

Spice Odyssey

The subtle aromas and bold flavors of world spices often inspire creativity in the kitchen, which was a driving factor behind John Beaver and Erica Perez's decision to open Oaktown Spice Shop. Exotic varieties of sea salt and peppercorns, single-origin yellow cardamom pods and sumac, and Saigon cinnamon are among the hundreds of colorful and pungent spices lining the shelves at the busy store in Oakland's Grand Lake district. Beaver and Perez launched Oaktown in 2011, after moving to the East Bay and discovering that their new food-centric city lacked a spice shop. The venture took off, and they plan to open a second location in November on Solano Avenue, in Albany. Many chefs incorporate Oaktown's spices into their dishes for bright pops of flavor. You can do the same by refreshing your spice rack and following these four recipes from East Bay restaurants. oaktownspiceshop.com

{ BAHARAT POWDER }

{ PERSIAN LIME CURRY RUB }

{ URFA BIBER }

{ SHICHIMI TOGARASHI }

{ CARDAMOM }

{ UMAMI SEA SALT }

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Edited by Lauren Bonney



WEDDING PUNCH

Courtesy of Rooftop Restaurant and Bar, Walnut Creek

WEDDING PUNCH

- » Ice
- » 1.5 ounces St. George Terroir gin
- » .75 ounces lemon juice
- » .75 ounces Dolin dry vermouth
- » .5 ounces orange curaçao
- » .75 ounces cardamom simple syrup (see below)
- » 1 orange
- » Oaktown's ground cardamom

Put ice in a shaker, combine all ingredients except for the orange and ground cardamom, shake, and pour into a glass. Garnish with an orange slice and a sprinkle of powdered cardamom.

CARDAMOM SIMPLE SYRUP

- » Oaktown's single-origin yellow cardamom pods
- » 1 cup organic cane sugar
- » 1 cup water

Toast a few cardamom pods in a skillet over medium heat until they brown (about 3 minutes). Place pods in a pitcher, and muddle them to extract the oils. Boil the water, and pour it over toasted and muddled cardamom. Steep for about 2-3 minutes, then strain through a conical strainer into another pitcher.

Combine hot cardamom-infused water and sugar, and stir until sugar is completely dissolved. Pour syrup into a bottle or resealable container.



Z'AATAR FLATBREAD WITH BABA GHANOUSH AND ROASTED CAULIFLOWER

Courtesy of Christian Fidelis de Goes, co-owner of Crispian Bakery, Alameda

BABA GHANOUSH

- » 3 large eggplants
- » 1 tablespoon salt, plus more for sprinkling
- » Extra virgin olive oil, for roasting
- » ½ cup butter
- » 1 tablespoon Oaktown's *baharat* powder
- » ¼ cup lemon juice
- » 3 tablespoons tahini

Peel and slice eggplant into 1-inch-thick discs, sprinkle them lightly with salt, and set on top of paper towels to drain for at least half an hour. Squeeze out extra liquid by hand, sprinkle with extra virgin olive oil, and roast in a 350°F oven until charred on the outside and creamy on the inside—approximately 20-30 minutes. Meanwhile, melt butter in a large pot, and cook over low heat until the butter browns. (Be careful not to let it burn.) Add *baharat* powder, stirring for about 20 seconds to let spices bloom in the hot butter. Add lemon juice to stop the cooking process (being careful not to get splashed by hot butter), then add tahini, and mix thoroughly to combine. Transfer eggplant to the bowl of a food processor, and pulse until a rough paste forms. As the machine is running, slowly start to drizzle in tahini and butter mixture until evenly incorporated. Taste puree before adding any salt, as some salt may remain from the draining process.

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FRIED CHICKEN

- » 1 pound boneless chicken thighs
- » Pinch of salt
- » Pinch of pepper
- » 2 ounces water
- » 1 ounce potato or corn starch
- » 2 teaspoons shio koji (optional)
- » 2 quarts soybean oil
- » Oaktown's shichimi togarashi and/or umami sea salt

Cut chicken into bite-sized pieces. Marinate chicken in salt, pepper, water, potato (or corn) starch, and shio koji (optional) for a few hours.

Deep-fry marinated meat in oil at 350°F for 3-4 minutes. Remove chicken from oil, and let sit for 5-10 minutes on a cooling rack.

