



MASTERING SOUTHERN COOKING  
*the ART of*  
 & Graubart  
 Dupree

# MASTERING *the ART of* SOUTHERN COOKING

*Nathalie Dupree  
 & Cynthia Graubart*

Photographs by Rick McKee  
 With a foreword by Pat Conroy

“If anyone can do for Southern food what Julia Child did for French, it’s the estimable Dupree. Recipes with a storehouse of tips: how to cook a country ham, how to kill a trout, how onions can save a marriage. We liked Fig and Pecan Tapenade With Goat Cheese, Frozen Fruit Salad and White Fruitcake.”

—Top Cookbooks of 2012, *Washington Post*

“Cynthia Graubart and Nathalie Dupree have written their names in the history of Southern Cooking in bold letters—and great recipes. This book will be forever.”

—Pat Conroy

“Having done all of those 11 cookbooks and 300 TV cooking shows teaching the pleasures of biscuits, fried chicken and coconut cakes, if [Dupree] hasn’t earned the right to call her new book (written with Cynthia Graubart) ‘Mastering the Art of Southern Cooking,’ who ever will?”

—Russ Parsons, *Los Angeles Times*

“The language is personal and encouraging. This is all such fun!”

—*Charleston Mercury*

“This authoritative book on Southern fare is a big book, heavier than a picnic ham, but it can be as light as a biscuit to read.”

—*Washington Times*

“... Hailed as one of 2012’s top cookbooks ... Mastering is a ... compendium of essays on Southern ingredients and techniques. It is stuffed like a fat turkey with Dupree’s delightful anecdotes.”

—*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“This handsome ... book distills all [Dupree] and coauthor Graubart know into a comprehensive guide to Southern cooking even non-Southerners will crave for insightful how-to’s on topics ranging from pie crusts to vegetable cookery to organizing one’s pantry.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

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# STARTERS



**S**outhern hospitality is more than a cliché. Historically, plantations were far apart and transportation was rudimentary. Guests, invited or unexpected, were welcomed and fed in good times and bad. Hard times, like the Great Depression, were times for helping each other. Even in good times, welcoming included offering something to eat or drink, to start the occasion, large or small.

In a region that has enjoyed big, mid-day farm lunches (called dinner) and three o'clock dinner in Charleston, it is hard to say when starters started, just as it is hard to say what a starter is. The word canapé is derived from the French word for "couch," for instance. Hors d'œuvre means, according to Food Lover's Companion, "outside the work" meal, or food outside the work. Starters is a word we have adopted to mean something we can eat anytime short of a main course.

Starters have gone from a narrow range of options to a broad swath of foods presented in new and exciting ways. The highlights once were when one was offered a ham biscuit or cheese straws, doled out stingily to children or offered graciously to adults. On a sideboard or buffet table, shrimp was draped around the edges and on top of ice in a large punch bowl with a dish of cocktail sauce in the center.

We've had celery sticks (which I still love) filled with pimento cheese or peanut butter; roasted pecans, peanuts, or variations thereof; various dips, including artichoke, crab and onion made from packaged onion soup and sour cream, served with chips; oysters wrapped in bacon, hopefully crisp, but often not.

Some of these remain in our repertoire, but we've kept them simple and resonant to the culture. Along our coast we use fresh crab, finding the canned not worth the effort; pimento cheese is still high on every Southerner's list, and we've filled a tart with it. Rather than ubiquitous cubes of mediocre cheese, we've poured melted hot pepper jelly over logs of goat cheese. Fresh vegetables shine, such as zucchini rounds with a little bit of grated carrots.

A variety of ingredients have become available to stimulate the imagination. The English custom of tea with sandwiches and other delicacies was certainly not lost on Southerners, even after we started dumping enough sugar

in our tea to make a spoon stand up unaided and enough ice to chill an igloo. Tiny grits cakes with shrimp and bacon; peaches and figs with country ham; savory tarts and custards that could replace soup or salad at the table or be served in the living room have all changed the order of meals.

Cynthia's husband, Cliff, has a habit of fixing little nibbles for the family while waiting for dinner. He might show up with a chopped-tomato-and-basil concoction or a chicken liver paté he whipped up in the food processor, with a glass of wine rather than the still popular bourbon and branch water his neighbor drinks. Many of us don't even know when we are hungry—my French son-in-law, Pierre Henri, who frowns at nibbling outside of meals and is no fan of canapés, says that when one eats, the hunger comes. So a starter should be only that—something to whet the appetite, readying one to sit down and eat a meal.

