

Summer Nostalgia



BEST HORS D'OEUVRE 2020

candyfloss squid

SYNOPSIS

They say life begins at 50...and that's exactly what our client wanted to portray in her Summer garden birthday party. There would be swimming, music and games in a warm, fresh afternoon setting. Upmarket but understated was the brief. Not too stiff but definitely worthy of the celebration. It was a fine line, and whilst the venue setting would model a traditional backyard gathering, it became clear that the food and the theatre it creates would be paramount to its success.



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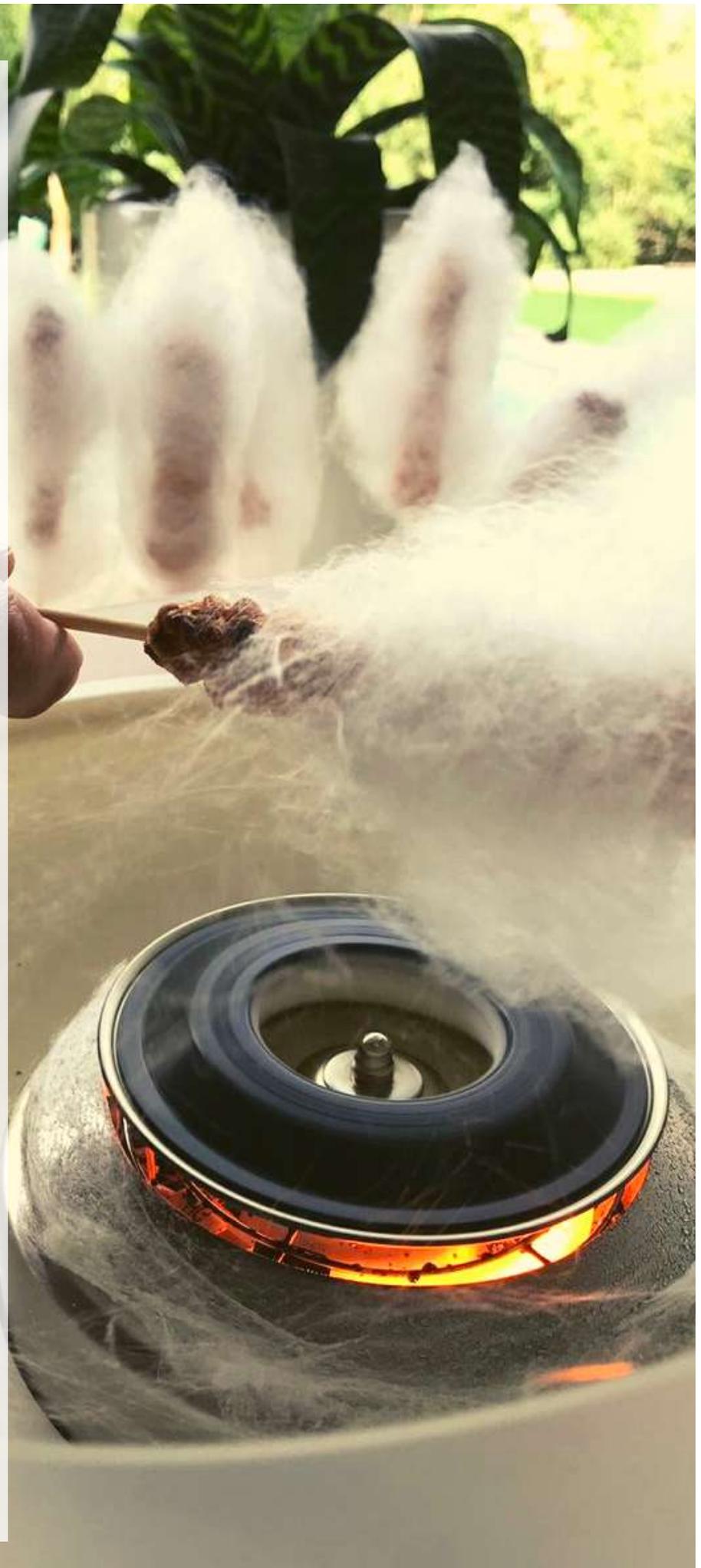
CONCEPT, DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES

Our chef screamed retro when we returned with the brief and we loved the idea! A classic throw back to when garden parties were the height of fashion but at the same time portrayed good family values and special memories. We wanted to serve hot dogs and banana split...but we needed to explore new culinary territories in which these classic dishes would surprise in both service and taste. Whilst we agreed that 'fusion' is perhaps over rated at times, we took it from a different angle, gathering the trends of today's culinary genius and forcing them into simplicity. Taking the familiar and dressing it in a veil of curiosity and innovation.

