

Zydeco Meadery makes 4 meads, and each one tells a story

By Gary Dzen
GLOBE STAFF

Eric Depradine is serious about his mead.

During a thoughtful conversation recently, Depradine weaved together information about his family history, Afro-Latino culture, honey production in Louisiana and Mississippi, and prohibitive licensing laws into the story of how he and his wife, DeAundra, started to make mead.

Their company, Zydeco Meadery, is named for the Zydeco style of music native to rural Louisiana. Eric and DeAundra became interested in mead after their honeymoon to the Puget Sound region of Washington State, where DeAundra fell in love with wines made from Riesling and Gewürztraminer grapes. When he quickly realized those grapes wouldn't grow in his then-home of Louisiana, Eric got to work trying to coax the same flavors out of his own



Zydeco Meadery is named for the Zydeco style of music of Louisiana, where Eric Depradine was living when he and his wife, DeAundra, started their company.

mead, or honey wine.

“You can’t grow European style grapes in Louisiana because of the climate. It’s too hot and there are some pest issues,” says Depradine. “But then I discovered mead.”

Eric, who has both a chemistry and history background, is honest about his trials and errors with initial batches of mead. Taking viticulture classes made Eric more confident. Eventually, to accommodate full-time jobs in other fields, the Depradines moved their business up to Massachusetts, where Eric grew up.

Zydeco makes four meads, and each one tells a story. Yankee Heritage Cyser is inspired by New England colonial times and made with fermented bitter-sweet apples and raisins. Bayou Soleil is a co-fermentation of grape juice and wildflower honey and most closely resembles in flavor the wines sampled on the Depradines’s honeymoon.

I recently opened a bottle of another

Zydeco mead, Atlantic Creole, made from knotweed honey collected from the rural areas of Massachusetts. In the glass, the wine smelled floral, but once I sipped a pleasant, nutty honey flavor was most prominent. There was a nice viscosity to the drink also, though not so much as to coat your throat.

The story behind Carnival Rose, a hibiscus mead made with honey and ginger, is the most personal.

“Hibiscus based drinks are really popular among Afro Latinos,” says Depradine. “The Mexican community, especially on the Gulf Coast, and also West Indians and West Africans — because it all came from the Atlantic coast of West Africa during the transatlantic slave trade — people from those regions, from Senegal to Angola, when you had a party, you usually made a red based drink, either out of the cola nut or the hibiscus plant.”

Eric’s grandmother, who lives in a nursing home in Dorchester, would al-

ways make a red drink for important occasions, and it stuck with him. Dialing in the recipe, he says, was not easy.

“Oh my goodness, old people don’t believe in measuring anything,” Depradine says with a laugh. “Man, it took me a long, long time and a lot of phone calls to my grandmother.”

Asked why he puts so much time and effort exploring the origin of his meads, Depradine says, “I had some really good teachers at Boston Latin Academy.”

Zydeco Meadery is a family affair, with the Depradines’s teenage son and daughter giving up their Saturdays to help produce the product. Those interested in purchasing any of the Zydeco meads can email Eric directly at info@zydecomeadery.net, or search the product on vinoshipper.com.

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DINNER IN A BOWL

QUICK RECIPES FOR A WEEKNIGHT



KAROLINE BOEHM GOODNICK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Sticky Chicken Rice Bowls

Serves 4

Chinese American sticky chicken is popular at chain Chinese restaurants and on food court menus. It’s easy to make at home and undoubtedly healthier. The sticky sweet sauce is made with ketchup, honey, brown sugar, and orange juice, reduced in a pan with boneless chicken thighs. Soy sauce and sherry vinegar provide a zesty (and much needed) balance. Because the sauce contains sugar, be careful that it doesn’t burn while cooking; keep the heat relatively low and stir occasionally. Slice the chicken and serve it in shallow bowls topped with scallions and sesame seeds, with white rice and steamed broccoli.

- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons sherry vinegar or white wine vinegar
- ¼ cup ketchup

- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 cup chicken stock
- Grated rind and juice of 1 orange
- 1½ pounds skinless, boneless chicken thighs
- Salt, to taste
- 2 tablespoons canola or vegetable oil
- 1 piece (1 inch) fresh ginger, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced
- 2 teaspoons toasted sesame seeds

- In a small bowl, combine the soy sauce, vinegar, ketchup, honey, brown sugar, chicken stock, and orange rind and juice. Stir well.
- Sprinkle the chicken on both sides with salt.
- In a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat the canola or vegetable oil. Cook the chicken on one

side only for 3 to 5 minutes, or until browned. Transfer to a plate.

- Add the ginger and garlic to the skillet. Cook, stirring, for 2 minutes, or until it is aromatic and starting to brown. Add the soy sauce mixture. Return the chicken to the pan.
- Lower the heat to medium-low. Cover the skillet and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Turn the chicken in the sauce, cover the skillet, and simmer for 5 minutes more. Remove the lid, and cook, stirring often, for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the sauce is thick and sticky. (Total simmering time is 12 to 13 minutes.)
- Transfer the chicken to a cutting board, allowing as much sauce to cling to it as possible. Cut the chicken into thick slices. Sprinkle with scallions and sesame seeds. Serve in shallow bowls with white rice and steamed broccoli.

Karoline Boehm Goodnick

Gochujang Glazed Tofu with Broccolini

Serves 4

Spicy and slightly sweet, the Korean chile paste gochujang is the star of this vegetarian supper. Bake tofu cubes in the oven until crispy and pale golden, put on a pot of rice, and simmer a glaze made with the condiment. For the glaze, thin the gochujang with water and a touch of lime, sweeten it with brown sugar. While you bake the tofu, you’ll have time to steam broccolini. Toss cubes of tofu and short lengths of broccolini with the glaze and serve over rice or noodles. A healthy vegetarian dinner is on the table in about half an hour.

- 1 block (14 to 16 ounces) firm or extra-firm tofu, cut into 1-inch cubes
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
- 1½ tablespoons cornstarch
- 2 tablespoons gochujang paste
- ¾ cup water

- Juice of ½ lime (2 tablespoons)
- 4 teaspoons brown sugar
- 1 bunch broccolini, bottom ends trimmed, stalks cut into 2-inch lengths
- 2 scallions, trimmed and thinly sliced, including some dark green (for garnish)
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds (for garnish)

- Set the oven at 425 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment.
- On a double layer of paper towels, spread the tofu cubes. Cover with a second double layer of paper towels and press well to remove as much moisture as possible.
- Transfer the tofu to a bowl. Add the salt and sesame oil and toss well to coat the tofu all over. Sprinkle with 1 tablespoon of the cornstarch and toss again. Spread the cubes on the parchment lined baking sheet.
- Bake the tofu for 15 minutes. With a spatula, turn the cubes. Con-

tinue baking for 15 minutes, or until the cubes are pale golden and slightly crisp. (Total baking time is 30 minutes.)

- Meanwhile, in a saucepan large enough to hold the tofu and broccolini, whisk the gochujang paste, water, lime juice, brown sugar, and the remaining ½ tablespoon cornstarch until smooth.
- Set the pan over medium heat. Whisking constantly, bring the sauce to a boil. Let it boil for about 1 minute. Set aside in a warm place.
- Set a steamer basket inside a large saucepan. Fill it with 1 inch of water. Bring the water to a boil. Add the broccolini, cover, and steam for 4 to 5 minutes, or until the broccolini is tender when pierced with the tip of a knife. Remove the pan from the heat.
- Tip the tofu and broccolini into the gochujang sauce. Stir gently to coat them. Serve the tofu and broccolini over rice or noodles. Sprinkle with scallions and sesame seeds.

Sally Pasley Vargas



SALLY PASLEY VARGAS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Italian Wedding Soup is a perfect marriage of flavors

►SOUP CLUB
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dilute with an equal amount of water, and use that as your broth, or to enrich store-bought stock. Collect it in the freezer and when you have enough, make soup with all homemade stock.

Grandmas around the world will be proud of you.

Some Italian Americans call this Escarole Soup because they add so many greens. Escarole is slightly bitter (in the most appealing way), as is chicory, another favorite green. A sweeter element in the pot would be Swiss chard or spinach.

