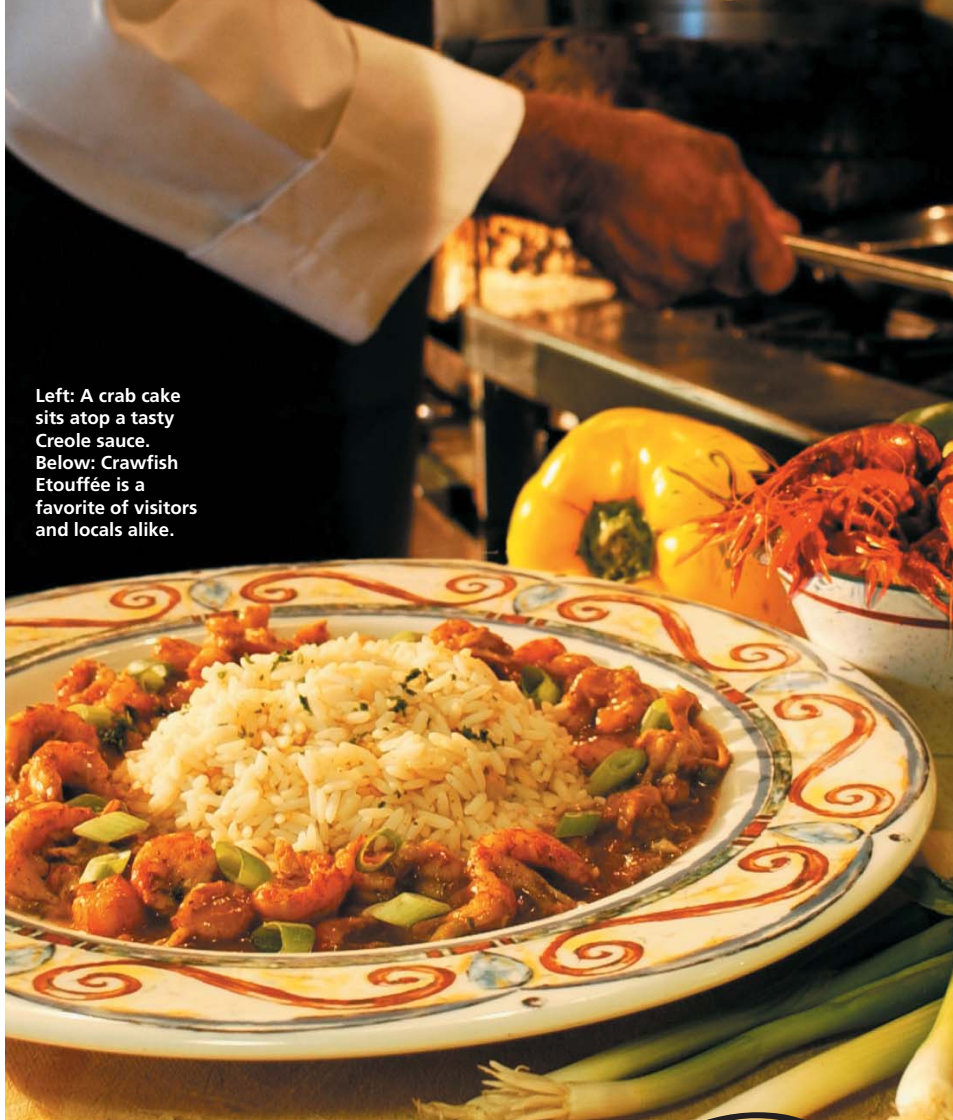




MT B5



Left: A crab cake sits atop a tasty Creole sauce. Below: Crawfish Etouffée is a favorite of visitors and locals alike.

BY SUSAN B. BARNES

In my family, food has a starring role in every get together and on vacations. We may not remember who all was there, but we can remember what side dishes were served. My husband Josh and my trip to New Orleans wouldn't be any different; we had just a few days to spend in the city known for its culinary flair, and we arrived in the French Quarter with fork in hand.

That evening started the whirlwind experience. Arnaud's is a monument in New Orleans. Established in 1919 by "Count" Arnaud Cazenave, the restaurant sprawls over a long block and is

New Orleans

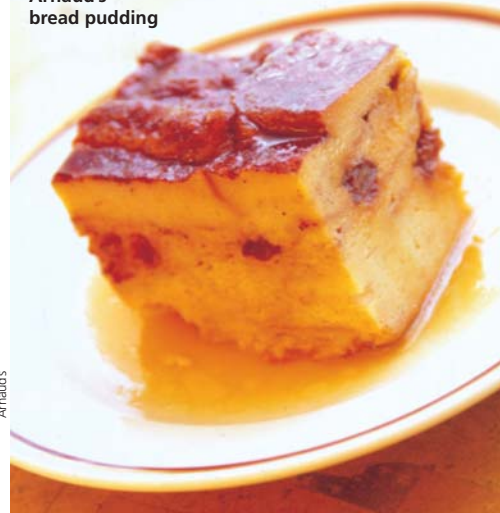
comprised of 12 buildings connected by stairs and hallways leading to dining rooms from intimate to large. Live jazz and great company are ideal complements to any meal, and we enjoyed both while feasting on the sumptuous items that Arnaud's menu had to offer.

