



Cook

Spanish

in America

Recipes with love from
**The Robot Book
Club**

Cook Spanish in America

*Authentic Family Recipes and Everyday Flavors for the Modern
Kitchen*

The Robot Book Club

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Published by The Robot Book Club

Table of Contents

Mañanas y Meriendas (The Rhythms of Morning and Afternoon)

La Hora del Vermut (The Weekend Prelude)

La Comida Hecha Rápida (The Weeknight Heart)

La Cena Ligera (The Gentle Evening)

El Domingo y La Sobremesa

Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Spanish Home Cooking.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

Prologue

For some, the journey began not with a passport stamp, but with a smell. A particular alchemy of olive oil, garlic, and smoked paprika, wafting from a kitchen in an Ohio suburb that somehow, impossibly, evoked a sun-drenched street in Seville or a mountain village in Asturias. This isn't about exotic travel brochures or the gilded plates of 'fine dining' that often miss the point entirely. This is about what happens when home, true home, follows you across an ocean, settling into a life defined by different rhythms, different markets, and a relentless clock.

The old ways—the late *comida*, the lingering *sobremesa*, the specific ingredients whispered from one *abuela* to the next—they don't fit neatly into the nine-to-five. And the local supermarket isn't exactly brimming with *ñora* peppers or properly cured *chorizo*. But the memory, the craving for that honest, unpretentious comfort, it persists. It demands to be fed, to be remembered, to be shared.

This book isn't some academic treatise on culinary history. It's a field guide, a translation for the kitchen you have, the life you live. It's a collection of real Spanish home cooking, distilled and adapted, not diluted or 'curated' for the tourist gaze. We're talking about the food that fueled generations, dishes born of resilience, resourcefulness, and profound love, made with what you can actually find, right here, right now. We've found the workarounds, the smart swaps, the methods that bring that deeply satisfying taste of Spain to your American table, authentically, without compromise.

Forget the rigid schedules. We've untangled the day, re-imagining the *desayuno*, *vermut*, *comida*, *cena*, and *sobremesa* not as strict timelines, but as moments, feelings, opportunities to connect—to heritage, to family, to joy. These are the recipes your grandparents carried with them, the secrets they perfected

with scant resources, passed down to ensure that a piece of Spain, the most delicious piece, remains vibrant, alive, and utterly authentic. Dive in. Abuela's waiting.



Mañanas y Meriendas (The Rhythms of Morning and Afternoon)

Quick, nostalgic breakfasts and comforting after-school snacks that fill the house with the aromas of a Spanish childhood.

The Spanish morning isn't born in a sterile drive-thru; it happens at the kitchen counter, smelling of aggressively toasted bread, raw garlic, and coffee strong enough to wake the dead. It's about honest, unpretentious sustenance before the chaotic American school run. You rub a bruised tomato onto charred sourdough because that's what your grandfather did, not because it looks good on the internet.

Then comes the merienda—that sacred, late-afternoon bridge between the day's obligations and a notoriously late dinner. It's the aroma of frying dough and cinnamon pulling exhausted kids through the front door. These aren't fussy, plated affairs. They are unapologetic, necessary carbohydrates—wedges of yesterday's tortilla stuffed into crusty bread, pots of impossibly thick hot chocolate, and bowls of sweet rice pudding that taste exactly, perfectly, like home.





Pan con Tomate y Tostada con Aceite y Jamón

Forget the balsamic-drenched, basil-strewn bruschetta of American strip malls. True Spanish pan con tomate is a masterclass in restraint, born from rural Catalan farmers needing to soften days-old bread, and elevated by Andalusian laborers with olive oil and cured mountain ham. The secret lies entirely in the biomechanics of the preparation. You do not chop the tomato; instead, the heavily toasted bread acts as a grater, tearing the flesh and absorbing the sweet juices while the tough skin is left behind in your hand. It is unpretentious, unapologetic, and delivers the sharp, unadulterated sensory rhythm of a real Spanish morning to a weeknight kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

1 large	artisanal ciabatta or country sourdough loaf <i>cut into 3/4-inch slices</i>	1 small	garlic clove <i>peeled and cut in half</i>
2 med	ripe Roma or plum tomatoes <i>cut in half horizontally across the equator</i>	1/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil
		1 tsp	flaky sea salt
		8 oz	jamón serrano <i>thinly sliced</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the bread until the surface is hard and highly abrasive.**
Broil, grill, or toast the slices until the edges are dark golden brown. The bread must be hot and crunchy enough to act like sandpaper, while maintaining a slight chew in the absolute center.
- 2. Lightly swipe the hot bread with the cut side of the garlic.**
Do not overdo it. One or two gentle passes across the rough crust is enough to grate microscopic amounts of raw garlic into the crumb, where the heat of the toast will instantly release its essential oils.
- 3. Rub the cut side of the tomato directly into the abrasive crust.**
Hold the warm bread in one hand and press the cut, fleshy side of the tomato firmly into the bread. Rub vigorously in a circular motion until the crust tears the flesh apart, pushing the juices into the air pockets of the bread, until all you are holding is the empty skin. Discard the skin.
- 4. Generously drizzle the tomato-soaked bread with olive oil.**
Do not be shy with the pour. The high-quality olive oil mixes with the fresh tomato juices to create a rich emulsion inside the crumb of the bread.
- 5. Season with flaky sea salt and drape the jamón serrano over the top.**
Do not press the ham flat; let it fall naturally with volume so it can breathe. The residual heat of the toast will cause the fat of the jamón to sweat slightly, releasing an incredible savory aroma. Serve immediately before the crust becomes soggy.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Use the grating method for stubborn winter tomatoes.**

If your American supermarket tomatoes are too firm to rub effectively into the bread, grate the flesh using the large holes of a box grater. Discard the skins, gently spoon the pulp over the toast, and spread it evenly.

- **Seek out genuine jamón serrano over Italian prosciutto.**

While prosciutto will work in a pinch, jamón serrano is cured longer in drier mountain air. This gives it a bolder, saltier flavor and the firm structural rigidity needed to stand up to the warm, oil-soaked bread.



Bocadillo de Tortilla

bo-kah-DEE-yo deh tor-TEE-yah

In Spain, a sandwich isn't just a sandwich—it's a bocadillo. The king of them all requires no meat, just a perfectly executed potato omelet shoved into a crusty baguette. The traditional method demands an hour of slow-poaching potatoes in oil, but modern Spanish home cooks have a secret for the weeknight rush: the microwave. By steam-poaching the potatoes, then giving the hot mixture a crucial five-minute rest in beaten eggs, a cook can achieve that coveted, creamy, straight-from-Madrid texture in a fraction of the time.

INGREDIENTS

1 large	crusty baguette or ciabatta loaf <i>sliced into 6-inch lengths and halved horizontally</i>	4 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
1 lb	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled, halved lengthwise, and sliced into 1/8-inch thick half-moons</i>	5 large	large eggs
1 med	yellow onion <i>peeled and sliced into thin strips</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt <i>divided</i>
		1 med	ripe tomato <i>halved (optional)</i>
		2 tbsp	mayonnaise <i>(optional)</i>

PREPARATION

- **Prepare all your ingredients before beginning the cooking process.**
The hot potatoes must be transferred directly into the beaten eggs to properly partially coagulate them during the resting phase.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the potatoes, onion, three tablespoons of olive oil, and half a teaspoon of salt in a large microwave-safe bowl.**
Toss well to coat every slice, then cover tightly with a microwave-safe plate or vented plastic wrap.
- 2. Microwave on high for ten to twelve minutes, stirring halfway through, until the potatoes are meltingly tender.**
The potatoes should crush easily under the tines of a fork; this steam-poaching replicates the texture of a traditional slow oil-poach.
- 3. Beat the eggs with the remaining half-teaspoon of salt in a large bowl, then fold in the hot potatoes and onions and let the mixture rest for at least five minutes.**
Do not skip this rest. The hot potatoes absorb the egg, thickening the mixture into a loose custard that guarantees a juicy, cohesive tortilla.

- 1. Heat the remaining tablespoon of olive oil in a non-stick skillet over medium heat, pour in the potato mixture, and cook undisturbed for three to four minutes.**

Use a spatula to spread the potatoes evenly; the edges will turn golden brown while the center remains slightly wobbly.

- 2. Place a large, flat dinner plate upside down over the skillet, invert the pan swiftly to drop the tortilla onto the plate, then gently slide it back into the skillet raw-side down.**

Tuck the rounded edges inward with your spatula and cook for another two minutes, then transfer to a cutting board to rest.

- 3. Cut a thick wedge of the warm tortilla and nestle it between the crusty bread.**

For a Catalan spin, rub the cut bread vigorously with the halved raw tomato and drizzle with olive oil; for a Madrid style, spread a thin layer of mayonnaise.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Use waxy potatoes like Yukon Gold or Red potatoes.**

Starchy varieties like Russets will disintegrate into mush during the poach and ruin the creamy interior texture of the tortilla.

- **Soft sandwich bread is strictly forbidden.**

The bread must have a firm, hard crust to provide structural integrity against the soft, yielding texture of the eggs and potatoes.



Churros Rústicos con Chocolate a la Taza

When it's raining on a Tuesday afternoon and you want the smell of home in twenty minutes, all you need is flour, water, and that bar of dark chocolate hiding in the back of your pantry. True Spanish churros are a miracle of peasant alchemy, entirely devoid of the eggs, butter, and cinnamon that diaspora versions rely on. They are unapologetic, unpretentious, and strictly built for plunging into a molten pool of thick, dark chocolate. Respect the simplicity, treat the boiling water with violence, and let the hot oil do the rest.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup whole milk

6 oz	dark chocolate baking bar <i>finely chopped</i>	1 cup	unbleached all-purpose or bread flour
1 tbsp	cornstarch	1/2 tsp	fine sea salt
1 tbsp	granulated white sugar	1 qt	neutral oil
1 pinch	fine sea salt	1/2 cup	granulated white sugar
1 cup	water		

PREPARATION

- **Prepare your workspace.**

Set out a sheet of parchment paper for extruding the dough, and a shallow dish filled with the half cup of granulated sugar for coating.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Create the chocolate slurry.**

In a small bowl, whisk the cornstarch with 2 tablespoons of the cold whole milk until perfectly smooth to prevent any lumps from forming in your chocolate.