Cut into the middle of one of the fattest pieces, and see how much it's cooked. (If not cooked through, repeat previous step once more.)

After chicken has rested, place it back in the oil for 1-2 minutes to reheat and make it crispy.

Toss fried chicken with Oaktown's shichimi togarashi (spicy) or umami sea salt. (Sprinkle with salt to taste with shichimi togarashi.)

SHICHIMI WATERMELON

- » 1 watermelon
- » Oaktown's shichimi togarashi
- » Salt
- » Greens (optional)
- » Fried edamame (optional)

Slice watermelon, and season with shichimi togarashi and salt to taste. Add greens with your favorite dressing and some fried edamame.

FRIED CHICKEN WITH SHICHIMI WATERMELON

Courtesy of Aburaya, Oakland



- » Ice
- » Water
- » 3 egg yolks
- » 1 cup sugar
- » 1 cup whole milk
- » 2 cups heavy cream
- » ½ cup coconut milk
- » 1 teaspoon salt
- » 3 tablespoons Oaktown's Persian lime curry rub
- » 1 lime; juice and zest

Fill a large bowl with ice and a little water to create an ice bath. Put a smaller bowl in the ice bath, and fit it with a fine mesh strainer.

In a medium bowl, combine egg yolks and sugar, and whisk until well-blended.

In a saucepan, combine milk, cream, and coconut milk, and cook over medium heat until hot but not boiling (about 170 degrees on a thermometer).

Add about ½ cup of hot milk and cream to the eggs, and immediately whisk to combine before adding another ½ cup of milk and cream, whisking to combine ingredients. Repeat until half of the milk mixture is combined with the eggs. This is called tempering, and once you're halfway, you can pour the egg and milk mixture back into the saucepan with remaining milk.

Return saucepan to stove, and cook mixture over medium heat, stirring constantly with a rubber spatula. Be sure to get all of the bottom and sides, otherwise you'll have little bits of overdone custard.

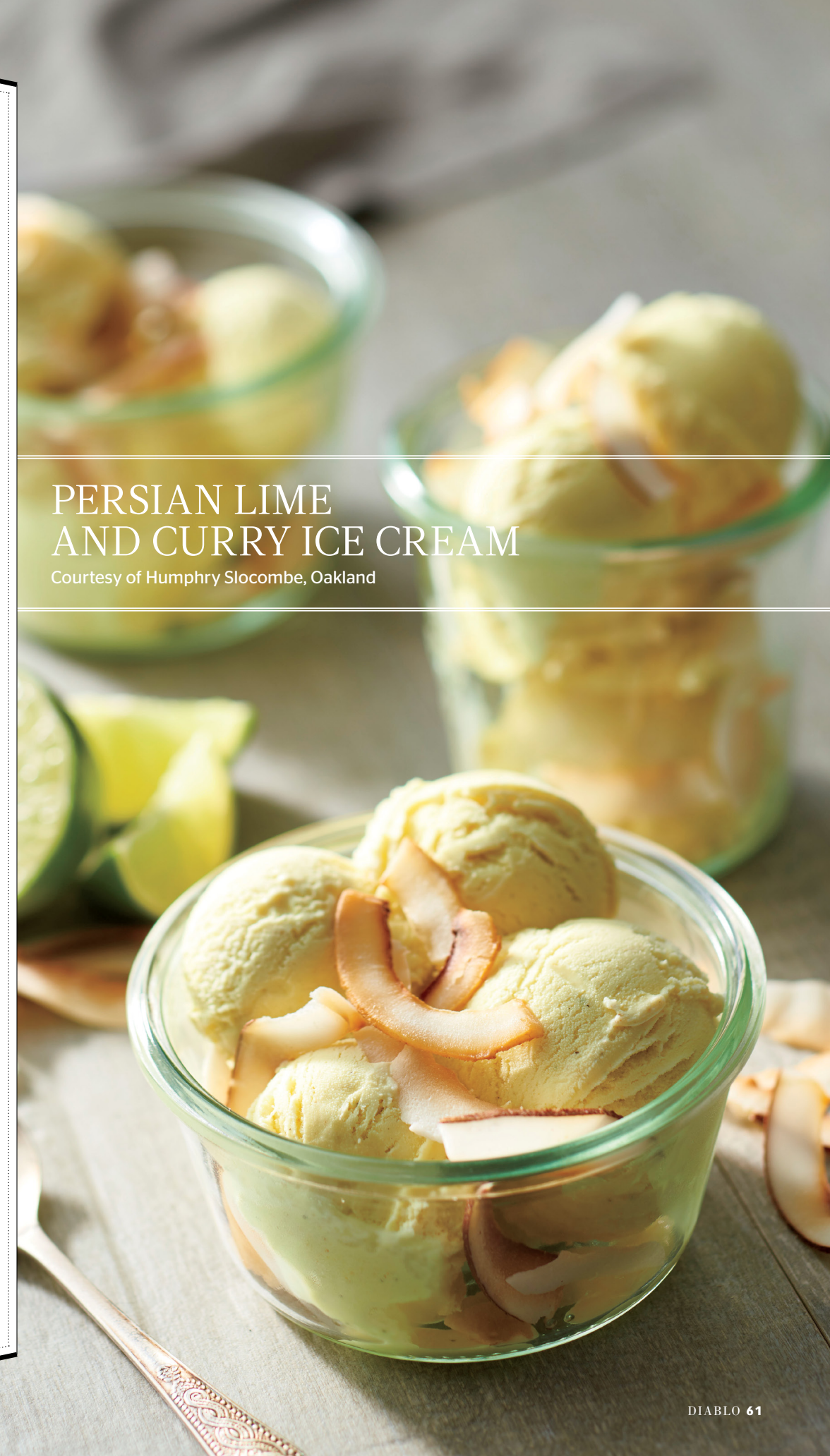
The custard is finished once it has thickened and coats the back of your spatula; this takes about 10 minutes.