## PEACHES AND FIGS WRAPPED IN COUNTRY HAM

Serves 2

TRADITIONALLY IN EUROPE, melons are wrapped in prosciutto ham and served as a starter or appetizer. Our thinly sliced country ham is supple enough to wrap equally well and is enjoyed by all, whether with peaches, figs, or cantaloupe. Serve as a nibble on toothpicks or plated as a starter.

1 fresh peach

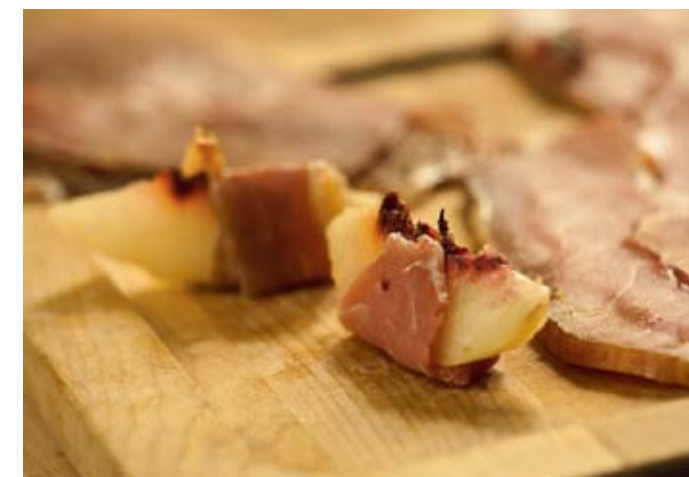
6 fresh figs, stems removed

2–3 biscuit slices of country ham

Peel and slice the peach into wedges. Cut an X in the top of each fig, cutting three-fourths of the way down, keeping the sections attached at the base. Tear the country ham into strips.

Roll a small portion of country ham around a finger and insert into the X on the fig. Wrap another ham strip around each peach wedge. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until serving time, not more than 2 to 3 hours.

**Variation:** Cut peeled cantaloupes or mangos in cubes or wedges, and wrap with country ham. May be secured with a toothpick.



## TOMATO BISQUE

Serves 4 to 6

THERE WAS A TIME when everyone knew the techniques of Southern cooking, so there was no need to explain in detail when using recipes. Everyone knew that bread thickened a soup. I cooked a similar recipe adaptation from a recipe of Mrs. H. R. Dull's Southern Cooking for many years. It is obviously a savvy way to save stale bread and to use tomatoes, either fresh or canned. It is absolutely fabulous.

1 cup milk	6 ripe tomatoes, peeled and finely chopped, or 1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes with juice	Salt
¾ cup stale breadcrumbs		Freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon butter	Granulated sugar	
1 small onion, chopped		

Rub crumbs through a mesh sieve. Heat the milk over very low heat in a large pot and add the breadcrumbs to soften.

Meanwhile, heat the butter, add the onion, and cook until soft. Add the tomatoes and their juices. Bring to

the boil, reduce heat, and cook uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes over low heat, until thick. Season to taste with sugar, salt, and pepper. Stir thoroughly. Strain into the milk mixture. Reheat, stirring until combined.

## TURNIP AND GREENS SOUP

Serves 4 to 6

ROOT VEGETABLES ARE GOOD BASES for hearty soups. Beets, potatoes, turnips, parsnips, rutabagas, carrots, and sweet potatoes can all be used as the base. Any greens will do—turnip, spinach, and collard are most prevalent in the South, but sweet potato leaves, beet greens, kale, watercress, and other greens are as easily used.

Turnips, unless noted otherwise, are usually white-fleshed and referred to as white turnips. These pink-skinned vegetables are milder than rutabagas, which are yellow-fleshed.

1 pound turnips	2 large garlic cloves, chopped	washed (page 205)
1 medium onion, sliced	4 cups chicken stock or broth, heated	Salt
2 tablespoons butter	1 pound turnip greens,	Freshly ground black pepper

Peel and roughly slice the turnips. If large and strong-tasting, add them to boiling water, bring the water back up to the boil, reduce heat, and simmer 3 to 5 minutes. Drain. If the turnips are medium or small and without intense sharpness, use as is.

