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REVEL IN A

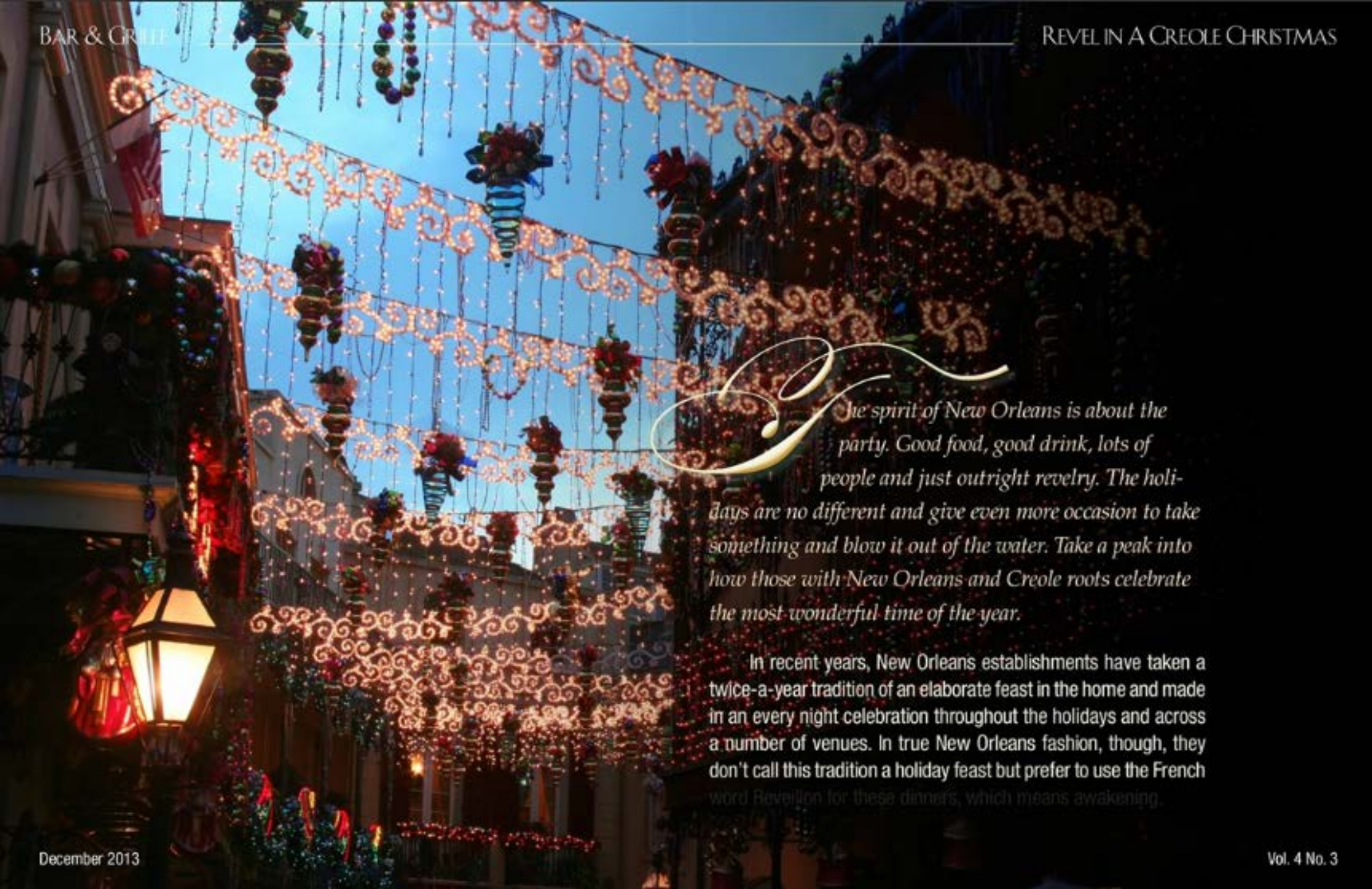
# *Create Christmas*

WITH REVEILLON

Story by Lindsay Mott







*The spirit of New Orleans is about the party. Good food, good drink, lots of people and just outright revelry. The holidays are no different and give even more occasion to take something and blow it out of the water. Take a peak into how those with New Orleans and Creole roots celebrate the most wonderful time of the year.*

In recent years, New Orleans establishments have taken a twice-a-year tradition of an elaborate feast in the home and made in an every night celebration throughout the holidays and across a number of venues. In true New Orleans fashion, though, they don't call this tradition a holiday feast but prefer to use the French word *Revelion* for these dinners, which means awakening.



According to many sources, New Orleans Creole families in the mid-1800s celebrated the “Reveillon” on Christmas Eve after midnight mass. These meals often consisted of egg dishes, sweetbreads, and such Creole specialties as daube glace, according to Charles Lebeuf, director of sales at Crescent City Brewhouse in the French Quarter. There was often a fruit-filled cake desert with wine or rum and whipped cream.

Lebeuf describes this history of the feast on the Crescent City Brewhouse’s blog as the brew house now offers its own version of this tradition nightly in December. Other descriptions of these traditional dinners include chicken and oyster gumbo, game pies, soups, soufflés, lavish desserts, brandy, and coffee on the menus of these festive, late-night dinners.

Over time, other holiday traditions crept in and the Reveillon dinners virtually disappeared in the 1940s, according to the city of New Orleans’ holiday tourism web site.

“As New Orleans became more of an American city in the 19th century, the Reveillon tradition began to fade—waking early on Christmas morning became more popular than celebrating after midnight mass on Christmas Eve,” said Rebecca Sell, marketing and publicity manager with French Quarter Festivals Inc., which was integral in getting these dinners going again in the 1990s.

