

# Chef's love of spicy food and big flavors drives the menu at Sassy Marie's

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Sassy Marie's, an 8-month-old restaurant on the North Side, might be Pittsburgh's best-kept dining secret -- and Richard Horn, executive chef, says he's tired of that.

"I just wish people would find us," Horn says. "I think there's ... the perception that we're just a neighborhood restaurant."

Horn calls the three-kitchen, three-story restaurant, housed in the same building as the former James Street Tavern, an "American regional chophouse," with many fine meat dishes, seafood and salads. The cuisine includes Caribbean and Cajun influences, which are fueled by Horn's nickname, "the pepper chef," earned because of his passion for spicy foods. The menu includes plenty of non-spicy items, too.



"I'm known for spicy food, but we want to fill our food up with the right amount of sass," says Horn, a South Hills native who now lives in Verona. "Everything has a little bit of flavor to it."

"The pepper chef" earned his nickname when he taught at the Pennsylvania Culinary Institute, Downtown. There, Horn -- who loves chili recipes -- was the go-to guy for anyone who had questions about all kinds of peppers. Horn is a 1985 graduate of the New England Culinary Institute in Montpelier, Vt.

His fondness for spices shows in many menu items, such as the signature cowboy steak that comes with a chipotle chimichurri sauce, which contains green peppers, cilantro and green onions. Among Sassy Marie's most popular dishes are N'awlins Seafood Pasta, with its New Orleans-style flavors, and Cedar Plank Salmon, a smoky-flavored salmon filet in a honey-bourbon marinade, and is roasted on a charred wood plank.

Another favorite is the Blackberry Pork Tenderloin -- center-cut pork with a blackberry demi-glace that has hints of Dijon mustard. Then there is Horn's Delta King Gumbo.

The environment at Sassy Marie's -- named after the lively and spirited Aunt Marie of the co-owners, Stephanie Britton and her brother, Duke -- is casual, yet elegant: The dining areas are somewhat fancy and formal, but patrons can feel comfortable in jeans, Horn says. The restaurant, which seats about 80 people in the main dining room and bar area on the first floor, features live blues and jazz on Friday and Saturday nights.

Crisp linen tablecloths -- white ones, topped by black -- grace the tops of the dining tables, along with wineglasses and fine place-settings.

"I did my Martha Stewart best," says Horn.

[Sassy Marie's](#), 422 Foreland St., North Side, is open 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays; 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; and 10:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Sundays, when brunch is served. The restaurant is available for private parties, and accepts reservations. Live music usually begins around 9 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. Details: 412-246-0355.

# Lobster Pierogies by Chef Richard Horn



Add the remaining ingredients and mix at medium speed until the dough forms a ball.



Use a 3-inch circular cutter to cut about 24 pieces.



Meanwhile, use a potato masher to mash the potatoes; add the cheddar cheese and garlic-butter mixture, and continue to mash.



Place about 1 1/2 tablespoons filling in the center of each dough circle; stretch the centers a bit before filling, to make it easier.



Moisten the edges with water, fold the dough over to create half-moons, and pinch with your fingers to seal.

Lobster pierogies are an occasional special at Sassy Marie's, and they always sell out quickly.

## Dough

- 2 cups flour, plus extra for kneading
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2 ounces (about 1/4 cup) butter, softened and cut into small pieces
- 1 large egg
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives
- Pinch of kosher salt and white pepper

Place flour in the bowl of a mixer with a dough hook attachment. Add the remaining ingredients and mix at medium speed until the dough forms a ball (**see Photo 1**). This will take a few minutes. Remove the dough from the bowl, sprinkle some flour on your countertop, wet your fingers and knead the dough to smooth it out. Wrap the dough in plastic and refrigerate for 20 minutes. This will let the dough relax, so it is more stretchable.

If you don't have an appliance with a dough hook, you can prepare this dough by hand-kneading, but it will take a lot of elbow grease.

Before you prepare the filling (recipe follows), roll out the dough to 1/8 inch thick. Use a 3-inch circular cutter to cut about 24 pieces (**Photo 2**). Stack the circles with wax paper between layers and set aside.

## Filling

- 8 ounces (about 1 1/2 cups) lobster meat, cleaned and diced
- Boiling water
- 2 ounces butter (about 1/4 cup)
- 1/2 tablespoon roasted garlic paste
- 12 ounces Yukon Gold potatoes, boiled, peeled and quartered
- 2 ounces (about 1/2 cup) shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives, plus extra for final garnish (optional)
- Kosher salt and white pepper, to taste

Poach the lobster meat in boiling water until slightly firm, but not fully cooked. Drain and set aside.

In a saucepot over low heat, melt the butter, add the roasted garlic paste and simmer to release the flavor. Meanwhile, use a potato masher to mash the potatoes; add the cheddar cheese and garlic-butter mixture, and continue to mash (**Photo 3**). Fold in the lobster meat and chives, and add kosher salt and white pepper to taste. Stir with a spatula until well-mixed.

## Assembly and Cooking

Place about 1 1/2 tablespoons filling in the center of each dough circle; stretch the centers a bit before filling, to make it easier (**Photo 4**). Moisten the edges with water, fold the dough over to create half-moons, and pinch with your fingers to seal (**Photo 5**). Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add the pierogies and cook for 3-5 minutes, or until the pierogies float to the top. Remove with a slotted spoon, and set aside while you prepare the sauce.

## Sauce and Presentation

- 18 ounces Spanish onions, sliced 1/4 inch thick
- 2 1/4 sticks butter, divided
- 24 ounces (about 4 1/2 cups) lobster meat, cleaned and finely diced
- Lobster Pierogies (**see recipe**)
- 18 ounces mushrooms, sliced (mixed wild mushrooms are a good choice)
- 1 1/2 cups baby peas
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons chardonnay

Saute the Spanish onions in 1 1/2 sticks butter over low heat until they are golden brown; set aside.

Note: The pierogies and sauce will need to be sauteed in batches, with 2 servings in each batch, so that the pan is not overloaded. Divide the ingredients into thirds and saute each batch separately. Saute the lobster in the remaining butter over medium-high heat in a non-stick pan with the pierogies. Add the mushrooms, sauteed onions and peas, and continue cooking until everything is thoroughly heated. Finally, add the chardonnay to deglaze the pan.

Divide among deep pasta bowls to serve, with 4 pierogies per serving.

Makes 24 pierogies, about 6 servings.