Heat the butter in a large Dutch oven; add the onion and cook until opaque. Add the garlic and then the turnips. Cook 5 minutes. Add the chicken stock and return to the boil. If the liquid is not covering the vegetables, add enough water to submerge any vegetable that bob up. Cover. Reduce heat and simmer until the vegetables are tender.

Remove and discard any stems and tough leaves from the greens; break the greens into large pieces and add to the vegetables. Purée the solids in the pot using

an immersion blender, or remove the solids to a food processor or sturdy blender and purée, adding liquid as necessary until greens are chopped. Return the purée to the pot if removed. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

### Variations

- Add 1 tablespoon chopped ginger before puréeing.
- Add 1 to 2 tablespoons curry powder before puréeing.
- Add fresh thyme, oregano, or fennel.
- Use 1 pound Jerusalem artichokes. Bring to the boil, reduce heat, and boil 5 to 10 minutes. Cool. Peel and return to the heat with the stock. Bring back to the boil, reduce heat, cover, and simmer until tender. When tender, purée as above, then add the greens and purée.

## ROASTED OKRA CHIPS

Makes 2 cups

FAMILIAR TO THOSE RAISED IN WARM-WEATHER or tropical climates, this pentagonal-shaped vegetable is harvested in the summertime from a hibiscus family tree that can grow 6 to 8 feet high. When asked to describe one characteristic of this vegetable, people will usually mention something about it being slimy, perhaps the main motivation when preparing these chips. The results were crispy tiny chips that became irresistible and blessedly “slime free.” Julia Regner, who interned with me, roasted every green vegetable that came into the kitchen that summer.

One large okra yields about 8 to 10 slices, and a small one about 5 to 7 slices. Try slicing the okra from tip to tip on a diagonal to get a 2-inch-long slice.

20 okra (about 3 cups, sliced vertically or horizontally)	2 tablespoon oil, cook's preference	½ teaspoon pepper
	½ teaspoon salt	

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Toss sliced okra gently with oil, salt, and pepper in a large bowl. Move okra onto a rimmed baking sheet and bake for approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Turn okra to the other side halfway through the cooking time. Total time to cook the okra depends on the thickness of the slice, so adjust baking time accordingly. Remove from oven when crispy and transfer to a paper towel. Any leftovers can be refrigerated. They will lose their crispiness but may be reheated.

**Variation:** Cynthia roasts her okra whole, following the method above, and keeps them on hand for snacking.

### Variation: Grilled Okra

Slice okra or leave whole. Toss gently with oil, salt, and pepper in a large bowl. Preheat a grill pan on the stove, or preheat the grill to medium. Add the okra to the hot pan or grill and cook 5 to 6 minutes per side. Remove when crispy.



## COUNTRY CAPTAIN

The name “Country Captain” came up in journals all during the 1800s and included a rudimentary, tomato-less curry in *Miss Leslie’s New Cookery Book* by Eliza Leslie, published in 1857. It came into its own after Mrs. William Bullard, who had homes in Warm Springs and Columbus, Georgia, hosted future President Franklin D. Roosevelt on his first visit to Warm Springs for polio treatment. It was in her home in Columbus that he later announced for governor of New York via radio. The family, including their daughter, Ms. Hart, became close friends.

For that first dinner, Mrs. Bullard had ordered *The International Cookbook: Over 3,300 Recipes Gathered From All Over the World, Including Many Never Before Published in English*, a two-volume set by the former chef of Delmonico’s, Alexander Filippini, published in 1914. Country Captain appears as a luncheon dish. Mrs. Bullard selected the recipe and gave it to her cook, Arie Mullins, who served it to Roosevelt, who loved it. When the Little White House and the treatment facility were completed, another cook, Daisy Bonner served it to patients there. One wheelchair patient wrote of a grueling trip to Warm Springs in 1926—mostly in a boxcar, as there was no other way for him to get there,—and being served Country Captain when he arrived. Never did a dish taste so good. Ultimately, Daisy was FDR’s favorite cook and cooked his last meal, something she wrote on the wall of his Warm Springs kitchen.

