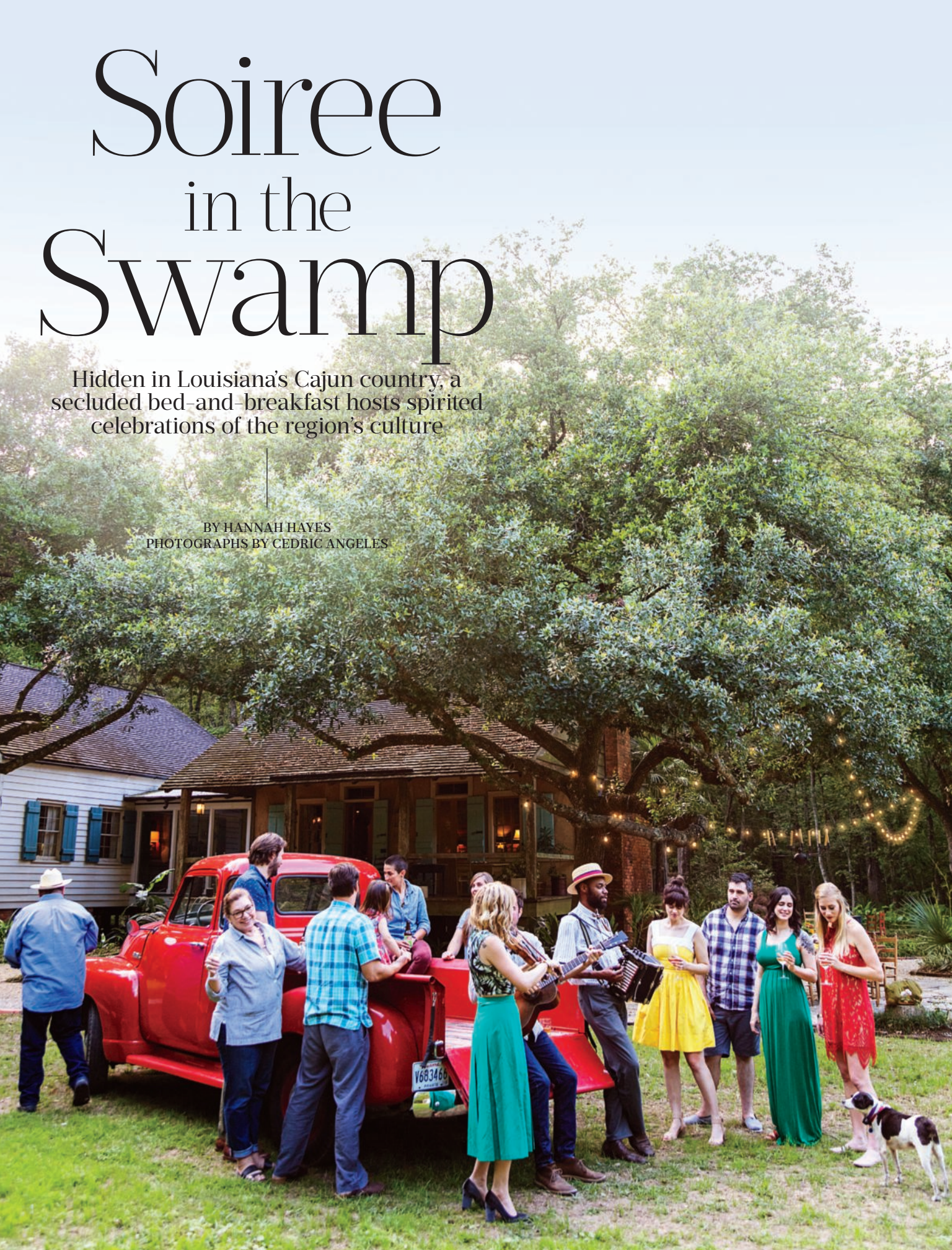


Soiree in the Swamp

Hidden in Louisiana's Cajun country, a secluded bed-and-breakfast hosts spirited celebrations of the region's culture

BY HANNAH HAYES
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CEDRIC ANGELES



IN HARMONY
"We have a really symbiotic community, and the energy about it is very genuine, especially with young people," says Walt Adams about the Acadian creative culture, which includes musicians Joel Savoy (left) and Cedric Watson (right).

The turn toward Maison Madeleine Bed & Breakfast doesn't feel quite right. The road, barely wide enough for two cars, winds

through fields of towering, emerald green sugarcane before it dead-ends at a scrubby boat landing for a swamp-tour operation. This can't be the way to the place that lures visitors from as far away as France and Brazil deep into Louisiana's Cajun country.

