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COOKBOOK REVIEW

# Spices, chiles, and more bold dishes in ‘Caribbean Potluck’

By **T. Susan Chang** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 21, 2014

Although you may not have heard of them, Suzanne and Michelle Rousseau are celebrity chefs in their home country, Jamaica. And like many celebrity chefs, they’ve made their way from a brick-and-mortar restaurant and high-profile catering to TV and the Internet. “Culinary hostesses” for the Jamaica Tourist Board, the telegenic sisters have transformed themselves into virtual spokeswomen for the cuisine of the southern Caribbean, maintaining a bustling media presence that can be tracked at [2sistersandameal.com](http://2sistersandameal.com).

The Caribbean pantry is not a perfect match for the New England one, and many recipes in “Caribbean Potluck” have to be nixed if you don’t have access to ackee, hardo bread, cho cho, ortanique, and other exotica. But a good number turned out to be doable with only a bit of



ELLEN SILVERMAN

**Sisters Suzanne and Michelle Rousseau are virtual spokeswomen for the cuisine of the southern Caribbean.**

finessing. Bold with thyme, garlic, and Scotch

bonnets (well, with habaneros, since that's what I could get), these dishes are almost confrontationally flavorful, and always surprising.

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Pastelitos, perfect as party appetizers, come with a number of fillings, including a “Trini-style” chicken with olive, capers, and raisins (like Spanish picadillo or Colombian-style empanadas). The proportions were wildly off — I got twice the amount of filling, and half again the amount of crust — still, not a crumb remained in the end.

A “red, green and gold salad,” hearty enough to eat for dinner, brims with color and texture: pickled beets, soft mango chunks, salty feta, toasted almonds, crisp, raw red onion. It's shockingly uncontrolled, yet each surprising bite refreshes.

Callaloo strudel (use kale if you can't get callaloo greens) will raise eyebrows: 1 cup of heavy cream, an entire package of cream cheese, a stick of butter (you can get away with half). There is something disconcerting about that much cream cheese wrapped in phyllo, and it's not clear how to cut or distribute it, but the crisp phyllo shards dazzle in the lime-scented sauce.

## **CARIBBEAN POTLUCK: Modern Recipes From Our Family Kitchen**

**Author:** Suzanne & Michelle Rousseau

**Publisher:** Kyle Books

**Number of pages:** 192 pp.

**Book price:** \$24.95

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**Recipe for shrimp salad with black beans, corn, plantains, and cilantro**

Shrimp marinated in citrus juices and a bazaar's worth of spices make a salad of black beans, corn, and cilantro almost obstreperously vibrant, while starchy, caramelized plantain soaks up the flavors with unexpected subtlety. Green bananas stewed in coconut milk look like a frightful gray mash, yet, as with the plantains, their featureless

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Both Rousseaus are Italophiles, which explains the presence of pasta and aioli in these pages. Their portobello-sundried tomato penne is fresh and wild with ginger, mint, thyme, and cilantro, all married into some kind of sense with a thyme-y cream sauce. The aioli is like none I've had before. This is bright with orange and ginger, and though roast salmon is its perfect partner, that wouldn't stop me from eating it on just about anything.

Some dishes refused to cooperate but won applause. A molasses glaze ruined one of my saucepans, but the glaze was also the crowning glory on a couple of pork rib racks. "Pan chicken in Red Stripe barbecue sauce" calls for 30 minutes of grilling (hello, flare-ups!), followed by roasting. Overkill or not, we sucked the meat off the bones.

Instructions throughout the book can occasionally be vague, but I muddled through until dessert, when everything that could go wrong, did. A "banana-coconut brulee" will be infamously remembered in my household. Flambeed bananas collapsed into mush, the yolks and coconut curdled, and in the end even my kids couldn't finish it. It was a great night for our backyard chickens.

Still, nothing ventured, nothing gained. After a week, I know many more uses for ginger, a bit about plantains, and I have a more liberal hand with thyme. My children's spice tolerance, already rather high for their age, has been inched up another notch by daily applications of habanero. Altogether, I count it a win.

### ***Recipe from 'Caribbean Potluck':***

- [Recipe for shrimp salad with black beans, corn, plantains, and cilantro](#)

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