Mrs. Bullard also served her version to General

George Patton, who became enamored of the dish. Years later, in honor of General Patton, it became an MRE (Meals Ready to Eat) for the troops. While traveling to the military base in Columbus, Georgia, Patton allegedly asked Mrs. Bullard to meet the train with some Country Captain. Various Columbus cookbooks have renditions of these recipes. Carson McCullers even wrote a letter describing this fashionable “new” dish she had eaten in Columbus. All this was before *Charleston Receipts* published the recipe in 1950.

Mr. Filippini’s recipe was later promulgated by Cecily Brownstone, a formidable newspaper columnist for Associated Press from 1947 to 1986. She became a zealot on the subject after publishing her version in a cookbook for the benefit of the Florence Crittenden League, Specialty of the House, criticizing any other version. Her version called for dredging the chicken in flour seasoned with salt and pepper, as one would a pan-fried chicken before browning. Molly O’Neill detailed much of this in an important article in the *New York Times*.

Cecily Brownstone and I agree totally on one thing: making Country Captain with chicken breast alone is heresy. And so is making the sauce separately and adding fried chicken, as some do now in Columbus, Georgia, where it is still considered “their” dish, both in restaurants and homes. I use red bell peppers rather than green and am happy with raisins if currants are not available.

THIS IS ONE OF MY MOST BELOVED RECIPES, in part because I served it in my restaurant in the early 1970s. It was from a recipe my second cousin in Macon, Georgia, sent me from a Columbus, Georgia, newspaper at the same time she gave me a huge electric cooker on a stand to cook it in. My stepfather, who had worked in the Roosevelt White House, came to the restaurant and told me of eating Country Captain at the Little White House on a trip to Warm Springs. My father, who had worked for General George Patton, remembered eating Country Captain from having eaten it with Patton in Columbus, Georgia.

Here is the way I made it in my restaurant all those years ago. (I pay homage to Filippini, Miss Leslie, Cecily Brownstone, and James Beard.) Browned chicken on the bone produces an incredible underlying flavor to this dish that cannot be obtained otherwise. Because modern diners have a hard time dealing with chicken on the bone when it is heavily sauced, I remove it from the bone and add it back into the sauce. It is a messy process, but it makes a truly wonderful fork-friendly, make-ahead dish. While it is possible to cook a half recipe with just one chicken, it is not much more work to cook a whole recipe, or even double it, and refrigerate or freeze half. The kitchen is clean as a pin when the guests arrive, and I feel calm and relaxed, knowing an enchanting meal is ready to be reheated in the microwave oven or on the stovetop.

2 whole chickens (3½–4 pounds each), cut into 8 pieces each (page 344)  
4 tablespoons butter  
1 tablespoon oil, cook’s preference  
1–2 onions, chopped  
2 red bell peppers, seeded, cored, and chopped  
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped

¼–½ teaspoon ground hot red pepper  
2–3 teaspoons curry powder  
2 (28-ounce) cans Italian plum tomatoes, liquid reserved  
½–1 cup chicken stock or broth, optional  
Salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
1 cup currants or raisins

8 cups cooked rice (page 259)  
1 cup blanched toasted, sliced almonds  
Shredded coconut, optional  
6 slices bacon, cooked crisp (page 413), optional  
1 teaspoon dried thyme, optional  
½ cup chopped fresh parsley, optional  
Chutney, optional

Pat the chicken dry with paper towels.

Heat the butter and oil over medium heat in a 10- or 12-inch heavy skillet or large Dutch oven until it shimmers. Add the chicken skin side down, dark pieces first, to the hottest part of the pan. Continue adding pieces in a clockwise fashion, to know which went in first, in batches or two pans if necessary, and cook to a deep golden brown on the bottom, about 5 minutes. Turn the chicken pieces with tongs, and brown for 2 to 3 minutes on the second side. Take care to reduce the heat or rotate the pan if there are hot spots so all the chicken browns evenly. Remove the chicken.

