

A legacy rooted in the vibrance of spice



The Spice of Life

A tribute to Floyd Cardoz

- >> **Date:** Sunday; seatings begin at 5 p.m.
- >> **Place:** TBD ... restaurant, Lotus Honolulu hotel, 2885 Kalakaua Ave.
- >> **Tickets:** Start at \$700 for table for two; go to 808ne.ws/spice
- >> **Call:** 738-6245

MORE EVENTS

The Hawai'i Food & Wine Festival runs Friday through Nov. 21. For details on the 10 festival dinners go to hfwf.me.

Chef Floyd Cardoz was a fixture at the annual Hawai'i Food & Wine Festival and always kept the month of October open so he could be sure to attend. His wife, Barkha Cardoz, said the festival allowed him to combine a visit to his favorite place with his favorite activity: feeding people.

This year he was asked to cook at an event that would have fallen on his 60th birthday, Oct. 2, Barkha said, and she thought he wouldn't want to work that day. "He said, 'Why not? ... Everything I love to do in one spot in one day, what could be a better blessing?'"

He wanted her and their sons, Peter and Justin, to make the trip for his 60th. But Floyd died March 25, one of the early victims of COVID-19.

In the many obituaries that followed, he was honored for all he did to advance the cuisine of his homeland outside India. The New York Times called him "the first chef to

bring the sweep and balance of his native Indian cooking to fine dining in the United States."

Hawaii's festival pays its tribute with a dinner Sunday, "The Spice of Life" with chef Vikram Garg preparing a four-course Indian menu at his restaurant, TBD ... in Waikiki.

The theme is perfectly in tune with what Barkha calls Floyd's mission, "to teach people to cook without fear, to cook with your heart." He wanted to see spices in every kitchen, she said. "We can't just live with salt and pepper."

When they were in culinary school together in Mumbai at the beginning of their relationship, she said, Floyd would note that the refined French cuisine they were studying could really use some spice. "Someone should take this French food and add flavor to it," he'd tell her. "I said, 'Who is going to do that?' and he said, 'I will do it, watch me.' Fast-forward, we were in New York and he does it."

The couple moved to the



COURTESY CARDOZ LEGACY

Barkha and Floyd Cardoz at a beachside Hawai'i Food & Wine Festival event in 2015.

U.S. in 1988; 10 years later Floyd opened the acclaimed Tabla in Manhattan, with a dedicated room where spices were stored and ground daily.

Barkha and their sons had hoped to attend Sunday's dinner, but given the dangers of

COVID-19 decided traveling from their home in New Jersey was too risky.

Instead, Barkha has been at work on a line of spice mixes that the couple had hoped to launch together this spring. She kept up the work, she said, "trying every way in my being to hold onto Floyd." The line debuted online two days after his birthday.

On the first day, she said, 1,000 sets of spices mixes were sold, many to people who wanted to show their respect for Floyd. "So many people have told me, 'We feel like Chef's in our kitchen.' What bigger compliment is that? ... I hold open my palms and say thank you."

I HAD a chance to spend a little time with Floyd in 2000, at a culinary event called Cuisines of the Sun on the Big Island. Among an all-star collection of chefs, he was easily the most intriguing. I remember being quite caught up with a little chicken meatball he made, fla-

vored with salted cod, mango and almonds, spiced with ginger, mustard seed, chiles, curry and rosemary. "I usually work with very lowly ingredients," he told me, "and push them up with spices."

Over the years, as he returned for other events, I'd briefly see him again, but this year I hoped to talk him into letting me cook with him, to teach me about all those mysterious spices.

Instead, I've been cooking my way through his 2016 cookbook, "Flavorwalla." (A walla in India, he writes, is a merchant with special knowledge. He preferred 'Flavorwalla' to other nicknames he's been given, like "Spicy Man.")

He also notes that the use of spices is about layers of flavor and should not be equated with heat. Chiles are just part of a world of spices and need to be used wisely, not just to bring the burn. "Heat is a flavor," he writes, "and it shouldn't be taken for granted or overused any more than



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any other flavor."

In the last few weeks I've made his steak crusted with mustard seed, coriander and rosemary; mung beans with a smoky fire-roasted poblano; grilled chicken with a hefty amount of lime, ginger and black pepper. All were a revelation in how spices can define a

dish. For Thanksgiving I have my eye on his Brussels sprouts hash with dal and another list of spices.

The recipe I've settled on for today is a sweet-savory grilled pineapple that merges our world with his. Besides, it was delicious.

In the book, Floyd notes that

the taste of pineapple transports him to a field behind his great-aunt's home, where he'd pick pineapples as a kid to eat right away. "For me this is the defining characteristic of what I do. I am most successful when a lovely feeling or recollection is captured through the food I prepare."

Grilled Pineapple With Cracked Black Pepper

Adapted from "Flavorwalla" by Floyd Cardoz (Artisan, 2016, \$29.95)

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 vanilla bean, split
- 1-inch piece ginger, peeled and sliced into 1/2-inch thick rings
- 1 ripe pineapple, peeled, cored and cut into 1/2-inch thick rings
- 1/2 cup ghee (see note)
- 1 tablespoon black peppercorns, coarsely ground

Combine sugar and water in saucepan over medium heat, and stir until sugar is dissolved. Remove from heat; add vanilla bean and ginger. Cover; let stand 30 minutes, then remove lid and cool.

Prepare a high-heat grill. Brush pineapple slices with ghee. Grill until marked but still firm, about 5 minutes per side.

Lay slices on platter and sprinkle with pepper. Strain sugar mixture and pour over pineapple. Let sit 1 hour before serving. Pineapple may be refrigerated in syrup up to 3 days. Serves 4 to 6.

Nutritional information unavailable.

TO MAKE GHEE: Melt cubed butter in saucepan over medium heat without stirring. Bring to boil and cook until foam on top forms crust and darkens. Remove from heat and strain through cheesecloth or a coffee filter.

Spice primer

In "Flavorwalla," Floyd Cardoz suggests these basic spice pairings:

- >> **Beef:** Coriander, black cardamom
- >> **Poultry:** Cumin, coriander
- >> **Pork:** Cloves, cinnamon, mustard seeds
- >> **Fish:** Coriander, fennel
- >> **Vegetables:** Cumin, mustard seeds

GRINDING TIP

Ideally, whole spices would be ground as needed. A coffee grinder is good for this task, but needs to be cleaned well afterward to get rid of fine powder and oils. Wipe with a paper towel, then grind some raw rice or dry bread for 10 to 20 seconds. Discard and wipe the grinder again.

LEGACY SPICE LINE

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