

CATE 2019 Best Action Station



Duck Fat Fried Chicken Station

## Synopsis

**Innovation, imagination, technology and a good dose of southern soul**

embody our duck fat fried chicken action station.

Originally inspired to elevate and modernize a true classic, we challenged ourselves even further to develop an interactive and instagrammable experience for our guests that would stimulate all of the senses and be completely delicious. Relying upon the broad appeal of fried chicken, mixing up the standard flavor profile by frying it in duck fat, and serving the dish under a glass dome from which maple smoke emerges once unveiled, we take action station to another level.





## CONCEPT

Creating unique and innovative experiences for our guests is a constant source of our insomnia. We have found that reinventing the wheel is not always necessary, while elevating something that is tried and true is often the way to go. In this case, we began with a timeless classic- fried chicken, and although millions of iterations on this particular favorite have undoubtedly been done before, we attempted to put our company twist on the dish, with a modern flair. The worldwide desire for experiences over things, has significantly changed the event industry for the better. Simultaneously, chefs have become celebrities and caterers have been inspired to bring the action into the front of the house. The rise of action stations has created new challenges but also great opportunity for us to offer fresher food, customized to guest's preferences, while interacting with the chef and creating a shareable or instagrammable experience.

Before the bells and whistles, the most crucial element of the dish needed to be the flavor. Bone-in chicken is so juicy and succulent but is also extremely difficult and messy to eat and no one wants juices running down the arms of their tuxedo or gown. We decided on our boneless chicken thighs marinated in a zippy, umami-rich mixture of soy, mirin, and aromatics.

We then took one of the most obvious elements of any fried item- the bath of fat, and swapped out the standard vegetable oil with duck fat for added depth and a gamey flavor.

We serve the fried thigh atop a pile of salty, cheesy homemade popcorn, and drizzle the entire dish with a spicy, tangy Thai chili-lime aioli.

*But WAIT- that's not all.*

For a final touch of wow, our table chef covers each plate with a glass dome and inject a dose of maplewood smoke which is captured in the dome and infuses every nook and cranny of the dish with earthy unctuousness. Upon presentation, the dome is removed and the guest is treated to a brilliant sensory adventure and a killer Instagram opportunity.



**CREATIVITY.** While iterations of this station have been developed for multiple events of varying size and style, we will always remain true to the original flavors and innovation of the presentation. Aside from the crispy, golden brown fried chicken thigh, much of the essence of the presentation lays in the playful whimsy of the popcorn, however the preferences of each client have allowed us to explore the adaptability of the starch component. In an effort to incorporate some southern soul into the version we served at the Museum of Science and Industry's Black Creativity Gala, we substituted the popcorn with a creamy mound of cheese grits, also providing a textural contrast from the crunchy chicken thigh. Plating the components in a beautiful glass-rimmed bowl not only made the presentation visually stunning, but also spared the guest's hand from the heat of the hot grits at the bottom of the dish. Finally, the zip of the spicy aioli drizzled on top cut through those grits like a warm knife in butter, proving that creativity without balance is like peanut butter without the jelly.







**PRODUCTION AND CHALLENGES.** An action station is just that- action intended to elicit excitement and surprise from a guest while also feeding them something delicious. Producing our duck fat fried chicken station at every event, particularly one as well-attended and noteworthy as the Black Creativity Gala, is like putting on a performance. Additionally, as is a challenge for every caterer utilizing countless off-site event spaces, available electricity sources can limit your options for set-up location especially with an action station requiring multiple gadgets. The complexity of frying chicken to order, from the sanitation factor to the proper cooking time, is a task in itself. As essentially a scratch-made dish done from start to finish, the guests are given the opportunity to see everything in action.



The chicken is breaded and fried to order on the actual station, not in the preparation area behind the scenes. Couple that with plating every dish with multiple components and finally, managing the intensity of the smoke injection, and the table chef, or chefs, responsible for this station must not only be skilled in culinary technique, but also have the ability to capture his or her audience while showing expertise in the art of multi-tasking. When timing is everything, especially when catering an event for over 800 people as was the case at the Black Creativity Gala, moving guests quickly through the station proved difficult as the smoking gun could take a bit of time, however, the visual thrill and the flavor of the final dish made it well worth the wait.

# Duck Fat Fried Chicken Station



## Recipe

Yield: 16 Servings

2 lbs Soy Mirin Chicken Thigh  
1 lb Cheddar Cheese Grits  
4 floz Thai Chili Aioli  
1 cup Potato Starch  
1 tbl Kosher Salt  
1 qt Duck Fat, rendered  
Micro Greens to Garnish

### Method:

1. Season chicken with kosher salt and dredge in potato starch
2. Deep fry each thigh in duck fat at 350 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes; drain on paper towel.
3. Plate 1 oz of grits, top with a 2oz fried chicken thigh, drizzle with ¼ floz aioli and garnish with micro greens
4. Cover and inject with smoke

## Soy Mirin Marinated Chicken Thigh

Yield: 16 Servings

2 lb Boneless Skinless Chicken Thighs  
1 cup Soy Sauce  
1 cup Mirin  
1 oz Ginger Root, Peeled  
1 oz Garlic  
1/2 tsp Black Pepper

### Method:

1. Puree soy sauce, mirin, ginger, garlic and black pepper in a blender until smooth
2. Marinate chicken overnight

## Bacon Cheddar Popcorn

Yield: 9 Oz

9 oz Popped Popcorn  
1 tbl Cheddar Powder  
2 tsp Bacon Cheddar Powder

### Method:

1. Toss popcorn, cheddar powder, and bacon cheddar powder in a bowl to combine

# Duck Fat Fried Chicken Station



## Recipe

### **Cheddar Cheese Grits**

Yield: 1 Pound

1 tbl Unsalted Butter  
1/2 tsp Garlic, minced  
6 floz Heavy Cream  
6 floz Chicken Stock  
2 ½ oz Instant Grits  
2 oz Sharp Cheddar Cheese, shredded  
½ tsp Kosher Salt  
¼ tsp Black Pepper

#### Method:

1. Saute garlic in melted butter until softened
2. Add heavy cream and chicken stock; bring to a boil
3. Stir in the grits, reduce heat to low, and stir constantly until thickened
4. Add cheddar cheese and season with salt and pepper
5. Keep warm for service

### **Thai Chili Aioli**

Yield: 1 Quart

2 floz Vegetable Oil  
10 oz Red Bell Pepper, diced  
10 oz Spanish Onion, diced  
2 tsp garlic, minced  
1 ½ cup Mai Ploy Chili Sauce  
½ tsp Crushed Red Pepper Flake  
1/8 tsp Cayenne Pepper  
1 1/3 cup Mayonnaise  
2 2/3 floz Lime Juice

#### Method:

1. Saute bell pepper and onion in vegetable oil over medium heat until soft and beginning to caramelize
2. Add garlic and cook until fragrant
3. Add Mai Ploy, crushed red pepper flake, and cayenne pepper and simmer for 8-10 minutes on low
4. Remove from heat and puree until smooth with a stick blender; cool completely
5. Combine with mayonnaise and lime juice

## DUCK FAT FRIED CHICKEN STATION:

6 Table Chefs/1 Lead Server/4 Servers-Runners

*Stations will be mirrored put across 2 – 8ft tables.*

Back Table – 8x24

4 - 8ft

Ramsey  
Center Piece

Bowl

For raw chicken

Fryers

Flatware in  
Brushed Metal  
Circular  
1 - SM  
1 - MD

Bowls

Chaferless  
Grits

Smoking Gun