

CONTINENTAL COOKBOOK

By Tammy Briggs

Chef Bryan Caswell

BRYAN CASWELL IS THE CORPORATE CHEF and co-owner of the Houston restaurant Reef and a newly named Continental Celebrity Chef. Called the No. 1 seafood restaurant in the U.S. by *Bon Appétit* in December 2008, Reef serves Mediterranean and Asian-influenced seafood prepared with produce fresh from the local farmers' market. Chef Caswell was featured on the July cover of *Food & Wine* magazine as one of the Best New Chefs for 2009, and he was recently a semifinalist for Best Chef/Southwest at the 2009 James Beard Awards. The Gulf Coast native is also a co-owner of Little Bigs, an upscale burger joint and wine bar in Houston. Caswell honed his culinary skills at New York's Jean-Georges in Trump International Hotel and Tower, Vongerichten restaurants in Hong Kong and Bangkok, and at the One & Only Ocean Club Resort on Paradise Island, Bahamas. We asked Caswell for a recipe.

Q: What has been your culinary dream?

A: I'm truly humbled to say that both of my professional dreams came true this year — *Food & Wine* named me a Best New Chef, and I became a Celebrity Chef for my hometown airline, Continental.

Q: What is your favorite cookbook?

A: I thought I knew everything about oysters, as I've been eating them since childhood, until I read *Sex, Death, and Oysters* by Robb Walsh.

Q: We hear there's a reason you named your second restaurant Little Bigs.

A: My father had two uncles who looked and acted nothing like one another. One was a big, soft-spoken guy and the other was a small, scrappy spitfire. My big uncle was always called Big Little Man and my small uncle was always called Little Big Man — a really big man in a really small package. He was the inspiration behind Little Bigs' slider burgers with a really big taste.

Q: When you're not cooking, what are your favorite pastimes?

A: Fishing, fishing, and, uh ... fishing!



Grouper with Salsa Cruda

Ingredients

- 4 beefsteak tomatoes, diced
- 6 scallions, white part only, thinly sliced
- 4 radishes, julienned
- 1 Thai chili, chopped fine
- ½ cup olive oil
- 4 tbsp. lime juice
- 1 tbsp. cilantro leaves, chopped
- 1 tsp. mint leaves, chopped
- 1 tbsp. basil leaves, chopped
- 1 tsp. salt
- 6 7 oz. grouper fillets, skinless
- 1 tbsp. unsalted butter
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper

Instructions

1. For Salsa Cruda, combine tomatoes, scallions, radishes, Thai chili, olive oil, lime juice, cilantro, mint, basil, and ½ tsp. salt in a large bowl.
2. Cover and chill for one hour before serving.
3. For grouper, preheat oven to 325°F.
4. Grease sheet pan with butter.
5. Lightly season fillets with ½ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper.
6. Sear one side of the fish on a flat grill. Flip fillet over and place on the sheet pan with cooked side up. Bake uncovered in oven for 10 minutes.
7. To plate, top grouper with Salsa Cruda. Serves six.

Serving suggestion: Accent dish with half a grilled peach, as pictured.



11 Number of Texas-based chefs included in *Food & Wine* magazine's Best New Chefs list over the past 21 years.