Meatballs here are mixed with ground turkey — you can use ground chicken, beef, or pork — Parmesan cheese, an egg, and enough fresh breadcrumbs (made from sandwich bread or a dinner roll) to bind them. Roll small meatballs with wet hands and refrigerate them on a rimmed baking sheet for

In New England, soup isn’t a winter-only activity. Our pot is simmering for three seasons.

half an hour, or overnight, until they firm up.

Cook everything in layers. Drop the meatballs into boiling broth and after a few minutes, add tiny pasta. That might be rice-shaped orzo, small tubes called ditalini, the tiny dots of acini de pepe, or fetching miniature bow ties labeled farfalline. The pasta start will give the soup body.

When it’s almost tender, add the greens and simmer just until they collapse. Ladle the soup into bowls and serve with more

Parmesan for sprinkling.

There’s something fun about a bowl of broth with delicious little meatballs. The greens give you crunch, and Parmesan adds a nutty umami bite.

The Winter Soup Club team is signing off for now. We hope you found new ideas for nightly dinners in the last weeks. Take the recipes you like and roll them into your repertoire. Or use parts of recipes, or even just a technique.

In New England, soup isn’t a winter-only activity. Our pot is simmering for three seasons. Yes, we’re happy when it finally thaws and nights are no longer chilly, but we hang up our ladle with great reluctance.

Hot soup is inviting, it’s nourishing, nurturing, calming. Sip by sip it slows you down. Thank you for coming along to see what’s in our pot.

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Italian Wedding Soup

Serves 6

- 2 slices firm white bread or 1 small dinner roll, torn into ½-inch pieces or 1 cup fresh (not dried) white breadcrumbs
- ½ cup milk
- 1 egg
- 1 pound ground meat turkey (dark meat, if available)
- 1 clove garlic, grated
- 1 teaspoon salt, or more to taste
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- ½ cup tiny pasta such as orzo (rice-shaped), ditalini (small tubes), acini de pepe (tiny rounds), farfalline (small bow ties)
- 2 quarts chicken stock or broth
- 4 cups (packed) escarole, chicory, Swiss chard, stemmed and cut into 1-inch pieces, or baby spinach

- Extra grated Parmesan (for serving)
- 1. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Have on hand a bowl of cold water.
- 2. In a bowl large enough to hold most of the ingredients, combine the bread or roll or breadcrumbs and milk. With your hands, work the mixture to crush the pieces until they are all wet. Set aside for 10 minutes.
- 3. Add the egg, turkey, garlic, salt, pepper, ½ cup Parmesan, and parsley. With your hands, work the mixture until thoroughly blended.
- 4. Wet your hands in the bowl of water. Use a soup spoon to scoop out mounds of the meatball mixture and roll them in your palms to make 1-inch balls. The mixture is soft. If it’s too soft to roll, add more breadcrumbs, 2 tablespoons at a time; dried are OK here. Set the balls on the baking sheet. Continue shaping until the mixture is used. You

should have about 34 balls. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes, or as long as overnight.

- Pour the chicken stock or broth into a soup pot. Bring to a boil. Carefully add the meatballs to the hot liquid. Let the liquid return to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer for 3 minutes.
- Add the pasta to the pot and cook, stirring once or twice, for 8 minutes, or until the pasta is almost tender.
- Add the escarole, chicory, Swiss chard, or baby spinach to the pot. Submerge it with the back of a ladle. Cook for 2 minutes, uncovered, or until the greens are wilted, the pasta is tender, and the meatballs are cooked through. (Total simmering time is 13 minutes.) Taste the soup for seasoning and add more salt and pepper, if you like.
- Ladle the broth, meatballs, and greens into bowls. Serve with grated Parmesan and crusty bread.

Sheryl Julian

Recipe tips

- Try to use any ground meat within a day of buying it, since it deteriorates quickly. In the case of ground meat, the sell-by date is usually accurate.
- Add more greens to the pot (perhaps another 2 cups chopped).
- When the soup is done, set on the cover and let the pot sit for 10 minutes to plump the pasta.
- Instead of crusty bread, you can also serve bowls with thick slices of toasted bread, drizzled with olive oil and flaky salt.