

Signature Dish

Favorite recipes from local chefs

COLIN EVANS

Amarillo Restaurant & Tavern, Monroe

BY EVAN THOMPSON
PHOTOS BY OLIVIA VANNI

They call it Cowboy Caviar, but don't worry: No one's asking you to eat fish eggs.

It's a Tex-Mex-style chunky salsa with a lime-infused dressing that eats like a delicacy at Amarillo Restaurant & Tavern in Monroe.

The dip, served with tortilla chips, is made with a colorful mix of roasted corn, black beans, avocado, tomatoes, cilantro, red onion and smoked jalapenos.

"A lot of people send their family and friends in just for that," said Connie Adams, who owns the Texas-style barbecue restaurant with her husband, Brian. "We use our smoked jalapenos that we smoke in-house here, which makes it more of a signature dish for us."

A chipotle vinaigrette, which combines citrus and smoky flavors, ties the medley of vegetables and beans together.

Cowboy Caviar, also known as Texas Caviar, was introduced in 1940 by a chef named Helen Corbitt. She was a cookbook author and among the first to advocate



Colin Evans preps vegetables for Cowboy Caviar in the kitchen at Amarillo Restaurant & Tavern in Monroe.

for cooking with all fresh ingredients.

Colin Evans, executive chef at Amarillo, said Cowboy Caviar is a healthy alternative to the barbecue, steaks and burgers also on the menu.

"They just love the texture, fresh crunch, the beans, the house-fried chips — all of it works so well together," Evans said. "It's such a wonderful, refreshing dish compared to all of our heavy, smoked meats."

True to its Texas roots, this Cowboy Caviar has a kick to it — mostly because of Amarillo's smoked jalapenos.

"These things have power," Evans said. "We smoke them whole. All of the seeds, all of the pits are still in there. That concentrates it and seeps into it and creates an intense heat profile."

He said the key to a good Cowboy Caviar is balance. Equal flavors between the ingredients keeps the heat factor in check.

Presentation is equally important.

"Everyone eats with their eyes first," Evans said. "It doesn't look like we just threw it on a plate and sent it out the window."

The Cowboy Caviar has been a popular item on the menu ever since Amarillo Restaurant & Tavern opened in September in a 115-year-old building on E. Main Street.

If the restaurant's name sounds familiar, that's because the original Amarillo Restaurant, owned by Gordon Campbell in Omaha, Nebraska, was known for serving the best barbecue in the city and had a celebrity following.

The Adamses, of Lake Stevens, bought the rights to the restaurant in a proxy auction after Campbell retired.

They remodeled the Monroe building, a former tavern, hired Evans and sent him to Texas to learn

from pit masters.

Evans, 29, has been a cook all his working life, starting out as a prep cook and weekend dishwasher at a place called the Black Sheep Cafe. The Lynnwood native's grandmother stirred his passion for cooking, but not in the way you might expect.

"She was a very old-school cook — grew up in the Depression — and she would never let me in the kitchen," Evans said. "I would have to stand there and watch. It was like a forbidden fruit."

He learned to cook for himself when he was 11. When he was old enough to get a job, he worked in local restaurants.

His passion caught the eye of his culinary teacher and assistant principal at Scriber Lake High School in Edmonds (he graduated in 2009), who helped him attend Le Cordon Bleu — one of the top culinary schools in the country at the time — in Portland, Oregon.

After graduation, Evans worked at a few more restaurants, including Diamond Knot Brewpub in Mountlake Terrace, before he was hired at Amarillo.

He said making Amarillo's Cowboy Caviar at home is easy, even without access to a restaurant-quality smoker.

The smoky taste of the jalapenos and roasted corn can be achieved by grilling them in oil in a saute pan on medium to high heat until they are slightly charred.

"That will add the depth of flavor you'd be looking for," Evans said.

He recommends rinsing the black beans and draining the juices from the tomatoes to ensure the dip's longevity.

And one more tip: "You really want to put your heart and soul into it," Evans said. "That's where the true flavor comes out." ■

Cowboy Caviar

1 cup canned black beans
2/3 cup red onion
1/3 cup tomato
1/2 cup yellow corn, thawed if frozen
1 tablespoon cilantro
3 tablespoons jalapeno
1 avocado
3/4 cup chipotle dressing

For the chipotle dressing:

1/3 cup canola oil
4 teaspoons adobo (or chipotle puree)
1 teaspoon apple vinegar
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
4 teaspoons fresh lime juice



Cowboy Caviar features the Amarillo's house-smoked jalapenos.

Rinse the black beans thoroughly, then drain. Dice the red onion and tomato. Seed and dice the jalapeno.

Saute the corn and jalapeno separately in a pan with oil

until slightly charred. Set aside to cool.

Place the black beans, red onion and tomato, minus its juices, in a mixing bowl.

Chop the cilantro. Slice an

avocado in half, remove the seed and dice the flesh. You'll want the avocado to be cut into larger chunks than the onion, tomato and jalapeno.

Add the cilantro and avocado, plus the cooled corn and jalapeno to the mixing bowl.

Making the dressing: Put adobo, vinegar, spices and lime juice into a blender and mix until smooth. While the blender is on, slowly add the oil to the mixture. This will emulsify the oil, making the dressing stable. Makes about 3/4 cup.

Add the chipotle dressing to taste. Mix thoroughly. Serve chilled with corn chips.

Serves 4.