon fillet.

CLASSIC SALMON RILLETTE ON BRIOCHE TOAST WITH FRIED CAPERS

For rilette:

½ c. dry white wine
juice of 1 lemon
1 bay leaf
½ carrot, peeled and diced
salt and black peppercorns
¼ c. fresh salmon pieces
¼ c. smoked salmon, julienned into small pieces
1 shallot, finely diced
1 lemon, zested and juiced
2 T. capers, chopped
2 T. fresh dill, chopped fine
3 oz. butter
3 oz. cream cheese
3 1-inch-thick slices brioche, crusts trimmed and each cut into 3 pieces

For the fried capers (optional):

2 t. capers, patted dry
¼ c. flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
1 splash milk
olive oil for frying

Prepare the salmon: Place wine, lemon juice, bay leaf, carrot, salt and peppercorns in a pot, bring to a boil and cook for a few minutes. Strain and return to pot — add the fresh salmon pieces and poach until just cooked. Strain and cool the fish. Shred the fresh salmon by hand into a medium bowl. Add smoked salmon, shallots, lemon juice, zest, capers and dill, and season with salt and pepper. Place butter and cream cheese in food processor and puree until creamy and soft. Add puree to bowl and fold all ingredients together. Chill for a while until spreadable.

Fry capers: Dip capers in milk and dredge in seasoned flour. Fry in hot oil and drain onto paper towels.

To serve: Spread salmon rilette on pieces of toasted brioche bread and top with fried capers.



LEMON MASCARPONE TART WITH BLUEBERRY COULIS

⅓ c. sugar
3 eggs
2 egg yolks
¼ lb. cream cheese, softened
¼ lb. mascarpone cheese
zest of 2 lemons
⅓ c. lemon juice
½ T. vanilla extract
pinch of nutmeg
¼ c. heavy cream
¼ c. flour
one prebaked 9-inch tart shell
(see recipe below for pate brisée)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Blend sugar, eggs, cream cheese, mascarpone and lemon zest briefly in mixer — do not over mix. Scrape down the bowl and paddle. Add the juice, vanilla and nutmeg gradually while mixing. Scrape sides again, then gradually add the cream and mix only to blend. Pour into pre-baked shell. Bake at 350 degrees, no fan, for 25 to 35 minutes. Cool, and top with desired topping or sauce.

PÂTE BRISÉE

18 oz. all-purpose flour
¼ c. sugar
1 t. salt
9 oz. (1 ¼ sticks) butter, cut into ½ -inch cubes
½ -½ c. ice water

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix flour, sugar, salt and butter in electric mixer with a paddle on low speed until butter is pea-sized. Add water and mix briefly or until rough dough is formed. Chill for one hour. Flour rolling pin and surface — roll dough to ⅛ inch thick. Form into tart shells and prick all over with a fork. Blind bake (place pie weights or handful of dried beans in each tart shell) at 350 degrees for 10 minutes.

BLUEBERRY COULIS

½ c. sugar
½ c. water
juice of 1 lemon
½ pint fresh blueberries

Bring sugar and water to a boil. Add blueberries and cook until soft. Cool to room temperature. Puree in food processor. Strain and add lemon juice. Cool until ready to serve.



CHILLED FRESH PEA SOUP WITH TRUFFLED CRÈME FRAÎCHE

¼ lb. butter (½ stick)
1 rib celery, peeled and chopped
1 small Spanish onion, peeled and chopped
1 small potato, peeled and chopped
1 ½ c. chicken or vegetable stock
2 c. fresh green peas, shucked and rinsed (set aside ¼ c. for garnish)
½ C. pea tendrils
olive oil
salt and white pepper
1 c. light cream
2 t. white truffle oil
3 T. crème fraîche

For the soup: Melt butter in a pot, add the celery and onion and cook until translucent. Add the potatoes and stock and bring to a boil. Cook until potato is tender. Add the peas and cook for a few minutes.

Remove from heat and blend soup carefully — do not overblend! Strain the soup and season to taste with salt and white pepper. Add light cream and adjust seasoning as necessary. Cool immediately in shallow container to preserve the bright color.

For the garnishes: Toss pea tendrils with a little olive oil, salt and pepper in a small bowl. In a separate bowl, toss reserved peas with olive oil, salt and pepper. Mix truffle oil and crème fraîche in a third bowl.

To serve: Pour soup into bowls; garnish center of each bowl with dressed pea tendrils, and sprinkle a few dressed peas around the outer edge. Drizzle creme fraiche around pea-tendrils garnish.

ARUGULA & FRISÉE SALAD WITH HEIRLOOM TOMATO & AVOCADO TIMBALE

2 ripe avocados, peeled and chopped
juice of 1 lime

1 T. cilantro, chopped
salt and pepper
1 ½ lb. heirloom tomatoes
(try a mix of Brandywine, yellow and green zebra-striped for best visual effect), seeded and chopped

½ c. extra virgin olive oil

4 c. baby arugula

4 c. frisée lettuce

⅓ c. pecorino cheese shavings
aged balsamic vinegar

Oil eight 3- to 4-inch ring molds. Toss chopped avocado with lime juice and cilantro in a small bowl; in a separate bowl, toss tomatoes with ¼ c. olive oil, salt and pepper. Spoon dressed avocado into bottom half of each ring mold; fill the rest of the way with dressed tomato and press down slightly to eliminate gaps between the tomatoes and avocado.

To serve: Toss lettuces with ¼ c. olive oil, half the balsamic vinegar and salt and pepper to taste. Unmold the tomato/avocado timbale onto serving plates. Place small pile of salad onto each plate next to the timbale and top greens with pecorino cheese shavings. Drizzle aged balsamic vinegar around the plate. Serve immediately.



SPRING TEA-NI

chamomile-infused Grey Goose Vodka
dried strawberries
limoncello di Roma sugar

For the vodka: Take half Grey Goose, half Grey Goose Citron and infuse with chamomile tea (6-10 bags). The vodka needs to be heated up. You can cool it down after it is hot for about 20 minutes. Also, add enough fresh strawberries. Let infuse for a MINIMUM of a week.

Strain the vodka into an empty bottle, making sure to have no trace of loose chamomile or strawberries.

To serve: Over ice in a shaker, add infused vodka, limoncello, and a dash of sour mix. Shake, strain into a martini glass. Glass has half-sugared rim. Garnish with chamillo tea, which is chamomile tea with dried strawberries.