Pour mixture through fine mesh strainer to remove any cooked egg bits. Add spice rub and salt, and let mixture cool by resting it in the ice bath, stirring occasionally. Once it has cooled completely, cover bowl, and place it in the fridge for at least one hour, but ideally overnight.

Once your custard base has fully cooled, add lime zest and juice, then churn it in your ice-cream maker according to the manufacturer's directions. Place it in Tupperware or another airtight container, and allow to freeze overnight to harden.

PERSIAN LIME AND CURRY ICE CREAM

Courtesy of Humphry Slocombe, Oakland



SPICE ODYSSEY
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ROASTED CAULIFLOWER

- » 1 head cauliflower, trimmed and cut into 8 wedges
- » 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- » Kosher salt
- » Oaktown's *urfa biber*

Preheat the oven to 500°F with a heavy rimmed baking sheet inside. Toss cauliflower in olive oil in a bowl, and season with salt and *urfa biber* to taste. Carefully add the cauliflower to the hot pan, return to oven, and roast for about 20 minutes. Flip the wedges halfway through to ensure even cooking.

ZA'ATAR FLATBREAD

- » 326 grams bread flour
- » 204 grams water
- » 8 grams salt
- » 162 grams poolish (see below)
- » Extra virgin olive oil
- » Oaktown's za'atar

POOLISH

- » 81 grams bread flour
- » 81 grams water
- » Small pinch of active dry yeast

Mix all three ingredients together until everything is homogeneous. Cover and set aside in a warm place (ideally 75°F) for 12 hours.

FLATBREAD

In a large bowl, mix bread flour, water, salt, and poolish until a shaggy mass forms. Transfer dough to the counter, and knead by hand for about 8-10 minutes, or in a mixer with a dough hook for 5 minutes.

Transfer to a bowl, and cover with plastic wrap; set aside. After 1 hour, fold dough over on itself, and put it back in the bowl with the smooth side facing up for another hour. Divide dough into two pieces. Form each piece in a ball, and put it in the fridge for up to 24 hours.

When you're ready to bake, preheat an oven with a pizza stone to 500°F. Roll out dough into a rectangle about 12 inches by 6 inches, brush with extra virgin olive oil, sprinkle the top with za'atar, and put it on the hot stone in the oven. Bake for approximately 7 minutes, until it's light and fluffy.

Smear the flatbread with baba ghanoush, and top with cauliflower and a dollop of plain whole-milk yogurt. ■

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