- 2. Melt and thicken the chocolate.**

Warm the remaining milk in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat until steaming, then whisk in the cornstarch slurry, one tablespoon of sugar, and a pinch of salt. Add the chopped chocolate, reduce the heat to medium-low, and whisk constantly for 3 to 5 minutes until it becomes a glossy, dense pudding that heavily coats the back of your spoon. Remove from the heat and cover.

- 3. Boil the water aggressively.**

In a medium saucepan, bring the cup of water and half-teaspoon of salt to a furious, rolling boil. If the water isn't violently bubbling, the flour won't flash-cook properly and your dough will be structurally weak.

1. Scald the flour.

Remove the pan from the heat and instantly dump in the entire cup of flour at once. Beat the mixture relentlessly with a sturdy wooden spoon for 30 to 60 seconds until a dense, sticky dough ball forms and pulls away clean from the sides of the pan.

2. Knead out the air bubbles.

Turn the dough onto a clean counter and let it cool for just a few minutes—enough to handle safely without burning yourself, but do not let it go cold. Knead it firmly for one minute to force out any trapped, microscopic air bubbles that would otherwise cause the churros to explosively pop in the fryer.

3. Extrude the dough safely.

Pack the warm dough tightly into a manual churrera (churro press) fitted with a medium star nozzle, ensuring absolutely no air gaps exist. Extrude the dough into 5-inch sticks or teardrop loops directly onto your prepared parchment paper.

4. Fry the churros.

Heat at least two inches of neutral oil in a wide, deep skillet to 385°F. Carefully slide three or four churros into the hot oil, frying them for 2 to 3 minutes per side until they develop a deeply rustic, golden-brown crust.

5. Coat and serve immediately.

Remove the churros with a spider, drain briefly on paper towels to wick away surface oil, and immediately roll them in the shallow dish of plain white sugar while still hot. Serve at once alongside steaming mugs of the thick hot chocolate for dipping.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the Churrera.**

Do not attempt to use a flimsy plastic piping bag. Authentic Spanish dough is dense and stubborn; a pastry bag won't apply the mechanical pressure needed to expel dangerous air pockets, and will likely tear in your hands. Spend \$15 online for a simple plastic or metal churrera—it is the single secret to getting that perfect, crispy star-shape safely.

- **The science of the explosion.**

Air and water vapor trapped inside the dense dough will expand rapidly when it hits the hot oil. Thoroughly mixing the dough and giving it a brief knead on the counter are mandatory steps to prevent boiling oil from splashing you.

- **Leave the cinnamon in the cupboard.**

While Mexican variations frequently use a heavy coating of cinnamon, canonical Spanish churros rely solely on the flavor of the fried dough and a light dusting of plain white sugar. Let the dark chocolate do the heavy lifting.



Magdalenas con Copete

mag-dah-LEH-nas con co-PEH-teh

Forget the dense, cakey coffee shop muffins of the American suburbs. A true Spanish magdalena is light, incredibly moist, and crowned with a towering peak called the copete. Making these doesn't require any ancient magic or specialty imports; the secret relies entirely on basic physics and ingredients already sitting in your local market. It's an abuela trick called *el choque termico*—the thermal shock. By whipping the eggs until they are wildly fluffy, chilling the batter, and blasting them in a very hot oven, the cold batter is forced to explode upward into that iconic dome. Best of all, you can mix the batter in ten minutes the night before and bake them fresh before work. Take a bite, close your eyes, and you'll know exactly what morning in Spain tastes like.

INGREDIENTS

3 large	eggs <i>room temperature</i>	1/4 cup	whole milk
1 cup	granulated sugar	1 tbsp	lemon zest <i>freshly grated</i>
2 tbsp	granulated sugar <i>reserved for sprinkling</i>	1 1/2 cup	all-purpose flour
1 cup	mild olive oil	1 tbsp	baking powder
		1/2 tsp	kosher salt

PREPARATION

- **Bring the eggs to room temperature.**

Room temperature eggs whip much faster and achieve a much higher volume than cold eggs, which is critical for the extreme emulsion step.

- **Zest the lemon.**

Use a microplane or fine grater to remove just the yellow skin of the lemon, leaving behind the bitter white pith. One large lemon should yield exactly the tablespoon you need.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Beat the eggs and the one cup of sugar with an electric mixer on medium-high speed for five to seven minutes.**

The mixture must turn pale, thick, and almost triple in volume. Do not shortchange this step; it incorporates the microscopic air bubbles that give the magdalena its incredibly spongy texture.

- 2. Lower the mixer speed and stream in the wet ingredients.**

Slowly pour in the olive oil, followed by the whole milk and the lemon zest, mixing just until combined.

- 1. Whisk the dry ingredients together in a separate bowl, then gently fold them into the wet mixture.**

Combine the flour, baking powder, and salt. Add this to the batter in two additions, using a spatula to fold it in gently just until the flour disappears to avoid developing tough gluten.

- 2. Cover the bowl tightly and refrigerate the batter for at least one hour.**

You can leave it in the fridge for up to 24 hours. This cold rest is the secret to hydrating the flour and setting the stage for the thermal shock.

- 3. Preheat your oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit and line a rigid metal muffin tin with twelve paper cups.**

The high initial heat combined with the freezing-cold batter is what forces the center of the magdalena to explode straight up.

- 4. Fill the cups three-quarters full and top with the extra sugar.**

Give the cold batter one quick stir before portioning. Sprinkle a generous pinch of the reserved granulated sugar directly onto the center of each muffin to create the signature crackly top.

- 5. Place the tin in the oven and immediately lower the heat to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.**

Bake for 14 to 16 minutes without opening the oven door, until the magdalenas sprout a towering peak and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Let them cool in the pan for five minutes before moving to a wire rack.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The muffin tin is non-negotiable.**

Do not use standalone paper cups on a flat baking sheet. You need the rigid metal walls of a standard American muffin tin to force the batter to rise vertically into that iconic peak.

- **Choosing your olive oil.**

While rustic versions occasionally use robust extra-virgin olive oil, a mild or light olive oil is standard in Spanish bakeries. It keeps the pastry perfectly moist without overpowering the bright lemon flavor.

- **Storage and longevity.**

Because olive oil remains liquid at room temperature, these magdalenas won't stale quickly like butter-based cakes. They will stay incredibly moist in an airtight container on the counter for three to four days.

- **The baking powder translation.**

Traditional Spanish recipes almost always call for a 15-gram envelope of 'levadura quimica'. In the American kitchen, this translates perfectly to exactly one level tablespoon of double-acting baking powder.



Bizcocho de Yogur 1, 2, 3

beeth-KO-cho de yo-GOOR

If you grew up in a Spanish household, you know the smell of this cake. It's the quintessential afternoon merienda, born when Spanish grandmothers figured out a brilliant hack: using a single, empty yogurt pot to measure everything else. Because American single-serve yogurts are all over the map, we're standardizing the 'pot' to a strict half-cup measure. No scales, no pretense. Just a towering, deeply tender, lemon-scented sponge that tastes exactly like a late afternoon in Madrid.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup plain whole-milk yogurt

1/2 cup mild cooking oil

1 cup granulated white sugar

1 1/2 cup all-purpose flour

3 large eggs
at room temperature

1 tbsp + baking powder

1/2 tsp

1 large lemon
zested

1 pinch salt

1 tbsp unsalted butter
softened, for the pan

PREPARATION

- **Preheat the oven to 350°F.**
- **Generously grease an 8-inch or 9-inch round cake pan with butter and lightly dust it with flour.**

Tap out the excess flour to ensure the cake releases flawlessly.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Whip the eggs and sugar into a pale, thick froth.**

Using an electric mixer, beat the eggs and sugar for 3 to 5 minutes until they double in volume and turn pale yellow. Do not skip this step; it provides the essential physical lift for a towering cake.

2. **Gently incorporate the wet ingredients.**

Add the yogurt, oil, and lemon zest to the egg mixture. Mix gently for just a few seconds until smoothly combined.

3. **Sift in the dry ingredients.**

Set a fine-mesh strainer over your bowl and pour in the flour, baking powder, and salt. Tap the strainer so the dry ingredients fall like snow, removing lumps and evenly distributing the leavening.

4. **Fold the batter together without overmixing.**

Using a rubber spatula, fold the flour into the wet ingredients with a slow, sweeping, under-and-over motion. Stop the exact second you no longer see streaks of dry flour to keep the crumb tender.

1. Bake undisturbed until golden.

Pour the batter into your prepared pan and bake on the middle rack for 35 to 45 minutes. Do not open the oven door for the first 30 minutes under any circumstances, or a draft of cold air will cause the rising cake to collapse.

2. Cool the cake gradually to prevent temperature shock.

When a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, turn off the oven, crack the door slightly, and leave the cake inside for 10 minutes. Afterward, transfer the pan to a wire rack to cool completely.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The measuring secret is locked to the half-cup.**

The traditional Spanish recipe uses a 125-gram yogurt pot as the sole measuring tool. Because American yogurt containers vary wildly, treating exactly 1/2 cup as your baseline 'pot' guarantees the hydration matches the three large eggs perfectly.



Picatostes Madrileños

pee-kah-TOHS-tehs mah-dree-LEHN-yohs

Walk the narrow streets off Madrid's Puerta del Sol early in the morning, and the air smells of hot olive oil, caramelized sugar, and melting chocolate. For over a century, historic cafes have served these alongside their famous churros, but long before they were late-night staples, picatostes were a grandmother's ultimate act of culinary thrift. Let's get one thing straight: this is not French toast, and it never touches an egg. It is pure, unpretentious fried dough made from yesterday's stale bread, crunchy on the outside, tender on the inside, and begging to be dragged through a mug of impossibly thick hot chocolate.