When the dinners returned, the tradition had moved from family homes to community gatherings at some of the city’s most popular restaurants. The menus for these dinners are similar to those of the early revelers but many chefs add their own

twists on the menu, even throwing in house specialties and favorites specific to their own tastes. This year, 48 restaurants are involved in the Reveillon movement.

“Each restaurant brings their own unique touch to the tradition, but diners can expect at least four courses, typically with seafood or prime cuts of meat,” Sell said, adding that many menus will include turtle soup or gumbo and rich deserts such as cakes or bread pudding.

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“What diners can expect from menus is a decadent experience worthy of New Orleans’ reputation as a great food city,” Sell said. “Part of our goal in resurrecting Reveillon was to showcase our great restaurants.”

#### **CRESCENT CITY BREWHOUSE**

Crescent City Brewhouse in the French Quarter is offering a Reveillon menu for the second year in a row, according to Lebeuf. Their menu consists of four courses. The first course is seafood andouille gumbo and the second course is baked oysters three ways. Third course is a choice of red fish Pontchartrain, shrimp and grits, or southern crispy duck. The dessert course is a choice of bread pudding with praline sauce, chocolate pecan



pie, or crème brûlée. They also throw in a four-beer sampler as they brew their own beer at the brewery.

*Even though the menus for the Reveillon dinners are all different, the common ground is found in the ingredients.*

*“Red snapper, satsumas, finest cheeses, cauliflower, oysters, veal, caviar, lamb, best in season—basically the ‘best ingredients’ that are not part of every day dining” ...*

“It’s our brew house take on these dinners,” Lebeuf said, adding that they also have live jazz every night.

Crescent City has been open since 1991 when it became the city’s first brewpub. Along with its homemade beer, the brew house works to put a modern flair on traditional Louisiana ingredients and recipes year round.

Lebeuf said that each of the more than 40 menus around the city for these special holiday menus will have some similarities, but many will put their own spin on it. These menus combine timeless Creole cuisine with contemporary New Orleans favorites. He said they have seen great turnout for the dinners and that the popularity is growing.

“It starts bringing a lot of locals down to the French quarter.”

#### **COMMANDER’S PALACE**

Commander’s Palace is a restaurant in the garden district of

New Orleans that has been in business for more than 100 years and offers ageless Creole cuisine year-round.

Reveillon hit the restaurant scene with its revival in the 1990s, according to Darla Fisackerly, marketing manager with the Commander’s Family of Restaurants, and they began doing their own even though they are not located in the French Quarter.

“Our menu is a contemporary spin on the traditional menu. Although—many of the traditional dishes are so rarely seen that they have now become ‘contemporary’,”

This year, their first course is a smoked pompano and caviar canapé with a second course of Creole ham, brie, parsnip, and honey roasted pear puréed soup. The third course is a panéed gulf flounder with roasted shiitake mushrooms, pearl onions, winter tomatoes, garlic-grilled kale, and lemony champagne butter. The fourth course is a deep-dish rabbit and foie gras potpie followed by Louisiana game bird cassoulet. Desert is a fig and white chocolate linzertorte with Creole cream cheese ice cream.

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“Red snapper, satsumas, finest cheeses, cauliflower, oysters, veal, caviar, lamb, best in season—basically the ‘best ingredients’ that are not part of every day dining,” she said.

They’ve been doing these holiday dinners for years now and are happy to be involved in keeping the tradition alive.

“This has been a wonderful way to revive an old Creole tradition before it was lost for good.”



Photograph by Darla Fisackerly

Marketing Manager, Commander's Family of Restaurants





**BRIGTSEN'S**

Brigtsen's has been working to revitalize Creole/Acadian cuisine in a Victorian cottage in uptown New Orleans since 1986. Under the direction of Chef Frank Brigtsen, the unique menu incorporates local ingredients and changes daily.

*"I think food does the same thing in many ways. We have emotional attachments to smells and tastes and dishes," Brigtsen said. "I think number one, food is such an important part of our cultural heritage here in New Orleans."*

Brigtsen's Reveillon menu leans more towards the traditional with a focus on seasonal ingredients and consists of options in each of the four courses. The first course is a choice of oyster chowder with bacon and fennel or file' gumbo with chicken and andouille sausage. The second course consists of a choice of organic lettuces with satsumas, spiced pecans, feta, croutons, pickled red onion, and cane vinegar dressing or sea scallops with acorn squash puree and Louisiana citrus marmalade. The main course is a choice of roast duck with dirty rice, tart dried cherry sauce and mashed sweet potatoes or poisson farci aux champignons with diners able to choose from sweet potato bread pudding with pecan praline sauce or eggnog crème brûlée for desert.

Brigtsen's offers the Reveillon menu every night in De-

ember. The restaurant has been doing the dinners for approximately the last eight years and Brigtsen said he looks forward to it every year.

"The Reveillon is a brilliant way to embrace the holiday season by celebrating some of the traditional dishes and flavors and ingredients of this area," he said. "I am proud of traditional Creole dishes."

Growing up Catholic in New Orleans Brigtsen said he remembers going to midnight mass and the smells of the frankincense and the memories this invokes.

"I think food does the same thing in many ways. We have emotional attachments to smells and tastes and dishes," Brigtsen said. "I think number one, food is such an important part of our cultural heritage here in New Orleans."



The menus above are just a small taste of the Reveillon offerings in New Orleans in December. The dinners bring back old memories and traditions for some, but with the emphasis on showcasing local ingredients and these New Orleans holiday flavors, many are now turning these dinners into new traditions.

Whether it is gumbo, oysters, sweet potatoes, local citrus, bread pudding, or something else—these are the flavors of a Creole Christmas. 