



Photography: Kenneth Thyssen

ARUBA SEAFOOD POT

by Chef **Harold Castro** of *Water's Edge 12°N Restaurant & Bar*

Like a lot of people on Aruba, Chef Harold Castro came for what was supposed to be a short trip and never left.

“It was supposed to be two years. Now I’ve been here for 24,” says the Colombian chef who worked in high-end Bogotá kitchens before coming to the Caribbean island. A veteran of many of Aruba’s top resorts, he’s spent more than four years running the kitchen at *Water’s Edge 12°N Restaurant & Bar* at the *Costa Linda Beach Resort*, which serves breakfast, lunch and dinner accompanied by soft, white sand and baby blue water on Eagle Beach.

Seemingly, vacation is just for his guests. Castro is busy baking bread daily, making sure there’s a fresh batch of carrot cake ready (he doesn’t want it sitting in a cooler for even a few days) and preparing complimentary *hors d’oeuvres* for the restaurant’s second of three daily happy hours. From 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., he’s often found handing the platters around the bar himself: sesame-spiked ahi tuna *tataki*, chicken skewers with peanut sauce and home-made flatbread pizza with Italian sausage, ham, chicken and peppers.

And each night, he’s on the line inspecting generous plates of exceptionally grilled shrimp bathed in buttery tarragon sauce, 14-oz. bone-in pork chops pan-seared then finished in the oven and topped with sweet apple glaze, and freshly grilled snapper pan-fried and served with Creole sauce or garlic-lemon butter, potatoes and fresh vegetables.

The undeniably passionate chef even hand-picked the flowers for this photo shoot.

This home-style recipe isn’t from *Water’s Edge*; rather, it’s one that Castro says is easy to make and enjoy at home, where the simmering pot of sweet squash, savory seafood and pungent herbs will lure family to the kitchen.

He sees it as representative of Aruba because of the international influences: Indonesian in the pumpkin, French in the flour and butter *roux* and Aruban in the local seafood and optional local *pica di papaya* hot sauce. “It’s like a fusion,” he says.

He first tasted it at an Indonesian friend’s house in Aruba and now makes it regularly on his day off. “To my wife and daughter, it’s a special day when I make this,” he says.

HAROLD CASTRO

Executive Chef – Water’s Edge 12°N Restaurant & Bar

Aruban Seafood Pot

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

12 mussels, scrubbed
12 clams, scrubbed
4 cloves garlic, peeled
2 tsp. (10 ml) olive oil
½ cup (125 g) butter
1 cup (150 g) diced carrots
4 cups (450 g) chopped pumpkin
1 cup (150 g) diced yellow onion
1 cup (150 g) diced green peppers
4 cups (1 l) fish stock
1 cup (150 g) flour
1 cup (200 g) squid cut into 1 ½-cm (½-inch) rings
1 cup (200 g) conch
16 medium shrimp
1 cup (200 g) red snapper fillet, cut in 2-cm (¾-inch) pieces
Salt and pepper
6 sprigs fresh cilantro
4 green onions
Pica di papaya or *pico de gallo*, optional



PICA DI PAPAYA VS. PICO DE GALLO

Pica di Papaya is an Aruban hot sauce made with hot peppers, mustard, garlic and papaya. It’s available at Aruban grocery and specialty stores and it is much spicier than *pico de gallo*, which is easy to make at home by combining 2 diced tomatoes with 1 tbsp. (15 g) finely diced red onion, 1 tbsp. (15 ml) lime juice, a pinch of salt and pepper and an optional ½ tsp. (2 g) minced green jalapeño.



Instructions

1. Bring a cup of water to a boil in a large pot. Add the mussels and clams, cover the pot and cook for 1 or 2 minutes, until the shells open. Strain the mussels and clams into a bowl. Discard any that don’t open.
2. Blend the garlic cloves and olive oil to a paste in a blender or mortar and pestle.
3. Melt the butter over medium heat and add the carrot and pumpkin. Stir and cook for 2 minutes. Add the onion and pepper and cook for 5 more minutes.
4. Add the squid and conch and season with salt and pepper. Lower the heat to medium-low and add the flour, stirring constantly for 3 minutes.
5. Slowly add the fish stock, stirring until the mixture is smooth and creamy.
6. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat again and add the snapper, mussels and clams. Cook for 3-5 minutes, until the snapper is almost done. It will keep cooking after taking the pot off the heat.
7. While the fish is cooking, mince the cilantro (stems and leaves) and green onions (green and white parts) and combine them in a bowl.
8. Ladle into bowls and sprinkle with the cilantro and green onions. Add a spoonful of *pica di papaya* hot sauce or *pico de gallo* salsa if desired.



CHEF’S TIPS

1. *Mise en place*: Chop all your ingredients in advance so they’re ready when you need them. The recipe moves quickly!
2. Use the freshest seafood and vegetables available.
3. Chef Castro says you can find conch, which look a bit like bay scallops, at Cheng’s Supermarket, five blocks east of the Superfood grocery store between the low-rise and high-rise hotels.
4. Always chop your herbs just before using so they retain their flavor.
5. You can use the cilantro stems and leaves. “The stems have lots of flavor,” says Castro.
6. Roll the cilantro into a cigar before slicing in both directions, so it gets less bruised.
7. Chop the pumpkin slightly larger than the carrots so it doesn’t fall apart in the soup.
8. You can substitute cornstarch for the flour or olive oil for the butter.
9. It’s best to use home-made fish stock, but the recipe will still work if you use a commercial fish stock base or bouillon. The fresh fish and seafood add plenty of flavor.