

Reinventing this classic American seafood appetizer meant looking abroad and turning up the heat

the original

Whether it's made with shrimp or crabmeat, the secret to a great seafood cocktail is in the sauce. Our inspiration comes from New York's The Palm, the storied steakhouse chain which just released "The Palm Restaurant Cookbook" (Running Press, 2003), a collection of classic recipes from the restaurant. Not included in the cookbook, though, is Vice President of Culinary Services Tony Tammero's formula for classic cocktail sauce, a zesty, biting blend that awakens the palate and cleanly contrasts the subtle sweetness of shrimp or crabmeat. (For The Palm's crabmeat cocktail, pictured, see recipe, p. 77.)

the analysis

Seafood cocktails are forever an American classic. The problem is, few restaurants outside of the traditional steakhouse set still serve them, and in many respects this appetizer icon has been left behind by other, more trendy offerings. This exercise is an ideal opportunity to blend old and new by infusing flavors from other cultures and adding a few dramatic elements to the presentation.

the result

Given the recent trend toward Latin flavor profiles, our alternatives play off of ceviche and gazpacho. Both offer a higher heat level to accommodate diners' move toward spicier foods. Both offer familiar seafood items, as well as induce trial of other types of fish. Another added benefit: Both of these starters can be positioned as flavorful, yet healthy, alternatives in the appetizer category, which is typically heavy on fried foods.



Cocktail CULTURE

By Daniel Bendas and Dean Small

Seafood ceviche with mango and avocado in citrus mojo

Danny Bendas and Dean Small,
Synergy Consulting

Yield: 4 servings

FOR THE SEAFOOD CEVICHE

Yield: 2 Lb

Lime juice, freshly squeezed	1/4 C
Lemon juice, freshly squeezed	2 TBS
Shallots, finely minced	1/2 Oz
Serrano chiles, seeded, finely minced	2 tsp
Garlic, chopped	1/4 Oz
Ground coriander	1/4 tsp
Coarsely ground black pepper	1/2 tsp
Salt	3/4 tsp
Bay scallops, side "chain" removed, uniform size, well-drained	6 Oz
Shrimp, 61-70 count, peeled, deveined, well-drained	6 Oz
Sashimi ahi tuna, boneless, skinless, 1/2-inch dice	6 Oz
Roma tomatoes, cored, seeded, 1/4-inch dice	5 Oz
Red onion, 1/4-inch dice	4 Oz
Green bell pepper, 1/4-inch dice	1 Oz
Red bell pepper, 1/4-inch dice	1 Oz
Mango, peeled, seeded, 3/8-inch dice	6 Oz

Italian parsley, chopped	1 TBS
Cilantro, chopped	2 TBS
Virgin olive oil	2 TBS

1. Place the lime juice, lemon juice, shallots, serrano chiles, garlic, ground coriander, pepper and salt into a suitable sized mixing bowl. Using a wire whip, blend the ingredients thoroughly.

2. Add the scallops, shrimp and tuna. Gently toss the ingredients together, coating well. Place the mixture into a shallow storage container. Cover and refrigerate until the seafood is firm and takes on a "cooked" appearance, about 8 to 10 hours.

3. Return the seafood mixture to a mixing bowl and add the tomato, red onion, bell peppers, mango, parsley, cilantro and olive oil. Gently blend the ingredients together. Reserve, refrigerated.

TO SERVE

Ceviche, 6- to 7-Oz portions	4 each
Avocado wedges, 1/2-inch thick	8 each
Lime wedges	4 each
Fresh scallion or chive "strands"	12 each
Fresh cilantro clusters	4 each
Fresh banana leaves, cut to fit service plate (optional)	4 each
Multi-colored tortilla chips	3 Oz

1. Spoon 6 to 7 ounces of ceviche into a serving glass. Garnish each glass with 2 avocado wedges, a lime wedge, 3 scallion or chive strands and a cilantro cluster.

2. Place the banana leaf underliner, if using, on each service plate, then set the ceviche glass on top. Mound the tortilla chips around the glass and serve immediately.

Menu price: \$8.95-\$9.95;
food cost/serving: 27%-28%

* Ceviches are a natural extension of the seafood cocktail, and are becoming more popular as diners continue to experiment with new foods and global flavors.

* The blend of mangoes and serrano chiles are a sweet-heat combination, offering a nice balance of flavors without overpowering the clean seafood and citrus flavors.



* The recipe can be adapted to a chef's needs by using different fish/seafood varieties based on inventory and availability.

* Ceviche is a cost-effective way to maximize the use of by-product when cutting/portioning fish for entrées.



* Despite a lengthy list of ingredients, the product is not difficult to prepare and is easily executed at the time of service.

Hand-shaken seafood martini with spicy gazpacho sauce

*Danny Bendas and Dean Small,
Synergy Consulting*

Yield: 14 servings

FOR THE SEAFOOD MIXTURE

Yield: 4 Lb

Lump crabmeat	1 Lb
Shrimp, 41-50 count, tail off, deveined, cooked	2 Lb
Lobster meat, cooked	1/2 Lb

Pick through the lump crabmeat to make sure all of the shell pieces have been removed. Combine all the seafood and thoroughly blend to create a uniform mixture. Use immediately or cover, label, date and reserve, refrigerated.

FOR THE SPICY GAZPACHO SAUCE

Yield: 1 3/4 qt

Clam juice	46 Oz
Rice wine vinegar	1 C
Blackening seasonings	3 TBS

Serrano chiles, minced	1/4 C
Horseradish, prepared, drained	1/4 C
Garlic, chopped	2 TBS
Lime juice, freshly squeezed	1/4 C
Lemon juice, freshly squeezed	1/4 C
Hot red pepper sauce	1 TBS
Chile sauce	3 C
Cilantro bunches, chopped	2 each
Salt	1 1/2 tsp

Place all the ingredients into a mixing bowl and, using a wire whip, thoroughly blend. Reserve.

TO SERVE

Avocado	1/8 each
Cherry tomatoes, quartered	8 each
Seafood mixture	4 Oz
Crab claw (optional)	1 each
Lime wheel or wedge	1 each
Cilantro sprig	1 each
Gazpacho sauce	1/2 C

1. Place two avocado slices in the bottom of a martini glass. Top with half of the tomatoes and the seafood mixture. Garnish the top with the remaining tomatoes and the crab claw, if using. Place a lime wheel or wedge on the side of the glass. Garnish with a sprig of fresh cilantro.

2. Stir the gazpacho sauce thoroughly (in shaker can). At the table, the server is to hand-shake the gazpacho sauce in front of the guest and carefully pour the sauce over the seafood cocktail. Be sure to serve with a cocktail fork.

*Menu price: \$8.95-\$9.25;
food cost/serving: 34%-35%*




* The blended seafood mixture sounds more exciting in menu copy and the addition of lobster certainly adds to the value perception of the overall dish.

* Customers like a spicy cocktail sauce, so we integrated many of the elements of a good cocktail sauce into a spicy seafood broth similar to gazpacho.



Bendas and Small are managing partners with Synergy, a California-based foodservice consulting firm specializing in menu development, operations and staff training.



* Shaking the gazpacho in a martini shaker and pouring the sauce on the cocktail tableside adds an element of theater to the dish and further increases the value perception.

* Garnishing with a crab claw (not pictured) can add another dash of drama.