INGREDIENTS

4 large	stale rustic country bread <i>cut into 1-inch by 4-inch batons</i>	1/2 cup	whole milk
1/2 cup	light olive oil	1/2 cup	granulated white sugar
1 large	fresh lemon peel <i>cut into a wide strip, avoiding the bitter white pith</i>	1/2 tsp	ground cinnamon

PREPARATION

- **Stale the bread overnight.**

Leave the cut bread batons out on the counter overnight so they dry out completely, which prevents them from absorbing too much oil when fried.

- **Mix the sugar coating.**

Combine the granulated sugar and ground cinnamon in a wide, shallow bowl and set aside.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the oil and aromatize it with the lemon peel.**

Place a large skillet over medium-high heat with the olive oil and lemon peel, letting it sizzle for about two minutes to perfume the oil and remove any bitter edge before discarding the peel.

- 2. Baptize the bread batons in the milk.**

Pour the milk into a shallow dish and give each baton a fleeting, one-second dip per side so it receives just a kiss of moisture without soaking.

- 3. Fry the moistened bread until deeply golden.**

Working quickly, lay the moistened bread into the hot oil and fry for one to two minutes per side until a shatteringly crisp crust forms.

1. Drain briefly and toss in the sugar mixture.

Move the fried bread to a paper towel for exactly five seconds to drain excess fat, then immediately roll it in the sugar and cinnamon while still hot so the crust slightly caramelizes.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Use the right bread.**

Standard American sandwich bread will disintegrate into a greasy sponge; you need a dense, artisanal sourdough or country loaf for the structure to hold up.

- **The chocolate is mandatory.**

You cannot serve picatostes without dipping them into a mug of thick, pudding-like Spanish hot chocolate.



El Bocadillo de la Infancia

Before cellophane-wrapped snacks invaded the Spanish afternoon, grandmothers relied on a brilliant, humble truth: a piece of bread and a few squares of good chocolate. This isn't some fussy, double-boiler ganache concocted by an American food blog; it's an authentic, rustic childhood memory elevated by the holy Mediterranean trinity. The residual heat of freshly toasted bread gently softens dark chocolate, while a healthy slick of peppery olive oil and a snap of flaky sea salt pull out depths of flavor you didn't know existed. It's entirely unpretentious, takes five minutes on a Tuesday, and tastes exactly like coming home in Madrid.

INGREDIENTS

1 med	artisanal baguette <i>sliced on a bias into 1-inch thick pieces</i>	3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
3 1/2 oz	dark chocolate bar <i>broken into individual squares</i>	1/2 tsp	flaky sea salt

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the sliced bread until golden.**
Place the slices under the broiler for one to two minutes until they are crispy on the outside but still airy and tender on the inside.
- 2. Immediately crown the hot bread with chocolate.**
The true grandmother's secret to this dish is capturing the bread's thermal energy. Place two or three squares of dark chocolate directly onto the hot crumb so it begins to soften from the bottom up.
- 3. Flash under the broiler if needed.**
You aren't looking for a liquid puddle. If the bread wasn't hot enough to melt the chocolate, pop the slices back into the warm oven for exactly thirty seconds so the chocolate holds its shape but yields instantly to your teeth.
- 4. Dress generously with olive oil and salt.**
Drizzle a high-quality, grassy extra virgin olive oil over the chocolate and the edges of the bread, then hit it with a hearty pinch of flaky sea salt.
- 5. Serve without hesitation.**
Eat immediately while the bread is still warm, the crust cracks, and the chocolate is soft and velvety.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the chocolate.**

Use a solid, high-quality 60 to 70 percent cacao bar. Never use chocolate chips, which contain stabilizers that actively resist melting and will ruin the luxurious texture.

- **Do not substitute the salt.**

Standard table salt will aggressively oversalt the dish; you need the textural crunch and mild salinity of a flaky finishing salt like Maldon to make the chocolate truly sing.



Torrijas de Leche

toh-REE-hahs deh LEH-cheh

Forget the rushed, syrup-drowned American French toast. In Spain, leftover bread is treated with the respect it deserves, transforming into a dessert of astonishing textural contrast through a patient, aromatic milk soak. It is an exercise in frugal brilliance—a crisp, cinnamon-kissed shell hiding what is essentially a rich, luscious custard inside. Unpretentious, deeply flavorful, and perfectly adapted to a standard kitchen, it requires only a little time and a steadfast refusal to cut corners.

INGREDIENTS

1 large dense white bread or challah **4 cup** whole milk
cut into 3/4-inch slices

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1 large cinnamon stick

1 med lemon
peeled avoiding the white pith

1/2 med orange
peeled avoiding the white pith

3 large large eggs
thoroughly beaten

2 cup light tasting olive oil or
vegetable oil

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1 tbsp ground cinnamon

PREPARATION

- **Stale the bread overnight.**

Fresh bread will disintegrate. Slice your loaf the night before and leave it on a wire rack to dry out entirely.

- **Infuse ahead of time.**

To make this on a weeknight, steep and strain the milk the night before. Keep it in the fridge so it is cold and ready to pour over the bread while you make dinner.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Infuse the milk to build the flavor base.**

Combine the milk, half cup of sugar, cinnamon stick, and citrus peels in a saucepan over medium heat. The exact moment bubbles form at the edges, remove from the heat, cover, and let steep for 15 minutes.

- 2. Strain and cool the milk completely.**

Strain the milk to remove the solids and let it cool completely to room temperature. This is the non-negotiable secret of the Spanish kitchen; hot milk will turn the bread into useless, unfryable mush.

- 3. Give the bread a long, patient soak.**

Arrange the stale bread slices in a single layer in a wide dish and pour the cooled milk over them. Let them sit for at least 30 minutes, flipping once gently, until the bread absorbs almost all the liquid and feels exceptionally heavy.

1. Set up the frying station.

Beat the eggs in a shallow bowl and whisk the remaining sugar and ground cinnamon in a separate wide dish. Line a plate with paper towels.

2. Fry to a deep golden brown.

Heat about an inch of oil in a skillet to 350°F. Carefully lift a soaked slice, dip it quickly into the egg to seal the liquid inside, and fry for about 2 minutes per side.

3. Coat with cinnamon sugar and rest.

Transfer the fried bread to paper towels for just a minute, then immediately dredge in the cinnamon-sugar mixture while warm. Serve the proper Spanish way: cooled to room temperature or chilled the next day with a cup of strong coffee.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the milk temperature.**

If you pour boiling milk over the bread, the starches instantly gelatinize and the structure collapses. Let the infusion cool.

● **No pith allowed.**

When peeling the citrus, avoid the white pith entirely, as it will turn the delicate milk infusion incredibly bitter.



La Hora del Vermut (The Weekend Prelude)

The quintessential Spanish ritual of opening the appetite translated into an effortless weekend gathering.

In Spain, the weekend noon hour isn't a time on the clock; it's an institution. La hora del vermut is that golden, lazy window before the heavy lifting of lunch begins—a sacred, unapologetic ritual of whetting the appetite. You don't really cook for this; you assemble. It is about the sharp, briny smack of a good olive, the acidic bite of a pickled pepper, and the rattle of ice in a glass of dark, aromatic vermouth.

Translated to an American front porch, the spirit remains fiercely intact. These are the salty, sizzling, garlic-slicked bites meant to be eaten standing up, armed with nothing but toothpicks and a crumpled napkin. From the effortless geometry of a Gilda to the molten reward of a proper croqueta, this is how you prime the engine. Let the afternoon wait.





El Vermut Preparado

To understand Spain on a Sunday afternoon, one must first respect the ritual of La Hora del Vermut. Neighborhood barmen do not simply pour from a dusty bottle; they prepare their vermouth with secretive, calculated measures of gin, bitters, and citrus, elevating a simple spiced wine into something transcendent. Built directly in the glass and anchored by the slow, salty bleed of a brined green olive, this unpretentious rite requires little more than cold ingredients, an American pantry, and the patience to let the savory alchemy happen.

INGREDIENTS

3 oz	Spanish sweet red vermouth <i>chilled</i>	1 tsp	Campari
1 tsp	London Dry gin	1/4 tsp	Angostura bitters

1 small orange peel
cut into a wide strip

2 med green Manzanilla olives
pitted or anchovy-stuffed, threaded on a toothpick

3 large ice cubes

PREPARATION

- **Keep your vermouth cold.**

Ensure your bottle of Spanish sweet red vermouth has been resting in the refrigerator well before you intend to mix.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Fill a short, heavy-bottomed glass with large ice cubes.

Pour the cold sweet red vermouth directly over the ice, followed immediately by the gin, Campari, and Angostura bitters.

2. Stir the drink gently without shaking.

Give the ingredients a slow turn with a spoon for five to ten seconds. The goal is to combine and chill the liquids without forcefully aerating or diluting the silky texture of the vermouth.

3. Express the invisible citrus oils across the surface of the drink.

Pinch the strip of orange peel skin-side down directly over the glass to release its bright oils, then drop the peel directly into the liquid.

4. Drop the skewered olives into the glass and wait.

Serve the drink immediately, but instruct your guests to let the olives sit undisturbed for a few minutes before sipping. The salty brine will slowly leach into the sweet and bitter wine, creating a perfect bridge of umami.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Vermouth is wine, not a distilled spirit.**

If you leave a bottle of vermouth on your counter, it will oxidize and die. Always store it in the refrigerator to preserve the crisp, complex botanical bite required for a true Spanish pour.

- **The olive is a seasoning, not just a garnish.**

Resist the urge to eat the olive immediately or to dump brine directly into your glass. The slow, osmotic exchange of salt from the resting olive is the essential secret to achieving an authentic neighborhood bar flavor.