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ORIGINALITY

After listing every retro style food imaginable, we looked to our menu favourites that we knew were already winners. This is how the Candyfloss Squid was born. Our salt & pepper squid is certainly a firm favourite amongst our clients and we knew that in terms of familiarity, this would definitely tick that box. We wanted the guests to be bursting with curiosity but confident enough to try it. We next toggled with the ideas of flavour. We couldn't serve the dish with a dipping sauce, which essentially is where all the flavour was with our salt & pepper squid, so we had to find a way in which to incorporate flavour into the batter in order to create the perfect mouthful. It was obvious that sugar and spice are a match made in heaven and it was then decided that the candy floss would provide the sweetness associated with Asian dipping sauces and the squid the heat that would tingle the tastebuds.



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PRODUCTION AT THE EVENT

The garden would be packed but we still wanted interest points around the venue to encourage guest to move around and explore. Instead of full on food stations that usually provide choices and customising of dishes, we created simple food assembling points where the hors d'oeuvre would be created and served.

To avoid cumbersome equipment and space invaders we opted to fry the squid in small batches back of house and bring it to the station to be finished off. This would ensure optimum freshness whilst simultaneously creating the perfect hype as the crispy battered sticks moved to the candy floss machine. The spiced flour was premixed at our production kitchen so as to allow fast, quick movement in the production of the dish with minimum amount of onsite prep in order to control and ensure a successful service.

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IMPLEMENTATION

We knew that white fluffy pillow sticks would draw the crowds and we were not wrong! We set up the Candyfloss Squid front and centre on the pool deck with a table top candy floss machine. The hot squid was then 'flossed' live by the chef and served immediately. Viewing the actual assembling of the dish confused and delighted the guests, the intrigue was overwhelming and at times we couldn't keep up with the demand. They loved the simplicity of it, the action of the chef and the obvious freshness of the dish. It was however the taste that stole the show. Strips of tender squid, coated in a hot and spicy batter, deep fried and then swirled in sweet candy floss. The combination was mind blowing! A perfect balance of soft sweet cloud, crunching into a perfect, flavoursome chilli bite. A certain talking point that achieved all our initial objectives.

As the chef got ahead, he placed them in white wooden boxes filled with Himalayan pink salt and passed them around. We thought this to be a clever 'carrier' for the dish, as it mimicked the ocean floor in a beautiful way.



OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

As service started, we quickly realised that we had underestimated the 'monster' we had created. The dish was without a doubt the most popular amongst the guests, young and old. As a result we identified two pressure points. Firstly the back of house frying was not going quick enough, we were frying in small batches to ensure perfect crispness of the batter, however this did not keep up with the demand of the station and so we grabbed two of the clients shallow saucepans, filled them with oil and set another chef on the task which quickly remedied the problem. This problem was however two fold. As the mounds of battered squid headed to the station, some guests thought it to be a passed hors d'oeuvre and would grab the squid before it was 'flossed'. This was not a serious issue in terms of taste but affected the amount of squid getting to the actual station. We quickly re-routed through the pool house which fixed the problem.

This is a perfect hors d'oeuvre and has since been served many times for events large and small. It is on-trend, innovative and appeals easily to all tastes. It works well at a station and even better passed around, but most importantly it never fails to delight guests with the familiar vs. unfamiliar demands of excitement and revolution which we as caterers strive to achieve.

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KEY RECIPE | CRISPY FIRECRACKER SQUID

INGREDIENTS

680g Squid Steaks
1 Tablespoon Shaoxing Wine
1/2 teaspoon Sesame Oil
5 cups vegetable oil (for frying)
1/2 cup Rice Flour
1/2 cup Semolina
1/3 cup Plain Cornmeal
1 teaspoon Salt
1/2 teaspoon White Pepper
1 teaspoon Chilli Powder
2 teaspoon Garlic Powder
1 1/2 cup Light Beer (ice cold)

METHOD

First prepare your squid steaks by making thin, cross hatch markings into the flesh of the squid. Take care not to slice all the way through. Then cut the marked squid into 2cm strips.

Marinate the squid in the shaoxing wine and sesame oil. Toss gently and set aside.

Place your oil in a deep fryer or medium saucepan and allow to heat to 170°C.

In a separate bowl combine all the dry ingredients and set aside.

Once the oil has reached temperature, you can now add the whisk the beer into the dry ingredients to form the batter.

Dip each squid strip into the batter. Allow any excess batter to drip off.

Place into the hot oil, taking care not to bunch pieces together or else they will stick to one another.

Gently move the squid pieces back and forth.

Let them fry until golden brown, about 2-2 1/2 minutes.

Remove all the squid and let drain on a paper-towel.

You can season the squid to taste with additional salt and white pepper.