

me of fall but is on the menu year-round and plays as well in spring, summer or winter.

Add a little caramel sauce and a scoop of ice cream (Chow's staff uses pumpkin; I'm happy with vanilla) and you have something that will end any meal memorably. Now and for the next few months, it'll be good with strawberries.

I've been known to have a hunk of this cake for breakfast. Why not? It's warm from ginger, dark from molasses and has a complex flavor that lingers.

The ginger cake has been a staple on the Chow menu since the restaurant opened in 1997. Owner Tony Gulisano has lots of other homey recipes in his repertoire, too. When I wrote "The Secrets of Success Cookbook" a decade ago, I featured his pecan pie, and we've run it several times in the Food section. It's become a reader and staff favorite, and I predict the ginger cake will be just as popular.

Gulisano's Chow restaurants are run on a simple concept: Serve the best organic food you can find and charge as little as possible. Organic eggs, for example, cost a little more, but in the long run he finds other ways to save. Service is casual. The flatware, wrapped in brown paper napkins, sits in a recycled Hershey's syrup can on each table.

The menu consists of international comfort foods such as wontons, Cobb salad, fish tacos, beef pot roast, Thai-style noodles and old-fashioned spaghetti and meatballs.

Since the original opened 13 years ago, Gulisano has expanded to four locations; two in San Francisco, one in Danville and one in Lafayette. All have similar menus and are open for breakfast with organic juices, eggs

# Chow's Ginger Cake With Caramel Sauce & Whipped Cream

Serves 16

## Ginger cake

- Butter and flour to prepare pan
- 2 ounces ginger, peeled and finely grated on a Microplane (about 3 tablespoons)
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup rice bran oil or other neutral flavored oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup dark molasses (see Note)
- 4 large eggs
- $2\frac{1}{2}$  cups all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cloves
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground white pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 tablespoon baking soda

## Caramel sauce

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons light corn syrup
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream at room temperature
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon kosher salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup unsalted butter (1 stick), cut into pieces

## Whipped cream

- 1 cup very cold heavy whipping cream
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon Tahitian vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon powdered sugar, + more to garnish

**For the cake:** Preheat oven to 350°. Lightly butter a 9- by 9-inch cake pan and dust very lightly with flour or line with parchment paper (see Note).

Combine ginger with  $\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoon water in a mixing bowl; add sugar, oil and molasses. Mix on low speed. Add eggs; continue mixing at low speed until fully incorporated.

Combine flour, cinnamon, cloves, white pepper, ground ginger and baking soda in another mixing bowl. Add dry ingredients slowly to the egg mixture, continuing to beat slowly, scraping mixing bowl occasionally. Increase speed to medium for 2 minutes. Scrape; decrease speed to low and slowly add  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup hot tap water. Mix until just combined, occasionally scraping. (The batter will be elastic.)

**For the caramel sauce:** In a medium-size stainless steel pot, combine sugar and  $1\frac{3}{4}$  cups hot water, stirring until sugar dissolves. Add corn syrup and cream of tartar; mix. Wipe down the inside of the pot with a wet towel to remove any sugar crystals. If needed, also brush inside of pot just once with a wet pastry brush. Bring to a boil over high heat without stirring, until mixture becomes a deep caramel color or a candy thermometer reaches 335°.

Remove pot from heat and immediately add cream in a slow stream while stirring (be careful — it will pop and sputter). Whisk in salt and the butter, a little at a time.

The caramel sauce can be made ahead and refrigerated. Carefully reheat in a water bath or in a microwave before using. Makes approximately 2 cups.

## For the whipped cream:

Vigorously whisk cream, vanilla extract and powdered sugar in a cold bowl until the cream reaches soft peaks. You want the cream to be relatively soft so it can slowly run over the sides of the cake. Makes about 2 cups; refrigerate leftovers to use another time.

**To finish:** (At Chow, the cake is cut into 2-inch squares and reheated  $2\frac{1}{2}$  minutes in a 350° oven.) Place the cake square in a shallow bowl, top with caramel sauce and a dollop of whipped cream. Finish with a dusting of powdered sugar.

**Note:** If you plan to turn the cake out of the pan before cutting, also use the parchment paper, which helps the cake release more easily. Dark molasses (also labeled "full") is more intensely flavored and less sweet than light or mild molasses. Avoid using blackstrap, which is less sweet and has a stronger flavor than dark molasses.

**Per serving:** 359 calories, 4 g protein, 43 g carbohydrate, 20 g fat (8 g saturated), 84 mg cholesterol, 285 mg sodium, 1 g fiber.