Las Gildas

lahs HEEL-dahs

It is the original food on a stick, born in a smoky San Sebastian tavern in the 1940s and named after a scandalous Rita Hayworth character—green, salty, and a little spicy. The Gilda is the holy trinity of Spanish snacking, a masterful, zero-cooking assembly where the sharp vinegar of a pickled pepper slices cleanly through the buttery fat of a green olive and the profound, oceanic funk of a premium Cantabrian anchovy. There is nowhere to hide with a bite this simple, so success hinges entirely on the quality of the ingredients and the secret of keeping the acidic brine far away from the delicate fish before it hits your tongue.

INGREDIENTS

12 large	premium oil-packed anchovy fillets	24 large	unstuffed Manzanilla or Castelvetrano olives <i>pitted</i>
12 med	pickled pepperoncini or mild banana peppers <i>stemmed and cut into bite-sized pieces</i>	2 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil

PREPARATION

- **Drain the pickled ingredients completely.**

The cardinal sin of the Gilda is letting acidic vinegar bleed onto the anchovy. Pat the peppers and olives bone-dry on paper towels before assembly.

- **Free the anchovies from their packing oil.**

Gently lift the fillets onto a separate plate, saving that umami-rich oil in the fridge for a future vinaigrette.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Thread the first olive onto a short wooden toothpick.**

Slide it all the way to the base to anchor the skewer.

- 2. Add a piece of the dried pickled pepper.**

- 3. Fold the anchovy fillet over itself into an S-shape and pierce it through the middle.**

This concentrates the profound umami of the fish directly in the center of the bite and keeps it structurally sound.

- 4. Follow with a second piece of pepper and cap the skewer with the final olive.**

- 5. Arrange the skewers on a serving plate and finish with a generous drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.**

Do this right before pouring the vermouth.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not compromise on the anchovies.**

A cheap, mass-produced anchovy packed in harsh salt will be mushy and overpower the bite. Seek out firm, premium oil-packed brands in glass jars.

- **Eat the Gilda in a single bite.**

Do not nibble. The magic happens when the butter, acid, and oceanic funk crash together in your mouth all at once.



Patatas Bravas Auténticas

Patatas bravas translate to "fierce potatoes," the undisputed kings of a weekend afternoon in Madrid. Let's get one thing straight: true Madrid-style salsa brava has no tomato in it. Zero. That deep, violent red comes entirely from pimentón. We're building a heavily spiced velouté to drape over impossibly crispy potatoes. Forget the messy double-fry; a quick alkaline parboil breaks down the potato's exterior, allowing a weeknight pan-fry to deliver that shattering, tavern-quality crust.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 med yellow onion
very finely minced

2 small garlic cloves
finely minced

1 tbsp	sweet Spanish smoked paprika	2 lb	russet potatoes <i>peeled and cut into irregular 1-inch chunks</i>
1/2 tbsp	hot Spanish smoked paprika	1/2 tsp	baking soda
2 tbsp	all-purpose flour	1 tbsp	kosher salt
1 1/2 cup	chicken broth <i>warmed</i>	1/4 cup	neutral oil
1 tbsp	sherry vinegar	1 pinch	flaky sea salt
		1 tbsp	fresh parsley <i>chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Warm the broth.**

Having your chicken broth warm before adding it to the roux prevents the sauce from seizing or becoming lumpy.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Melt the aromatics.**

Heat the extra-virgin olive oil in a saucepan over medium-low heat, add the onion and a pinch of salt, and sweat for 8 to 10 minutes until completely soft and translucent without browning. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute more.

- 2. Bloom the pimentón.**

This is non-negotiable: pull the pan entirely off the heat. Stir in both the sweet and hot smoked paprika for 30 seconds, letting the residual heat release the oils and turn the mixture crimson without burning the spices into a bitter mess.

- 3. Build the velouté.**

Return the pan to medium-low heat and whisk in the flour, cooking for 1 to 2 minutes to kill the raw starch flavor. Gradually whisk in the warm chicken broth and sherry vinegar to prevent lumps, then simmer for 10 minutes until the sauce turns velvety and thick.

1. Blend to a silky finish.

Take the sauce off the heat and hit it with an immersion blender until completely smooth. Taste for salt, then set aside—it holds beautifully at room temperature.

2. Boil with a trick.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil with the kosher salt and baking soda. Add the potato chunks and boil for exactly 5 to 6 minutes until the edges just yield but the centers remain firm.

3. Rough them up.

Drain the potatoes and let the steam blow off for a couple of minutes to dry them out. Vigorously shake them in the colander until a mashed, starchy paste forms on the edges—this is the secret to a shattering crust.

4. Fry to a glass-like crunch.

Heat the neutral oil in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Drop the potatoes in a single layer, let them sear undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes, then toss occasionally for another 10 to 12 minutes until deeply golden brown all over.

5. Serve the Madrid way.

Drain the potatoes on paper towels and toss immediately with flaky sea salt. Plate them and spoon the warm salsa brava over the top, deliberately leaving some edges dry and crunchy, and finish with a scatter of fresh parsley.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Adjusting the heat.**

If you cannot source hot Spanish smoked paprika, use entirely sweet pimentón and add a quarter-teaspoon of cayenne pepper to simulate the necessary kick.

● **Make the sauce ahead.**

The salsa brava scales up effortlessly and keeps in the fridge for up to two weeks, getting better as it sits. The potatoes, however, demand to be cooked and eaten immediately.



Mejillones en Escabeche sobre Chips

meh-hee-YOH-nes en es-kah-BEH-cheh SO-breh cheeps

This is the ultimate Spanish party trick and the undisputed king of La Hora del Vermut. In Spain, escabeche is a time-honored preservation technique that turns plump mussels, olive oil, vinegar, and smoked paprika into something far greater than the sum of its parts. It requires no cooking on the day you eat it, demanding only that you respect the clock and let the mussels rest in their vibrant marinade for at least twenty-four hours. Poured directly over a bowl of violently crunchy potato chips, the acidic, smoky oil soaks into the salt, creating a fleeting, magical contrast that tastes exactly like a neighborhood vermutería.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	fresh live blue mussels <i>scrubbed, debearded, and cracked ones discarded</i>	1 tsp	whole black peppercorns
1/4 cup	dry white wine	1 1/2 tsp	sweet smoked Spanish paprika
3 med	dried bay leaves	1/4 tsp	hot smoked paprika
1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil	1/4 tsp	kosher salt
1/3 cup	white wine vinegar	8 oz	thick kettle-cooked potato chips
3 large	garlic cloves <i>left unpeeled and lightly smashed</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Clean and debeard the mussels.**

Rinse the mussels under cold running water, pulling off any fibrous beards. Discard any with cracked shells or that refuse to close when tapped.

- **Prepare the garlic.**

Leave the papery skins on to protect the garlic from burning while infusing the oil, and give each clove a firm crush with the flat of your knife.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Steam the mussels in the white wine and one bay leaf until they just pop open.**

Bring the wine and one bay leaf to a rapid simmer in a wide pot, add the cleaned mussels, and cover tightly for 3 to 5 minutes. Do not overcook them, or they will become rubbery.

- 2. Shuck the opened mussels into a glass jar and reserve the cooking liquid.**

Discard any mussels that did not open. Strain the leftover cooking liquid from the pot through a fine-mesh sieve and save exactly 1/4 cup of this oceanic broth.

- 1. Infuse the olive oil with the garlic, peppercorns, and remaining bay leaves over medium-low heat.**

Let the aromatics sizzle gently in a skillet for 3 to 5 minutes until the garlic is fragrant and just beginning to turn golden.

- 2. Remove the skillet completely from the heat before stirring in the smoked paprikas.**

This is a non-negotiable rule of Spanish cooking as paprika burns in seconds over an open flame and will ruin the entire batch with a bitter taste. Let it bloom in the hot oil for about 10 seconds.

- 3. Pour the vinegar and the reserved mussel broth into the infused paprika oil.**

Stand back as the liquid may sputter when it hits the hot oil, then add the salt and place the skillet back over low heat for one to two minutes to simmer off the harsh bite of the raw vinegar.

- 4. Pour the hot escabeche liquid over the shucked mussels to submerge them completely.**

Let the mixture cool to room temperature, seal with a tight lid, and refrigerate for a minimum of 24 hours, or up to 48 hours, to allow the flavors to penetrate the bivalves.

- 5. Spoon the chilled mussels and their vivid orange oil generously over a platter of thick kettle chips.**

Serve immediately while the chips are still aggressively crunchy but just beginning to soak up the smoky, acidic sauce.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the clock.**

Escabeche is a cold preservation method, not a quick pan-sauce. The 24-hour resting period is the absolute secret to achieving the proper firm texture and the unmistakable taste of a Spanish home.

- **Choose the right potato chip.**

Standard, thin American potato chips will disintegrate into a soggy paste when hit with the marinade. You must use thick, kettle-cooked chips to replicate the structural integrity of a Spanish churrería fry.



Gambas al Ajillo

gahm-bahs ahl ah-hee-yoh

Forget the butter, the lemon, and the kitchen-sink spice blends peddled by suburban tapas joints. The true taste of an Andalusian abuela's kitchen relies on a technique so elegantly simple it feels like a revelation: exploiting the whole shrimp. By extracting the 'liquid gold' from the heads, you conjure a velvety, aggressively garlicky emulsion that renders dairy entirely obsolete. It's unpretentious, requires fifteen minutes of your weeknight, and serves as the ultimate excuse to drag half a loaf of good bread through the remnants.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	head-on shell-on shrimp <i>peeled and deveined, heads reserved, patted completely dry</i>	1 tsp	coarse sea salt
3/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil	2 tbsp	dry sherry
8 med clove	garlic <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>	1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely minced</i>
2 small	dried guindilla peppers or chiles de árbol	1 med loaf	crusty artisan bread <i>torn for serving</i>

PREPARATION

- **Extract the liquid gold from the shrimp heads.**

Place the reserved shrimp heads in a fine-mesh sieve set over a small bowl. Using your fingers, squeeze them firmly to extract all the orange juices, known as the coral. Discard the squeezed heads and whisk the dry sherry into this juice.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Confit the garlic and chilies in cold oil.**

In a heavy-bottomed stainless steel or cast-iron skillet, pour in the olive oil, sliced garlic, and dried chilies. Set the pan over medium-low heat. Let the garlic gently bubble and dance for about 10 minutes to slowly temper its bite and deeply impregnate the oil, ensuring it turns a sweet, nutty golden color rather than a bitter brown.