Add the onions, peppers, garlic, hot red pepper, and curry powder to the pan and cook until soft, stirring up all the good bits in the bottom of the pan. Add the tomatoes, cutting them into chunks, and stir some more. Return the chicken to the pan, skin side up; cover and simmer until tender, about 30 minutes. Add reserved tomato liquid or a

little chicken stock if available. If runny, uncover and cook a little longer until liquid is reduced. Cool and remove any fat from the surface of the sauce. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and additional red pepper or curry as needed. Remove the chicken, cool and remove the chicken from the bone. Discard the bones and skins. Return the chicken to the now cool sauce. This may be made ahead several days and refrigerated covered, or frozen up to 3 months.

Bring the chicken and sauce to the boil quickly, stirring; reduce heat and cook as necessary until heated through. Stir the currants into the sauce, and serve the chicken and sauce on hot rice. Garnish with toasted almonds.

Mrs. Leslie served Country Captain with the coconut. Mr. Filippini draped the dish with the bacon, added the thyme and parsley, and served the dish with chutney, none of which I do.

## CLASSIC CARAMEL CAKE

**Makes 1 (9-inch) round 3-layer cake  
or 1 (9 x 13 x 2-inch) 2-layer cake**

THIS WAS ONCE MADE ALL OVER THE UNITED STATES, but since the 1930s, the South has claimed it as its own. Three or four layers may be made from the same batter. If four layers are made, however, reduce the cooking time and either be very stingy with the icing or double the caramel mixture to have a surfeit.

The Burnt Sugar Icing is traditionally made in an iron skillet. Only a small amount of sugar is caramelized for the icing, but it flavors the whole mixture, giving the icing a grainy texture from the un-dissolved sugar. Some people prefer it that way. Heavy cream (my favorite) or half-and-half is preferred for the higher fat content that will prevent curdling. Use a candy thermometer to accurately judge the soft-ball stage. Some recipes have said that once the icing is prepared, there are only 20 seconds to get it on the cake! Actually, it may be kept warm by keeping the bowl of icing in a pan of hot water, or it can be microwaved to reheat, checking in 10- to 20-second increments to make sure it does not overcook. For best results, the icing should be spreadable, like plain peanut butter. A thermometer, whether instant-read or candy, makes any sugar work easier. Sugar work is much more difficult on a rainy day because of the relationship between sugar and humidity.

1½ cups unsalted butter, softened  
2 cups granulated sugar  
5 large eggs

3 cups all-purpose or cake flour  
¼ teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon baking powder

1¼ cups milk  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1 recipe Caramel Icing or other favorite

Position rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 325 degrees. Butter and flour three 9-inch cake pans or two 9 x 13-inch pans. Line the bottoms with parchment or waxed paper. Butter and flour the paper.

Cut the butter into 1-inch pieces and add to the bowl of a stand mixer, and beat on low speed until soft. Increase the speed and whisk for 1 or 2 minutes, until it looks like lightly whipped cream. Add the sugar 1 tablespoon at a time, starting on slow and increasing speed until well whipped, about 7 or 8 minutes. Beat in the eggs one at a time, beating after each addition.

Sift together the dry ingredients onto a large piece of waxed paper. Add a third of the flour mixture into the egg mixture and beat to incorporate, then half the milk and beat; repeat, ending with flour. Add the vanilla extract and beat until smooth. Pour the batter evenly into the cake pans. Tap the pans once against the counter to remove any air bubbles and smooth the top of the batter.

Bake 35 to 45 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean. The internal temperature of

the cake should be 190 to 195 degrees on an instant-read thermometer.

Move the pans to a wire rack to cool completely. Carefully run a knife around the inside of the pans to loosen the cakes. Turn the pans upside down over pieces of waxed paper. Remove the pans and peel off the paper. The cakes may be made ahead to this point. Well-wrapped, they will freeze up to 2 months.

Ice with either Caramel Icing or Quick Caramel Icing (both page 580), and follow icing directions on page 550.

**Variation:** Decorate the top and sides with pecan halves.

### **Variation: Orange Caramel Cake**

Substitute 8 ounces sour cream for the milk and use orange extract instead of vanilla extract. Add ½ cup orange juice and 2 teaspoons grated orange rind, no white attached, to the icing ingredients when bringing them to a simmer.

## CARAMEL ICING

**Makes 3½ to 4 cups**

THIS CLASSIC RECIPE should be in every cook's repertoire. An easier version appears below.

