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Modern Dishes With Crawfish



This time of year, bayou dwellers gather around giant pots for a cherished springtime ritual: the crawfish boil. But while the traditional preparations—the favorite being étouffée—focus on spice, butter, and more butter, chefs far from the Gulf are repurposing the Louisiana staple, pairing the sweet meat with Thai green curry, stewing the shells to make rich soups, and even smoking the things whole. Anyone put off by the freshwater crustaceans just needs perspective: Sure, they resemble giant bugs, but they taste like lobster.

[HOW TO]

PEEL THEM

FRANK RANDOL—THE MAN BEHIND RANDOL'S RESTAURANT IN LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA, AND A MAIL-ORDER BUSINESS THAT SHIPS MORE THAN 50,000 POUNDS OF LIVE CRAWFISH EACH YEAR—ON HOW TO EAT THE WEE CRUSTACEAN LIKE A PRO.



2320 Kaliste Saloom Road, Lafayette, Louisiana, 800-YO-CAJUN, randols.com

1. Hold the head and twist off the tail.
2. Grab the head—which has no meat in it but packs a ton of flavor—hold the open end to your mouth, and suck out the fat and the seasonings.
3. The tail's where all the meat is, and—if you're a Yankee—you'll peel it like a lobster. Cajuns pinch the tail just above the fan. The meat slides right out.

1 NEW YORK CITY DOVETAIL

John Fraser uses crawfish to elevate humdrum chicken breast, tossing the tails with bacon, chanterelles, and peas and finishing the dish with a sauce made from the shells. 103 West 77th Street, 212-362-3800, dovetailnyc.com

2 LOS ANGELES CAFE WA S

For his ambitious take on surf and turf, Alex Reznik tops slices of sous vide beef cheek with a tarragon-infused sabayon and crawfish that he smokes over cherrywood chips. 1521 North Vine Street, 323-466-5400, cafeवास.com

3 BOSTON AURA

Shell-on crawfish mingle with scallops and mussels in Rachel Klein's green curry. On the side, she serves a riff on shrimp toast, bread spread with crawfish, battered in panko, and fried. 1 Seaport Lane, 617-385-4300, aurarestaurant.com

4 NEW ORLEANS CAFÉ ADELAIDE

Chris Lusk is crazy for local products. He serves redfish with Louisiana crawfish tails sautéed in butter and Steen's cane vinegar, topped with a vinaigrette made from LeBlanc's pepper jelly. 300 Poydras Street, 504-595-3305, cafeadeelaide.com

5 BLUFFTON, SOUTH CAROLINA THE RIVER HOUSE RESTAURANT

Chris Blobaum makes an intense stock with crawfish shells and purées it with squash. He crowns the soup with fried leeks, truffle oil, and plenty of tail meat. Inn at Palmetto Bluff, 476 Mount Pelia Road, 843-706-6500, palmettobluffresort.com