Classic Creole is the mainstay of Arnaud's, and there are plenty of dishes to choose from. I started my meal with a specialty of the house, Smoked Pompano Bourgeois. The translucent, thinly sliced fish was hickory-smoked to perfection and served with sour cream, capers,

onions and crisp wafers. Every mouthful was a unique taste sensation. We also sampled another specialty, Shrimp Arnaud in tangy remoulade sauce, an appetizer that is a great introduction to Creole cuisine.

It was then on to a rich shrimp bisque before our entrées arrived. With so much to choose from, it was hard to select just one entrée. In the end, I was thoroughly delighted with Crabmeat Karen, an elegantly shaped puff pastry filled with Louisiana crabmeat and mushrooms, served with a white wine sauce. We fin-

Arnaud's bread pudding



Arnaud's



Michael Tieranove/NOTMVC

rice cakes served with maple syrup and pecans. Delicious!

After such an indulgent meal, we strolled the streets to work off some of those calories, passing the many shops, galleries and antique stores that help make up the character of this fascinating city.

A colleague of mine who lived in New Orleans suggested The Gumbo Shop for lunch, a favorite with locals and located in one of the oldest buildings in the city, dating back to about 1794. The Cajun shrimp po-boy was unbelievably filling, with just enough spice to make it interesting. The Chicken Andouille Gumbo was voted Best of New Orleans by locals—an honor not lightly bestowed—then we were on our way in search of dessert.

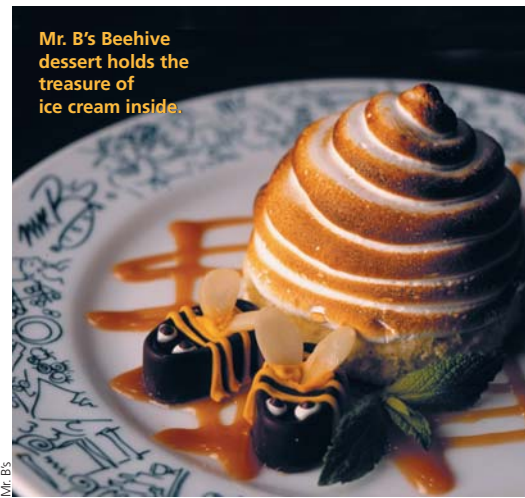
A landmark in New Orleans, Café du Monde is world-famous for its beignets and chicory coffee. Established in 1862, the original coffee shop stands proudly in the New Orleans French Market and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, closing only for Christmas Day and for the occasional hurricane—the natural phenomenon, not the drink.

I'd experienced Café du Monde years ago when I visited during Mardi Gras, and was pleased to find it fairly quiet this time around. We ordered beignets, French-style doughnuts generously covered with powdered sugar. They disappeared in no time, tempting us to order another plate, but we passed. After all, dinner was right around the corner.

Our meal at Mr. B's Bistro started out with a delectable spinach salad with warm bacon dressing and fried red onion rings. My entrée of a succulent fresh fish fillet, grilled lightly over hickory and served with savory mashed potatoes and a lemon-butter sauce was unforgettable. Loving all things with andouille sausage, Josh gave the Pasta Jambalaya a try and enjoyed every tasty morsel of shrimp, sausage, duck, chicken and spinach fettucine.

We had planned on passing on dessert, but how could we miss out on a beehive-shaped meringue holding the treasure of ice cream inside? It seemed to be a sin to dig our spoons into the beehive, and the reward was sinfully scrumptious. A fitting end to a uniquely delicious meal.

Brennan's Restaurant has been pro-



viding a divine culinary experience for diners in the French Quarter since 1946, and breakfast at Brennan's is a must for visitors to New Orleans. Plan on spending two or so hours indulging in a three-course prix fixe culinary journey.

The baked apple with double cream was sublime. The Oyster Soup Brennan was delectable, but when they brought out a bowl of the New Orleans Turtle Soup "just to taste," Josh was in heaven.

After a while of mulling over the choices, Josh decided on the Eggs Bayou LaFourche, poached eggs perched atop his beloved andouille sausage and topped with Hollandaise sauce. I had quite a time deciding as well, but finally opted to try two of the 12 egg dishes offered. The Eggs Sardou, a delicious display of poached eggs atop artichoke bottoms over creamed spinach and covered with Hollandaise sauce was well-received, but my mouth still waters at the thought of Eggs Nouvelle Orléans, poached eggs on a mound of lump crabmeat and topped with a brandy-cream sauce.

Brennan's is the creator of the world-famous Bananas Foster. Who could resist bananas sautéed tableside in butter, brown sugar, cinnamon and banana liquor? Upon serving, the creation is flamed in rum and served over vanilla ice cream. While devouring this undeniable dessert, Clark Brennan, founder Owen Edward Brennan's grandson, cordially stopped by our table and welcomed us to his restaurant. I could get used to this New Orleans hospitality.

And with this final flourish, we concluded our introductory foray into the world of New Orleans cuisine. ■

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE FOOD

ished with the decadent Chocolate Devastation and bread pudding.

The next morning, walking down the quieted streets of the French Quarter, we took in the beautifully detailed architecture and some eccentric, colorful residents starting their day. We rounded the corner onto St. Peter Street and came to the unassuming front door of The Old Coffee Pot, which led to an enchanting courtyard. After ordering rich coffee laced slightly with chicory, we dove into plates of Creole eggs with andouille sausage and *callas*, the now-rare traditional Creole