

Ovenly is back, with a sweet & salty genius snack

By Kate Krader
Bloomberg News

One beneficiary of pandemic-related lockdowns has been cookbooks. Print sales rose 15% for the first three quarters of 2020, compared to 2019.

Cult favorite Brooklyn bakery Ovenly has taken advantage of that renewed obsession with a new edition of their 2014 tome “Ovenly: Sweet and Salty Recipes from New York’s Most Creative Bakery.”

The book went through three printings and then disappeared.

“During quarantine when everyone amped up their baking, no one could find our cookbook,” says Ovenly cofounder Agatha Kulaga.

In response, she and fellow founder Erin Patinkin put out an updated version in early January, including new recipes, such as their top-selling hot chocolate cookies, packed with mini marshmallows.

Among the old favorites: spicy caramel corn, studded with fat pieces of bacon. Although Ovenly became famous for its cookies, scones and stout-spiked Brooklyn Blackout cake, “the secret beginning,” says Kulaga, is that they started off as a bar snack company.

“We spent a lot of time brainstorming business plans over drinks,” she says. “Our plan was to level up lame bar snacks.”

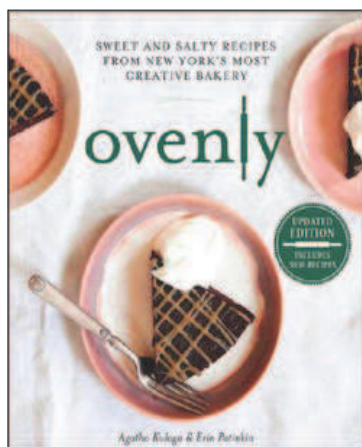
Their pastries may have taken off more quickly, but their first big idea — that popcorn — is a sight to behold, a genius snack perfect for staying at home.

The kernels are doused in a cayenne pepper caramel infused with ale. Add bacon, and the result is addictively smoky, sweet and spicy, combining a large amount of craveable products in one place.

It’s a no-brainer with beer, although it’ll complement a wintry whiskey drink too.

The beer caramel is the trickiest part (but made infinitely simpler with a candy thermometer), then it’s just a matter of combining the ingredients and waiting for the popcorn to cool enough to eat.

SPICY BACON AND BEER CARAMEL CORN



INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a pan, fry the bacon until crisp, about 10 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to cool, then crumble into large pieces. Pour off 4 tablespoons fat for the popcorn. Reserve the remaining fat for another use. (The book’s authors, who are strong no-waste advocates, recommend mixing leftover bacon fat with softened butter for a porky spread for bread and muffins.)

2. Spray a large mixing bowl, baking sheet and two large metal mixing spoons with non-stick cooking spray.

3. In a popcorn popper or large pot with a lid, heat the bacon fat over medium-high heat. Add the popcorn, cover and cook until all the kernels have popped, shaking constantly to prevent burning. If using a popper, follow the manufacturer’s directions.

4. Transfer the popcorn to the coated bowl and mix in the cooked bacon.

5. Combine the baking soda and cayenne in a small bowl.

6. In a large pot, combine the sugar, ale, water, butter and salt. Cook until the mixture turns a rich golden brown and reaches 305° on a candy thermometer, about 15 minutes. (If you don’t have a thermometer, drop a spoonful of the mixture in cold water; it should be hard enough to crack if you mold it.)

7. Remove the pan from heat and stir in the cayenne and baking soda for 30 seconds until any clumps have been dispersed and the foam subsides.

8. Immediately pour the caramel evenly over the popcorn and bacon and mix well using the prepared spoons, until everything is well coated.

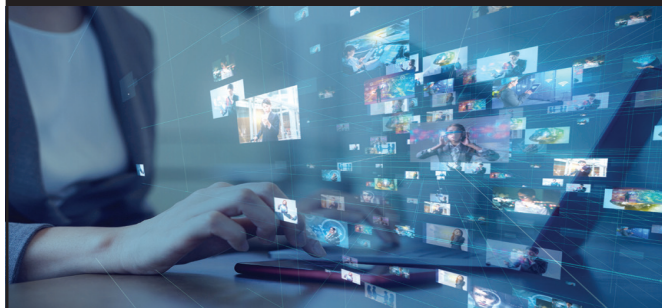
9. Spread the caramel corn onto the prepared baking sheet. Let cool, then break apart into bite-sized pieces and serve.

INGREDIENTS

- 6 slices thick-cut bacon or 10 slices regular bacon
- Non-stick cooking spray
- 1/3 cup popcorn kernels
- 4 tablespoons rendered bacon fat (from cooking the bacon)
- 3 cups sugar
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1/4 cup dark English ale
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 1/2 tablespoons salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste

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This recipe is adapted from “Ovenly: Sweet and Salty Recipes from New York’s Most Creative Bakery” by Agatha Kulaga and Erin Patinkin (Park Row Books; \$24).
Makes about 4 cups.

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