3¼ cups granulated sugar, divided  
¼ cup boiling water  
½ cup unsalted butter, softened

¼ teaspoon baking soda  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1½ cups cream, half-and-half, or milk, divided

Stir ¼ cup of the sugar with the boiling water in a small pot. Heat over low heat until the sugar is dissolved, then proceed to cook until it turns a deep copper-amber color, watching carefully and swirling the pot over the heat as necessary to distribute the color evenly. A small portion may appear burnt—don't worry unless the whole mixture seems burnt and has a burnt odor. If the whole mixture seems burnt, discard and start over.

Meanwhile, on low heat, dissolve the remaining 3 cups sugar with the butter, baking soda, vanilla, and 1 cup cream or milk in a large heavy pan or Dutch oven. When dissolved, bring to a simmer, just until little bubbles appear around the outside of the pan. Take care not to let it boil over.

Cover both hands with oven mitts or cloths to protect them from caramel splashes. Add a small portion of the cream or milk mixture to the caramel and bring to the

boil to dissolve; pour it into the simmering milk mixture. If necessary to remove all the caramel from the pan, repeat this step. Bring the mixture to the boil and boil rapidly to the soft-ball stage (240 degrees on a candy thermometer), stirring constantly.

Carefully remove the pan from the heat and place in a large roasting pan filled with enough cold water to stop the caramel from cooking. Transfer the caramel cream quickly to the bowl of a stand mixer, preferably heavy duty, and beat until very thick and creamy. It should look and spread like peanut butter. If necessary, add a bit more of the cream to make spreadable. If it is too cold to spread, place the bowl in a pan of hot water to warm up, and add a bit more cream if necessary. May be briefly warmed in the microwave as well, if transferred out of the metal bowl.

Spread the icing on the cake. See page 550 for how to ice a cake.

# SHRIMP AND OKRA IN A TANGY BUTTER SAUCE

Serves 6 to 8

SHRIMP and okra like each other. In this case, the okra can be briefly sautéed ahead of time, added back when the shrimp is cooked, and reheated, making an all-in-one meal with the rice.

1 pound okra  
1 cup butter, divided  
3 large garlic cloves, chopped  
1 teaspoon ground hot red pepper

1–2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil, marjoram, oregano, and/or rosemary  
2 pounds raw large shrimp, shells removed

Salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
3 cups cooked rice, hot

Remove the top and bottom tips of the okra and slice the pods lengthwise. Melt  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of the butter in a large skillet, add the okra, and sauté over high heat for a few minutes, until wilted. Remove and set aside.

Add the remaining butter and melt. Add the garlic, hot red pepper, and herbs, and cook a few minutes without browning, until as hot as possible. This may be

done several hours ahead—the butter will gather flavor as it sits.

When ready to serve, reheat the butter. Add the peeled shrimp and cook until pink on the first side. Turn and cook until nearly pink. Add the okra and cook 1 minute, just to reheat. Remove, season to taste with salt and pepper, and pour over hot cooked rice.

# SHRIMP PILAU

Serves 4

PILAU, OR PURLOO, IS A CONSTANT IN THE LOWCOUNTRY and places where rice is still routinely eaten. The combination of the shrimp with the zesty seasoning and crispy bacon suits just about anyone—family, friends, or special company. Those who love it spicy should add the Worcestershire sauce and ground red pepper to taste.

4 slices bacon, cooked crisp, drippings reserved  
4 tablespoons butter  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup finely chopped celery  
2 tablespoons chopped red or yellow bell pepper

2 cups medium raw shrimp, peeled  
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce, optional  
 $\frac{1}{4}$ –1 teaspoon ground hot red pepper, optional  
1 tablespoon flour

Salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
3 cups cooked white rice, hot

Crumble the bacon and set it and drippings aside. Melt the butter in a large saucepan. When hot, add the celery and bell pepper. Cook until soft, about 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, sprinkle the shrimp with the optional Worcestershire sauce. Mix the optional hot red pepper and flour together with the salt and freshly ground pepper. Toss the shrimp lightly with the flour and add

to the still hot butter mixture. Stir until the shrimp are cooked, about 3 to 5 minutes. Taste and re-season with salt and pepper. Reheat the drippings, combine with the shrimp, hot cooked rice and crumbled bacon. Serve hot.

**Variation:** Add 1 small diced tomato.