But just a bit farther to the left on the bumpy dirt lane that circles Lake Martin, a hidden oasis of two sun-dappled cottages appears behind the spiky palmetto fronds and Spanish moss-cloaked oaks. A one-eyed marmalade tabby cat named Dude saunters up the steps to find a sunny spot on the porch; an azalea pink roseate spoonbill soars over the courtyard; and the sweet smell of pain perdu (French toast) floats from the kitchen.

When Louisiana native Madeleine Cenac decided to start her namesake inn here, she was recently divorced with three children, and the dreamy French Creole cottage from 1840 that now serves as the main guesthouse looked more like a nightmare to restore. But Cenac saw promise in the property, mere feet from Lake Martin, part of the Atchafalaya Basin where snowy egrets and blue herons perch above the alligators and frogs that skim the water.

From the rustic bousillage walls (made with a mixture of clay and Spanish moss) to the heirloom furnishings gathered from Cenac's past life as a design consultant, she resurrected the house into a destination for discerning tourists visiting nearby Lafayette and Breau Bridge.

When Walt Adams, a health-care design and construction consultant in Lafayette, heard about Maison Madeleine, he decided to celebrate the launch of his company there. But during the party, he found something else magical about the setting: Madeleine. Egged on by his adult daughters, Adams initiated a few subsequent meetings, but the couple (pictured at right) had their first official date at the Blue Moon Saloon in

Lafayette. Their eyes met as the Lost Bayou Ramblers played onstage, and not long after, Adams checked in permanently at the Maison.

Soon, the couple hosted another life-changing visitor at the B&B: Anthony Bourdain. Filming an episode of his television show *No Reservations* in 2011, the writer-host invited a collective of chefs, musicians, and locals over for a crawfish boil. After an evening of cracking tails and pouring bourbon, there was a consensus that they should do this more often, off camera. "We wanted to establish

[this place] as a nexus of Acadian culture," says Adams.

Cenac and Adams renovated another building on the property to house a restaurant-style kitchen complete with a pint-size juke joint in the back for the gatherings that became known as the "Secret Supper" series. Once



LOCAL LOVE

"The very heart of Cajun cooking is the idea of using ordinary, commonplace, and affordable ingredients to achieve some really extraordinary results," says chef Jeremy Conner. "Summer is awesome here. Crab, muscadines, corn, and okra are all in season."

“After an evening of cracking [crawfish] tails and pouring bourbon, there was a consensus that they should do this more often, off camera.”



Blackberry Trifles with Pecan Feuilletage and Mascarpone-Cane Syrup Mousse, p. 111



Seared Hanger Steak with Braised Greens and Grapes, p. 109



Grilled Eggplant-and-Corn Romesco Napoleons, p. 111

TASTE MEMORY

“I can’t escape my own Sicilian culture, whether in technique or flavors,” says chef Manny Augello, who was born on the Italian island and moved to southwest Louisiana as a child. “I incorporate what I grew up with and influences from this area.”



Kettle Chip-Crusted Fried Green Tomatoes with Tasso Tartar Sauce, p. 109

word got out, chefs such as Isaac Toups came to cook dinners served beneath sprawling oak trees as a rotating cadre of musicians set the scene sonically.

At a recent Secret Supper, chef Manny Augello of Bread & Circus Provisions in Lafayette (who cooked at the very first Secret Supper in 2013) had returned with chef de cuisine Chanel Gaudé and chef Jeremy Conner (the co-owner of Cellar Salt Co. and Olympic Grove, a mobile event service).

While the three worked in the kitchen, tossing together crab salad and crushing Zapp’s Spicy Cajun Crawtators potato chips to crust fried green tomatoes, the sound of a fiddle coming into tune cut through the humid air outside. Musicians Joel Savoy and Linzay Young (both formerly of the Red Stick Ramblers) strummed their guitars, Cedric Watson squeezed his accordion, and Kelli Jones (of Feufollet) sang in Cajun French.

An outsider might see this gathering, which includes a James Beard Award semifinalist and a Grammy winner performing traditional tunes, as a contrived display to impress out-of-towners, but this kind of overlap between music and food in Acadiana isn’t unusual to those who call it home. (Nor is it uncommon to hear Cajun French

spoken casually in the aisles of the Piggly Wiggly in town.)

“There’s so much talent that it pushes all of us to remain parallel to each other,” says Augello. “You’ve got to put your soul into it here, or it’s nothing,” echoes Conner.