- 2. Flash-cook the shrimp over high heat.**

Once the garlic edges begin to toast, crank the heat to medium-high. Immediately lay the dried, salted shrimp into the pan in a single layer. Cook for exactly 1 minute, flip, and cook for another 30 to 45 seconds until they just turn pink and opaque. Do not overcook.

1. Create the emulsion off the heat.

Remove the skillet from the heat entirely. Pour the reserved shrimp juice and sherry mixture directly into the hot pan. Vigorously shake and swirl the pan in a circular motion for 15 seconds. The proteins from the shrimp heads will bind with the hot oil, instantly transforming it into a velvety, slightly cloudy sauce.

2. Garnish and serve immediately.

Scatter the minced parsley over the top. Serve immediately straight from the sizzling skillet, accompanied by copious amounts of crusty bread to dredge through the garlic-infused oil.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Dry your shrimp completely.**

If your sauce is watery and spits aggressively, the shrimp weren't dried properly. Moisture is the absolute enemy of this emulsion.

● **Source head-on shrimp if humanly possible.**

If you absolutely cannot find head-on shrimp at a local Asian market or fishmonger, buy the highest quality shell-on shrimp available. You will skip the head-squeezing prep step, but know the dish will lack its signature velvety finish.

● **Watch the garlic closely.**

If the garlic turns dark brown during the confit stage, it is ruined and bitter. Cut your losses, toss it out, and start over.



El Matrimonio

el mah-tree-moh-nee-oh

In the Spanish tradition of the aperitivo, the anchoa (salt-cured) and the boquerón (vinegar-marinated) are the exact same fish separated by ancient preservation methods. Reunited on toasted bread, they form a masterclass in culinary balance: a dark, umami-dense fillet offsetting the sharp, acidic snap of its pickled sibling. The secret to elevating this from a cobbled-together bar snack to a home-cooked treasure lies in the Logroño tradition—resting the cold fish atop a freshly blistered, warm strip of green pepper. It is an unpretentious study in temperature and texture that tastes precisely like a bustling Saturday afternoon on La Rioja's Calle Laurel.

INGREDIENTS

1 med	crusty baguette <i>cut diagonally into 1/2-inch thick slices</i>	8	white marinated anchovies
1 small	green frying pepper <i>cored, deseeded, and sliced into 8 wide strips</i>	3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
8	Cantabrian anchovy fillets	1 pinch	flaky sea salt
		1 pinch	fresh parsley <i>finely chopped</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the bread until sturdy enough to hold the oil.**
Heat a large, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium heat, lightly brush the bread slices with a touch of olive oil, and toast for 1 to 2 minutes per side until golden and sturdy.
- 2. Blister the green peppers in high-quality olive oil.**
Pour the remaining extra virgin olive oil into the skillet. Once shimmering, fry the pepper strips for 3 to 4 minutes per side until they soften, turn a deep olive green, and sweeten, then drain slightly on a paper towel.
- 3. Assemble the tapas à la minute to preserve the crunch.**
Working quickly so the vinegar and oil do not destroy the bread, lay a single, warm strip of the fried green pepper down the center of each slice.
- 4. Marry the two anchovies atop the warm pepper.**
Lay the white boquerón down first, then place the dark anchoa directly on top of it so the acidity cuts through the pepper's fat while the salty top note hits the palate first.
- 5. Garnish simply and serve immediately.**
Drizzle lightly with residual oil from the anchovy tin, finish with a single flake of sea salt and a pinch of parsley, and eat at once alongside an ice-cold vermouth.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Seek out high-quality Cantabrian anchovies.**

The American supermarket standard can be overly mushy; look for jars or tins in the specialty aisle explicitly stating "Cantabrian" to ensure a firm, meaty texture.

- **Check the refrigerated section for boquerones.**

These vinegar-marinated fillets are semi-perishable and typically found near the fresh pastas or artisanal cheeses, not in the canned fish aisle.

- **Substitute peppers if necessary.**

If you cannot find a sweet green frying pepper like a Cubanelle or Anaheim, a standard green bell pepper sliced into strips works flawlessly.



Banderillas de Encurtidos

bahn-deh-REE-yahs deh ehn-koor-TEE-dohs

Named after the barbed darts of a bullfight, the banderilla is the quintessential Spanish bar snack, an unpretentious masterpiece born of sheer resourcefulness. It requires absolutely no cooking, relying entirely on the sharp, unapologetic contrast of acid, salt, and fat to awaken the palate before a meal. An abuela's secret isn't found in a hot pan, but in the deliberate layering of standard pantry staples—crisp cocktail onions, briny olives, and melt-in-the-mouth anchovies. It is a riot of textures and flavors on a stick, proving that with the right jars from any typical supermarket, you can recreate the exact magic of a San Sebastián tavern right in your own kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

10 oz	baby dill pickles or cornichons <i>drained and patted dry</i>	10 oz	mild pepperoncini <i>drained, patted dry, and sliced into thin strips</i>
10 oz	cocktail onions <i>drained and patted dry</i>	12 oz	jarred roasted red peppers <i>drained, patted dry, and cut into small squares</i>
6 oz	pimento-stuffed Spanish green olives <i>drained and patted dry</i>	2 oz	flat anchovy fillets in olive oil <i>drained with the oil reserved</i>
		12 small	wooden skewers

PREPARATION

- **Dry the pickled vegetables completely.**

Commercial American pickles and onions carry a harsh brine that ruins the texture of the skewer, so patting them dry on a paper towel prevents a soggy, dripping mess.

- **Portion the peppers.**

Slice the pepperoncini into slender strips to mimic authentic Spanish piparras, and cut the roasted red peppers into small squares that will sit neatly on the skewer.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Thread the skewers starting with the cocktail onion.**

Hold the skewer and push a cocktail onion near the blunt top, followed by a square of red pepper, a green olive, and a folded strip of pepperoncini.

- 2. Add the anchovy and finish with the pickle.**

Roll an anchovy fillet tightly and thread it on, then cap the pointed end of the skewer with a cornichon to act as a sturdy base stopper.

- 3. Chill the assembled banderillas thoroughly.**

Place the assembled skewers in the refrigerator until they are completely cold, maximizing the crisp crunch of the vegetables.

1. Drizzle with anchovy oil immediately before serving.

Spoon a tiny amount of the reserved tin oil over the ice-cold skewers to enrich the sharp vinegar bite with a luxurious, umami-rich finish.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Never use sweet or bread-and-butter pickles.**

The dish relies entirely on a sharp, acidic bite; any added sweetness from the pickle brine will completely throw off the balance of the banderilla.

● **Skip the spicy pepper for a milder version.**

In Spain, it is incredibly common to serve both spicy and sweet variations side-by-side, so simply omit the pepperoncini to make a kid-friendly version.



Croquetas de Jamón Serrano

kro-KEH-tas deh ha-MON seh-RRAH-no

In Spain, Saturday afternoon belongs to the hour of vermouth, and its undisputed king is the croqueta de jamón. Forget the Americanized shortcut of stuffing these with shredded cheese to fake a gooey center; the true magic lies in a slow-cooked, deeply savory béchamel that demands nothing but patience and a wooden spoon. By splashing a little chicken broth into the milk to mimic a simmering ham bone, you get the profound, old-world punch of a grandmother's kitchen using standard supermarket finds. Make a massive batch on a Sunday, freeze them solid, and you've got the authentic taste of the homeland ready to hit the fryer on a random Tuesday night.

INGREDIENTS

4 tbsp	unsalted butter	1 pinch	nutmeg <i>freshly grated</i>
3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil	1 pinch	kosher salt and black pepper <i>to taste</i>
1/2 med	yellow onion <i>minced into an ultra-fine paste</i>	1 cup	all-purpose flour
5 oz	Jamón Serrano <i>finely diced into 1/16-inch cubes</i>	3 large	eggs <i>thoroughly beaten</i>
3/4 cup	all-purpose flour	2 cup	plain fine breadcrumbs <i>lightly crushed if using panko</i>
3 1/2 cup	whole milk <i>warmed</i>	4 cup	neutral oil
3/4 cup	chicken broth <i>warmed</i>		

PREPARATION

- **The dough must rest in the refrigerator for at least 8 hours.**

This overnight chill is non-negotiable. It allows the starches to fully retrograde and hydrate, turning a thick liquid into a firm, moldable matrix.

- **Breaded croquetas can be frozen for future use.**

After breading, place them on a parchment-lined tray and freeze until solid before transferring to a freezer bag. They keep perfectly for quick weeknight tapas.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sweat the onion in the fat until it melts into a translucent paste.**

Heat the butter and olive oil in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the minced onion and a tiny pinch of salt, cooking slowly for 5 to 7 minutes until completely soft without taking on any color.

- 2. Sauté the jamón briefly to release its fat.**

Add the diced Jamón Serrano and cook for exactly 60 seconds. You want to extract its rich, nutty flavor into the fat, but cooking it any longer will turn the cured meat unpleasantly tough.

1. Whisk in the flour and toast the roux thoroughly.

Dump the 3/4 cup of flour into the pot all at once and vigorously whisk it into the ham and onion mixture. Cook this paste over medium heat for 2 to 3 full minutes until it smells toasted and turns light golden; rushing this step leaves a raw flour taste that ruins the croqueta.