Through Maison Madeleine, Cenac and Adams found a way to cultivate that community while also introducing visitors to the magic of their little piece of Louisiana. “This place is unlike any other on the planet, and people lose themselves in that,” says Adams.

GET IN ON THE SECRET If you’d like to book one of Maison Madeleine’s two guest rooms (both accommodate two to three adults) or inquire about dates for future Secret Suppers, call 337/332-4555 or visit maisonmadeleine.com.

PROP STYLING: BUFFY HARGETT MILLER; FOOD STYLING: TINA BELL STAMOS

THE RECIPES

Augello and Conner's menu balances the traditional and unexpected

Kettle Chip-Crusted Fried Green Tomatoes with Tasso Tartar Sauce

ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 30 MIN.

SERVES 8

TASSO TARTAR SAUCE

- 3 oz. pork tasso, chopped (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped shallots (from 2 medium shallots)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped red onion (from 1 onion)
- 2 Tbsp. chopped celery (from 1 stalk)
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice (from 1 lemon)
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tsp. Creole mustard
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. cayenne pepper
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. kosher salt

FRIED GREEN TOMATOES

Canola oil, for frying

- 4 green tomatoes (about 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ lb.), cut into $\frac{1}{3}$ -inch-thick slices
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. black pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 3 cups finely crushed spicy kettle-cooked potato chips (such as Zapp's Spicy Cajun Crawtators, from 2 [5-oz.] bags)

1. Prepare the Tasso Tartar Sauce: Place pork tasso, shallots, red onion, celery, fresh lemon juice, and garlic in bowl of a food processor; pulse until finely chopped, 6 to 8 times. Scrape

mixture into a small bowl, and fold in mayonnaise, mustard, cayenne, sugar, and salt. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

2. Prepare the Fried Green Tomatoes: Heat 1 inch of oil in a large, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium to 350°F. Sprinkle tomato slices with salt and pepper. Place flour, beaten eggs, and crushed chips in 3 separate shallow bowls. Dredge tomato slices in flour; dip in egg, shaking off excess. Dredge in crushed chips until coated. Fry tomatoes, in batches, in hot oil until golden brown and crunchy, about 2 minutes per side. Serve immediately with Tasso Tartar Sauce.

Seared Hanger Steak with Braised Greens and Grapes

If you can't find Swamp Pop Noble Cane Cola, Dr Pepper has a similar spicy and moderately sweet flavor.

ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 2 HOURS, 40 MIN.

SERVES 8

- 4 qt. water
- 2 large bunches fresh collard greens (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. each), stemmed and chopped into medium-size pieces (or 4 large bunches fresh mustard greens)
- 2 (12-oz.) bottles fig cola soft drink (such as Swamp Pop Noble Cane Cola)
- 1 ($\frac{1}{2}$ -lb.) smoked ham hock
- 1 large (12 oz.) yellow onion, sliced (about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups)
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped (about 2 tsp.)
- 3 Tbsp. kosher salt

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- 1 tsp. crushed red pepper
- 3 tsp. black pepper, divided
- 2 lb. hanger steak, trimmed
- 2 ½ tsp. flaky sea salt
- 3 oz. large red table grapes or ripe muscadines (about ¾ cup)

1. Stir together water, greens, cola, ham hock, onion, garlic, kosher salt, crushed red pepper, and 2 teaspoons of the black pepper in a large pot. Bring to a boil over medium-high; reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer until greens and ham hock meat are tender, about 2 hours. (Mustard greens will take 45 minutes.)

2. Sprinkle hanger steak with sea salt and remaining 1 teaspoon black pepper, and rub into steak. Let stand 10 minutes.

3. Heat a well-seasoned 12-inch cast-iron skillet over medium-high. Add steak; cook, turning occasionally, 10 to 12 minutes for medium-rare or until desired degree of doneness. Remove steak from skillet, and let rest until just cool enough to handle but still very warm, about 7 minutes.

4. While hanger steak rests, thinly slice or shave grapes, removing seeds as you go.

5. Using a slotted spoon, divide greens evenly among 8 serving plates. Slice steak, and place on top of greens. Top with sliced grapes, and serve immediately.

Grilled Eggplant-and-Corn Romesco Napoleons

ACTIVE 25 MIN. - TOTAL 40 MIN.