2. Gradually build the béchamel by whisking in the warm liquids.

Combine the warm milk and broth. Pour in a half cup of the liquid, whisking constantly as the flour seizes. Continue adding the liquid in small splashes, ensuring each addition is fully smooth before adding the next.

3. Stir the sauce continuously until it thickens and pulls away from the pot.

Reduce the heat to medium-low, add the nutmeg and black pepper, and stir constantly with a wooden spoon for 10 to 15 minutes. The béchamel is ready when it is thick, glossy, and cleanly leaves the sides and bottom of the pan as you drag your spoon through it. Taste and add salt only if necessary.

4. Chill the dough entirely before shaping.

Pour the hot dough into a wide baking dish, spread it flat, and press plastic wrap directly onto the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Let it cool, then refrigerate for at least 8 hours or overnight; warm dough is impossible to shape.

5. Roll the chilled dough into small cylinders.

Using lightly oiled hands, scoop 1-inch portions of the cold dough (about the size of a walnut) and roll them into traditional small cylinders or spheres.

6. Coat the croquetas using a double-breading technique to prevent explosions.

Roll each piece in flour, submerge it in the beaten egg, and coat it in breadcrumbs. For an impenetrable crust, dip it back into the egg and roll it in the breadcrumbs a second time.

7. Deep fry in batches at 350°F until deeply golden.

Heat at least 2 inches of oil in a deep saucepan. Fry 3 to 4 croquetas at a time for 2 to 3 minutes, turning gently. Remove with a slotted spoon to a paper towel-lined plate and serve immediately while the centers are molten.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Double breading prevents the dreaded fryer explosion.**

The most common failure point is a croqueta bursting in the oil. Coating it twice in egg and breadcrumbs creates a rigid barrier that keeps the molten béchamel safely inside.

- **Frying directly from the freezer yields the best results.**

You can freeze the breaded croquetas solid in a single layer, then bag them. When you're ready to eat, drop them straight into the 350°F oil without thawing. The frozen state allows a protective crust to form before the center rapidly expands.

- **Do not add cheese to the béchamel.**

Resist the urge to add Manchego or Gouda. The authentic creamy texture comes entirely from the precise ratio of fat to flour and the patient stirring of the sauce.



La Comida Hecha Rápida (The Weeknight Heart)

Hearty, traditional Spanish midday meals stripped down and adapted for the reality of a busy American weeknight.

In Spain, the midday comida is sacred—a heavy, sleep-inducing anchor of stews and unapologetic caloric joy meant to carry a working stiff through the rest of the day. But transplant that reality to a 7:00 PM Tuesday in an American suburb, and the mechanics change. You don't have three hours to simmer a pot

of garbanzos while the sun beats down on the plaza. You have a single skillet, a frantic schedule, and whatever you managed to grab from the local supermarket before the doors locked.

This is about survival without surrender. It's the soul of the Iberian peninsula—the smoky hit of chorizo, the healing funk of a proper chicken broth, the peasant brilliance of pisto—stripped down for the reality of the modern weeknight. These aren't the sanitized, small-plate tapas of a tourist trap. They are the honest, deeply nourishing bowls of comfort that keep the diaspora sane, cooked fast, eaten late, and uncompromising in their identity.





Lentejas Rápidas con Chorizo

len-TEH-has RAH-pee-das con cho-REE-so

This is the ultimate manifestation of la cocina de la abuela—food that doesn't try to be fancy, because it doesn't need to be. It smells like woodsmoke, garlic, and earthy comfort. We're trading the terrifying, whistling stovetop pressure cooker of your mother's era for a modern electric one, but we are keeping the two secrets that matter: building a slow, unhurried sofrito, and snapping the potatoes to release their natural thickening starches. No flour, no shortcuts, just fundamentally, aggressively good food that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

8 oz Spanish-style cured chorizo
cut into 1/4-inch thick coins

1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 tsp	sweet smoked paprika
3 med	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 large	dried bay leaf
1 med	carrot <i>peeled and diced</i>	1 lb	small brown lentils <i>rinsed and picked over for stones</i>
1/2 med	green bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>	2 med	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled</i>
2 tbsp	tomato purée	6 cup	low-sodium chicken broth
		1 tsp	kosher salt
		1 tbsp	red wine vinegar

PREPARATION

- **Have your mise en place ready before the chorizo hits the pan.**

The cooking process moves quickly once the chorizo fat renders. Make sure your onion, garlic, carrot, and bell pepper are all finely diced and standing by.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the chorizo to build your flavor foundation.**

Set your electric pressure cooker to the Sauté setting on medium. Add the olive oil and chorizo coins, letting them sizzle for 2 to 3 minutes until they release their deep red, smoky fat. Remove the chorizo to a plate with a slotted spoon, leaving that beautiful red oil in the pot.

- 2. Build the sofrito slowly and deliberately.**

Add the diced onion, garlic, carrot, and green bell pepper to the hot chorizo fat. Sauté for 6 to 8 minutes until the onions are completely translucent, soft, and reduced in volume by half. If you rush this and add liquid before the vegetables caramelize, your stew will taste like dishwater.

1. Toast the paprika completely off the heat.

Make a well in the center of the vegetables, add the tomato purée, and cook for 2 minutes until it thickens into a paste. Turn off the pressure cooker's Sauté function completely. Add the smoked paprika and stir vigorously for exactly 15 seconds. If you leave the heat on, the high sugar content of the paprika will burn and turn irreparably bitter.

2. Snap the potatoes to naturally thicken the stew.

Add the rinsed lentils, reserved chorizo, and bay leaf to the pot. Instead of slicing the potatoes cleanly, insert a paring knife half an inch into the flesh and twist your wrist to pry and snap off 1-inch, jagged chunks. Toss these rough pieces into the pot. These broken edges will melt under pressure and give the broth a rich, velvety texture without needing a flour slurry.

3. Lock it down and cook on high pressure.

Pour in the chicken broth and salt, thoroughly scraping the bottom of the pot to lift any caramelized bits so you don't trigger a burn warning. Lock the lid, set the valve to sealing, and pressure cook on High for 12 minutes.

4. Let the pressure release naturally.

When the timer sounds, do absolutely nothing for 15 minutes. A manual quick release will cause a sudden drop in pressure, making the lentils violently boil and explode into an unappealing mush. After 15 minutes, flip the valve to release any remaining steam and open the lid.

5. Finish with acid.

Discard the bay leaf. Give the stew a gentle stir, mashing one or two potato chunks against the side of the pot to thicken the broth even further. Stir in the red wine vinegar to awaken the earthy, smoky flavors, and let it rest for 5 minutes before serving with a massive hunk of crusty bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not use Mexican chorizo.**

Look for hard, Spanish-style cured chorizo in the deli section. Raw Mexican chorizo in a plastic tube is highly acidic ground pork that will entirely disintegrate into greasy crumbles if boiled in a stew.

- **No overnight soaking required.**

Spanish pardina or standard small brown lentils have a relatively delicate structure and thin skin. They will cook fully in the pressure cooker directly from their dried state.



Macarrones con Chorizo de la Abuela

mah-kah-ROH-nes kohn choh-REE-tho deh lah ah-BWEH-lah

This isn't a delicate Italian pasta; it is unapologetic, rustic Spanish comfort food born from a mid-century pantry. The magic lies entirely in patience with the fat: slowly rendering firm, paprika-laced Spanish chorizo until it bleeds a vibrant red gold, then using that smoky oil to fry the sofrito. It smells exactly like an abuela's kitchen, easily resurrected on a busy American weeknight.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb dried penne pasta
1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

8 oz cured Spanish chorizo
casing removed and sliced into thin coins

1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 med	bay leaf
3 cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	1/2 tsp	sugar
1/4 cup	dry white wine	1 tsp	kosher salt
1 tbsp	tomato paste	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
28 oz	crushed tomatoes	1 1/2 cup	low-moisture mozzarella <i>shredded</i>
1 tsp	dried oregano	1/2 cup	Parmesan cheese <i>grated</i>

PREPARATION

- **Preheat the broiler.**

Set your oven's broiler to high before assembling the final dish.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the pasta to a firm al dente.**

Drop the penne into heavily salted boiling water and cook for two minutes less than the package tells you, reserving a half cup of the starchy water before draining.

- 2. Render the red gold.**

In a wide skillet over medium-low heat, slowly cook the sliced chorizo in a splash of olive oil until it crisps and bleeds its vivid, smoky orange fat, then scoop out the meat and leave that glorious fat in the pan.

- 3. Build the sofrito in the chorizo fat.**

Crank the heat to medium, dump the diced onion directly into the rendered fat, and sweat it for 6 to 8 minutes until softened and deeply golden before tossing in the garlic for one final minute.

1. Deglaze the pan and build the tomato base.

Hit the pan with white wine, scraping up the browned bits until the liquid almost vanishes, then stir in the tomato paste, crushed tomatoes, oregano, bay leaf, sugar, salt, and pepper.

2. Simmer the sauce to marry the flavors.

Drop the heat to low and let the sauce bubble lazily for 10 minutes to thicken up.

3. Bring the elements together.

Fish out the bay leaf, dump the crispy chorizo and drained pasta into the simmering sauce, and toss aggressively, adding a splash of pasta water if the noodles need loosening.

4. Gratiné under the broiler to finish.

Transfer the whole mess to a baking dish, blanket it with the mozzarella and Parmesan, and blast it under the broiler for 3 to 5 minutes until the cheese is bubbling and spotted with dark, crusty bits.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Use cured Spanish chorizo, not Mexican chorizo.**

Spanish chorizo is a firm, cured sausage heavily laced with smoked paprika, usually hanging out near the deli cheeses at the supermarket. Raw, crumbly Mexican chorizo will completely ruin the architecture and flavor of this dish.



Pollo al Ajillo

In Spain, al ajillo isn't just a recipe; it's a foundational technique born of necessity, traditionally used to tame the wild gaminess of country rabbit. We're adapting the abuela's method for an American weeknight using bone-in chicken thighs, but the soul of the dish remains untouched. The secret lies entirely in respecting the garlic—infusing the oil with whole, smashed cloves before building the pan sauce with sliced ones—so it turns deeply sweet and caramelized instead of bitter and acrid. Unpretentious, cheap, and deeply flavorful, this is the true taste of a Spanish home kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

2 1/2 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs <i>patted completely dry</i>	5 large	peeled garlic cloves <i>thinly sliced</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 cup	dry white wine
1/2 tsp	black pepper	1/2 cup	low-sodium chicken broth
1 tbsp	all-purpose flour	1 med	bay leaf
1/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil	1 sprig	fresh thyme
5 large	unpeeled garlic cloves <i>lightly smashed with the side of a knife</i>	1 tbsp	white wine vinegar
		2 tbsp	fresh parsley <i>finely chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Pat the chicken completely dry.**

Moisture is the enemy of a proper sear; wet chicken skin will steam rather than crisp in the pan.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Season the chicken generously with salt and pepper, then toss lightly with the flour.**

This nearly invisible dusting encourages a beautiful golden crust and naturally thickens the pan sauce as it braises.

- 2. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet or Dutch oven over medium-low heat and fry the unpeeled, smashed garlic cloves.**

The skins protect the garlic from scorching while leaching sweet, earthy flavor into the fat; once golden and fragrant after 3 to 5 minutes, remove the cloves with a slotted spoon and set aside.

- 1. Increase the heat to medium-high, place the chicken in the infused oil skin-side down, and sear undisturbed for 6 to 8 minutes.**

Wait until the skin is deeply golden brown and crispy before flipping to brown the other side for 4 minutes, then transfer the partially cooked chicken to a plate.

- 2. Lower the heat to medium, add the peeled, sliced garlic to the pan, and stir constantly for 30 to 60 seconds.**

Watch it closely and do not let the garlic turn brown or it will turn the entire dish offensively bitter.

- 3. Pour in the white wine and scrape up all the delicious browned bits from the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon.**

Let the wine bubble and reduce by half, which will take about 2 minutes and cook off the harsh alcohol flavor.

- 4. Stir in the chicken broth, then return the chicken to the pan along with the reserved unpeeled garlic, bay leaf, and thyme.**

Bring to a gentle simmer, cover with the lid slightly ajar, and braise on medium-low for 20 minutes until the chicken is tender and cooked through.

- 5. Remove the pan from the heat, discard the herbs, and stir the vinegar into the pan sauce.**

This vigorous final splash is the authentic trick to cut the richness of the olive oil and chicken fat. Spoon the silky glaze over the chicken and garnish generously with parsley.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Serve with good crusty bread.**

This is a Spanish rustic dish, not a pasta topping; it practically demands a torn loaf of bread to mop up the incredible garlic and wine sauce.

- **Eat the unpeeled garlic.**

Don't throw away those reserved unpeeled cloves; squeezing the sweet, confit-like garlic paste out of the skins directly onto a piece of bread is the cook's absolute best reward.



Espinacas con Garbanzos a la Sevillana

In America, we are taught to barely wilt our spinach to keep it bright and fresh, but in Seville, the grandmothers know better. This dish—a living relic of Andalusia’s Moorish history—relies on a magic trick of Spanish home cooking called a *majado*: a pounded paste of fried bread, garlic, and vinegar that thickens without flour. Using canned chickpeas and frozen chopped spinach isn't cheating; it's exactly how modern Spanish cooks get this dark, rich, uncompromisingly savory taste of home on the table on a Tuesday night. Forget the tomatoes and embrace the heavy pour of olive oil.

INGREDIENTS

1/3 cup	extra virgin olive oil	1 tbsp	sweet smoked Spanish paprika
4 large	garlic cloves <i>peeled and left whole</i>	1 tsp	ground cumin
2 large slices	day-old crusty white bread <i>crusts removed and torn into chunks</i>	1/2 tsp	ground coriander
1 tbsp	sherry vinegar	1 pinch	ground cloves
15 oz	canned chickpeas <i>thoroughly rinsed and drained</i>	1 pinch	ground ginger
16 oz	frozen chopped spinach <i>completely thawed</i>	1/2 cup	water
		to taste	kosher salt
		to taste	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>

PREPARATION

- **Wring the water from the spinach.**

Place the thawed spinach in a clean kitchen towel and aggressively squeeze out as much liquid as humanly possible until it forms a dense, dry puck.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Fry the garlic to scent the oil.**

Heat the olive oil in a large, heavy skillet over medium heat, fry the whole garlic cloves until deeply golden brown on all sides, then transfer them to a small food processor.

- 2. Crisp the bread.**

In the same oil, fry the torn bread chunks until golden brown all over, then transfer them to the food processor with the garlic.

- 3. Pull the skillet off the heat.**

Leave the remaining flavored oil in the skillet, but remove it from the burner so the spices don't scorch in the next steps.

1. Blend the majado.

To the food processor, add the sherry vinegar, cumin, coriander, a generous pinch of salt, and a splash of water, then pulse until it forms a thick, chunky paste.

2. Bloom the spices in the residual heat.

With the skillet still off the heat, stir the smoked paprika, clove, and ginger into the warm olive oil for 15 to 30 seconds until the oil turns a deep, fiery red.

3. Sauté the spinach.

Return the skillet to medium-low heat, add the dry spinach, and stir well to break it up and coat it in the spiced oil for 3 to 5 minutes.

4. Simmer and bind.

Fold in the drained chickpeas, the majado paste, and the half cup of water, then simmer covered on low heat for 10 to 15 minutes until the liquid is mostly absorbed.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **This is a dry dish.**

Do not treat this like a stew or potaje. It is a plato seco, meant to be scooped up with extra wedges of fried bread.

● **Do not fear the olive oil.**

A third of a cup might seem like a heavy pour for a weeknight, but the olive oil is the literal foundation of the sauce. It emulsifies with the majado to bind the dish together.



Pisto Manchego con Huevo Frito

If there is a single smell that defines a Spanish home in late summer, it is the rich, sweet aroma of onions, peppers, and tomatoes melting down in a heavy pour of olive oil. Pisto Manchego is an ancient peasant dish from the plains of La Mancha, born of agricultural necessity and elevated by patience. For the diaspora kid in an American suburb, this is the uncompromising taste of an abuela's kitchen transposed to a busy weeknight. The secret here isn't a complex spice blend—it's the fingernail-sized cuts of the vegetables

allowing them to collapse into a jammy, cohesive stew, crowned unapologetically by a Spanish-style egg fried fast and hot in olive oil until the edges turn into golden lace.

INGREDIENTS

1/3 cup	extra virgin olive oil	28 oz	crushed tomatoes
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
2 med	garlic	1/2 tsp	sugar
clove	<i>minced</i>	1/4 tsp	ground cumin
1 large	Cubanelle or green bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>	4 large	large eggs
1 large	red bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>	1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>reserved for frying</i>
2 med	zucchini <i>unpeeled and finely diced</i>	1 pinch	flaky sea salt
		1 med	crusty bread
		loaf	<i>sliced for serving</i>

PREPARATION

- **Dice all vegetables to the size of a fingernail.**

This specific cut, known as *tamaño uña*, allows the vegetables to rapidly break down and emulsify with the tomato and oil, creating a cohesive stew rather than distinct floating chunks.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the aromatic base slowly.**

Place a heavy-bottomed pot over medium-low heat with the one-third cup of olive oil, add the minced garlic for 30 seconds until fragrant, then immediately stir in the onion and a pinch of salt to sweat gently for 10 minutes until translucent.

1. Melt down the peppers.

Stir in the diced green and red peppers, tossing them in the oil, and let them cook for another 15 minutes until significantly softened.

2. Incorporate the zucchini.

Add the unpeeled zucchini, increase the heat to medium, and cook for 10 minutes until the vegetables begin collapsing into a fragrant mass.

3. Emulsify the stew.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes, kosher salt, sugar, and cumin, lower the heat to a simmer, and cook uncovered for 20 minutes until the watery juices evaporate and the red-tinted oil rises to the surface.

4. Fry the eggs hot and fast.

In a small skillet, heat the half cup of olive oil over medium-high heat until a breadcrumb sizzles fiercely, then slip in a cracked egg and rapidly baste the white with hot oil for 45 seconds until the edges form a golden, crispy lace.

5. Serve unapologetically.

Ladle the warm pisto into shallow bowls, crown each with a fried egg topped with flaky sea salt, and serve with copious amounts of crusty bread to break the yolk.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not skimp on the olive oil.**

In Spanish cooking, extra virgin olive oil is a foundational flavoring ingredient and the primary medium for the stew's emulsion, not just a grease for the pan.

● **Balance the acidity.**

A classic trick from Spanish grandmothers is adding a half teaspoon of sugar to neutralize the harsh acidity of canned tomatoes without making the dish artificially sweet.

- **Test the frying oil.**

To ensure the oil is hot enough for the eggs (around 350°F), drop a small piece of bread into the skillet; if it fries fiercely and turns golden, you are ready to crack the eggs.



Arroz a la Cubana

ah-ROTH ah lah koo-BAH-nah

Despite the name, this dish is fundamentally Spanish, a colonial crossover brought back to the Iberian peninsula by returning emigrants who missed the Caribbean. It represents the unpretentious, grandmotherly comfort of a true Spanish home, an absolute masterclass in executing humble ingredients flawlessly. With a deeply reduced tomato sofrito, perfectly separate grains of rice, sweet caramelized plantains, and an egg fried violently in smoking-hot olive oil to achieve crispy, lacy edges, it delivers a staggering amount of soul for a weeknight dinner.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cup	long-grain white rice <i>rinsed aggressively until water runs completely clear</i>	2 med	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>
1/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil	1 1/2 cup	canned crushed tomatoes
1 med	garlic clove <i>smashed and peeled</i>	1/2 tsp	white sugar
1 med	bay leaf	1/4 tsp	black pepper
3 cup	water	2 med	sweet plantains <i>very ripe with black spotting, peeled and cut into 1-inch diagonal slices</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	4 large	large eggs <i>brought to room temperature</i>
1/2 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 pinch	all-purpose flour

PREPARATION

- **Wash the rice aggressively.**

Rinse the rice in a fine-mesh strainer under cold water, agitating the grains with your hands until the water beneath runs entirely clear to remove the surface starch. This ensures separate, fluffy grains.