SERVES 8

- 3 ears fresh yellow corn, husked
- ¾ cup chopped red onion (from 1 small onion)
- ½ cup chopped almonds, toasted
- 2 tsp. minced garlic (2 garlic cloves)

- ½ tsp. smoked paprika
- 2 ½ tsp. kosher salt, divided
- 2 tsp. black pepper, divided
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- ¼ cup plus 3 Tbsp. olive oil, divided
- 2 medium (1 lb. each) eggplants, cut crosswise into ½-inch-thick slices
- 1 oz. (1 ½ cups) watercress, torn

1. Preheat a grill to medium-high (400°F to 450°F). Place corn on grate, and grill, covered, until tender and lightly charred, about 12 minutes, turning occasionally. Let cool 10 minutes. Cut corn kernels from cobs.

2. Place onion, almonds, garlic, smoked paprika, 1 ½ teaspoons each of the kosher salt and black pepper, and half of corn kernels (about 1 ½ cups) in bowl of a food processor. In a separate bowl, whisk together apple cider vinegar and ¼ cup of the olive oil. While drizzling olive oil mixture into corn mixture in processor, pulse until combined with a coarse texture, about 10 times. Set aside, and reserve remaining half of corn kernels.

3. Toss eggplant with remaining 3 tablespoons oil, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Place on grate, and grill, uncovered, in batches if needed, until grill marks appear and eggplant is soft, 2 to 3 minutes per side.

4. Place 1 eggplant slice on each of 8 serving plates. Top with about 1 ½ tablespoons romesco sauce, 1 tablespoon reserved corn kernels, and a few pieces of torn watercress. Repeat layers twice to make 8 layered stacks.

Blackberry Trifles with Pecan Feuilletage and Mascarpone-Cane Syrup Mousse

The feuilletage can be served with ice cream or simply eaten on its own as an easy make-ahead dessert for any get-together.

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RICH**



ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 2 HOURS

SERVES 8

PECAN FEUILLETAGE

- 2/3 cup finely chopped pecans**
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar**
- 9 frozen phyllo pastry sheets (4 oz.), thawed and separated into layers**
- 1/3 cup butter, melted**

MULLED WINE

- 1 qt. (32 oz.) dry red wine**
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar**
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon**
- 1/2 tsp. ground allspice**
- 1/2 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg**
- 2 whole cloves**

MASCARPONE-CANE SYRUP

MOUSSE

- 3 oz. mascarpone cheese (about 1/3 cup)**
- 3/4 cup heavy cream**
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. cane syrup (such as Steen's)**

ADDITIONAL INGREDIENT

- 4 cups (20 oz.) fresh blackberries**

1. Prepare the Pecan Feuilletage: Preheat oven to 400°F. Stir together pecans and sugar in a small bowl. Place 1 layer of phyllo on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet; brush with some of the melted butter. Sprinkle with about 1 1/2 tablespoons pecan mixture. Cover with another layer of phyllo. Repeat process with remaining phyllo sheets, butter, and pecan mixture, ending with a butter-brushed phyllo sheet on top.
2. Bake in preheated oven until layers are golden brown, bonded together, and crispy, 12 to 14 minutes. Cool completely on baking sheet, about 30 minutes. Break apart, or cut into pieces.
3. Prepare the Mulled Wine: Stir together red wine, sugar, cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg, and cloves in a large saucepan over medium-high; bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to medium, and cook, stirring occasionally, until mixture is syrupy and reduced to about 1 1/2 cups, 40 to 50 minutes. Remove from heat, and

cool completely, about 30 minutes. Discard cloves.

4. Prepare the Mascarpone-Cane Syrup Mousse: Beat together mascarpone cheese, heavy cream, and cane syrup in a large bowl with the whisk attachment of an electric mixer on medium-high speed until stiff peaks form, about 1 1/2 minutes.
5. To assemble trifles: Divide fresh blackberries evenly among 8 (1/2-cup) serving glasses. Pour 3 tablespoons of Mulled Wine over berries in each glass. Top with 2 to 3 tablespoons Mascarpone-Cane Syrup Mousse and pieces of Pecan Feuilletage.

Acadian Kitchen Staples

1

Steen's 100% Pure Cane Syrup

This yellow-labeled can doesn't look very different than it did when Steen's got its start in 1910, but that's what Louisianans love about it. Made with the state's sugarcane, the subtly tangy syrup is used by locals in everything from pies to cocktails.

2

Zapp's Potato Chips

Zapp's makes their cult-followed chips outside New Orleans, but they are the entire state's flagship snack. Now distributed across the South, the colorful bags are easy to find in grocery stores and gas stations.

3

Cellar Salt Co. Sea Salt

This small, Lafayette, Louisiana-based company harvests pyramid-shaped flakes of sea salt straight from the Gulf of Mexico.

4

Swamp Pop Noble Cane Cola

Flavored with summertime figs, this small-batch soda stands out with a deep, sultry sweetness. **SL**

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