- **Bring the eggs to room temperature.**

Cold eggs straight from the refrigerator will drop the oil temperature and cause violent, dangerous splattering in the pan.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast and simmer the rice.**

In a medium saucepan, heat one tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil over medium heat. Add the smashed garlic clove and bay leaf, cooking until fragrant. Add the thoroughly washed rice and toast for one minute. Pour in the water and half a teaspoon of salt, bring to a boil, reduce to the lowest simmer, cover tightly, and cook for 15 minutes.

1. Rest the rice off the heat.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and leave it covered for exactly five minutes. This resting period is critical to allow the grains to fluff and separate properly.

2. Build the tomato sofrito.

In a separate saucepan or skillet, heat two tablespoons of olive oil over medium-low heat. Sauté the diced onion until translucent and soft, about eight minutes, then stir in the minced garlic for one minute.

3. Reduce the tomato sauce.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes, sugar, black pepper, and the remaining half teaspoon of salt. Reduce the heat to low and allow the sauce to bubble and thicken deeply while the rice finishes cooking.

4. Fry the sweet plantains.

In a non-stick skillet, heat two tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat. Fry the plantain slices until they are deeply golden and caramelized on both sides, about two to three minutes per side, then transfer to a paper towel-lined plate.

5. Prepare the oil for the eggs.

Wipe out the plantain skillet, pour in a generous quarter-inch layer of extra virgin olive oil, and place over medium-high heat until shimmering. Sprinkle a tiny pinch of flour into the oil to prevent the liquid from splattering dangerously.

6. Fry the eggs to achieve puntillas.

Crack a room-temperature egg into a small ramekin and gently slide it into the hot oil. Tilt the pan slightly and use a slotted spoon to rapidly scoop the hot oil over the egg white and yolk. Cook for under a minute until the edges are dark, crispy, and lacy, the white is fully set, and the yolk remains completely liquid.

7. Mold the rice and assemble the plate.

Pack a one-cup dry measuring cup with the cooked rice and invert it onto the center of a warm plate to form a neat dome. Spoon the thick tomato sauce over half the rice, lay the lacy egg beside it, and arrange the caramelized plantains around the edge. Serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the sugar in the sofrito.**

A pinch of sugar is a universally recognized Spanish technique to neutralize the natural acidity of the tomatoes and round out the deeply savory sauce.

- **Crack your eggs into a ramekin first.**

Dropping an egg directly into smoking-hot oil is a gamble. Sliding it in gently from a small bowl keeps the yolk perfectly centered and protects your hands from splashing fat.



Huevos Rotos con Chistorra

WEH-vos RO-tos con chees-TOR-rah

There are few dishes more representative of a Spanish home or a buzzing Madrid tavern than Huevos Rotos. It is a masterpiece born of absolute necessity, combining humble potatoes with whatever pork was left from the slaughter. The secret your grandmother would fiercely defend is in the fat: don't you dare throw away the brilliant, paprika-laced oil rendered from the sausage. By frying the eggs directly in that crimson gold, this unpretentious weeknight meal delivers a flavor so deeply comforting it will instantly transport you to a crowded, napkin-strewn bar on the Cava Baja.

INGREDIENTS

4 large	pasture-raised eggs	1/2 lb	authentic chistorra or soft
3 large	Yukon Gold or Russet potatoes <i>peeled and cleanly sliced into 1/2-inch batons</i>	1 1/2 cup	semi-cured Spanish chorizo <i>cut into 1-inch pieces</i>
		1 tsp	extra virgin olive oil
			coarse sea salt

PREPARATION

- **Wash the cut potatoes.**

Submerge the potato batons in a bowl of cold water for 10 minutes to draw out the surface starch, then drain and dry them completely with paper towels so they don't splatter in the hot oil.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Poach the potatoes.**

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat, add the dried potatoes, and let them gently bubble in the oil for 10 to 12 minutes until easily pierced with a fork.

- 2. Crisp the potatoes.**

Turn the heat up to high and fry for another 3 to 5 minutes until golden and crisp. Remove the potatoes to a paper-towel-lined plate with a slotted spoon and season generously with salt.

- 3. Render the sausage.**

Carefully pour off all but 2 tablespoons of the oil from the skillet. Reduce the heat to medium-high, add the chistorra, and sear for 2 to 3 minutes until slightly crisp. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the sausage to the plate with the potatoes, leaving the red, smoky fat in the pan.

1. Fry the eggs in the rendered fat.

Crack the eggs directly into the hot, crimson fat left in the pan. Working quickly, use a spoon to splash the hot fat over the egg whites until the edges become crispy and lace-like—la puntilla—while keeping the yolks completely liquid, about 1 to 2 minutes.

2. Assemble and break.

Transfer the eggs directly onto the potatoes and sausage. Bring the platter to the table immediately and dramatically slash through the eggs with a knife and fork, letting the rich yolks run down to coat the crispy potatoes and smoky meat.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Sourcing the sausage.**

Authentic chistorra is a thin, fast-cured sausage from Navarra. You can find it at specialty grocers, but a soft, raw Spanish cooking chorizo is a perfect substitute. Do not use Mexican chorizo, which relies on vinegar and native chilies instead of smoked paprika.

● **Slice cleanly, don't snap.**

While many Spanish stews require you to 'chascar' (snap or tear) potatoes to release starch into the broth, doing so here will cause them to burn and stick together in the frying oil.



La Cena Ligera (The Gentle Evening)

Solutions for exhausted weeknights, inspired by the late, light Spanish dinners.

The evening meal is rarely a grand production. By the time ten o'clock rolls around, the day has already extracted its toll. La cena is less about culinary ambition and more about grace—a quiet, pragmatic winding down. It's the gentle thud of a knife slicing embutidos on a wooden board, the alchemy of

stale bread revived in a garlic broth, or the sacred geometry of a perfectly flipped tortilla. These aren't the towering paellas trotted out for Sunday crowds; this is the quiet food of survival, elevated by generations of collective habit.

It's the beauty of eating well when everyone is simply too damn tired to cook. The trick isn't found in complex technique, but in the instinctual knowledge of how to treat an egg, a potato, and whatever odds and ends happen to be lingering in the fridge. What follows is the true evening rhythm of the Spanish home—unfussy, unpretentious, and exactly what is required at the end of a long, bruising day.





Tortilla Española Clásica

tor-TEE-yah deh pah-TAH-tahs

For the first-generation kid who grew up in an Ohio suburb, the smell of olive oil and onions wafting through the house meant one thing: comfort. The Tortilla Española is often misunderstood in America—it's not an Italian frittata, shouldn't see the inside of an oven, and needs no paprika or cheese. Authentic Spanish home cooking takes humble ingredients and uses technique to spin them into gold. By letting the hot potatoes soak in the beaten eggs before cooking—a crucial step known as *el abrazo*—you create a velvety custard that tastes exactly like the homeland. Poaching the potatoes slowly takes time, so do the olive-oil poach on a Sunday, keep it in the fridge, and you can have a perfect, juicy tortilla on the table in fifteen minutes on a Tuesday.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled, halved lengthwise, and sliced crosswise into 1/8-inch half-moons</i>	1 1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil
1 med	yellow onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	6 large	eggs <i>room temperature</i>
		1 tsp	kosher salt

PREPARATION

- **Confit the potatoes and onions in advance.**

To make this a 15-minute weeknight meal, do the gentle poaching (Step 1) on a weekend. Store the tender potatoes and onions submerged in their cooking oil in the fridge for up to four days, then simply heat them through before draining and mixing with the eggs.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Confit the potatoes and onions.**

Place a large skillet over medium-low heat and pour in the olive oil. Add the sliced potatoes and onions. The oil should bubble very gently—you are confiting, not deep-frying. Cook for 25 to 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are incredibly tender and the onions are translucent. In the last three minutes, turn the heat up slightly to get a hint of golden-brown on the edges.

- 2. Drain and reserve the liquid gold.**

Place a large colander over a heat-proof bowl and carefully pour in the potato mixture. Let it drain for five minutes. Save the drained oil in a jar; it is infused with potato and onion flavor and is incredible for frying eggs or roasting vegetables later in the week.

1. Let the potatoes and eggs embrace.

In a large mixing bowl, crack the eggs and add the salt. Beat them lightly with a fork just to mix the yolks and whites—vigorous whisking introduces air and dries out the final dish. Fold the hot, drained potatoes and onions into the eggs. Walk away for 10 to 15 minutes. This resting period, 'el abrazo,' gently tempers the eggs and leaches potato starch into the liquid, creating a thick, creamy custard.

2. Sear the bottom of the tortilla.

Heat one tablespoon of your reserved infused olive oil in a 9-inch non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. When shimmering, pour in the entire potato-egg mixture. After 30 seconds, drop the heat to medium-low. Run a rubber spatula around the edges, tucking them inward to form a rounded border. Cook undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes until the bottom is lightly golden but the top is still quite runny.

3. Execute the flip.

This is a rite of passage. Place a large, completely flat plate upside down over the skillet. Place your non-dominant hand firmly against the center of the plate. In one quick, confident motion, invert the skillet and plate together. The tortilla should drop onto the plate, browned side up.

4. Finish cooking and rest.

Place the skillet back on the heat and gently slide the tortilla off the plate, raw side down. Tuck the edges under again with your spatula. Cook for exactly two more minutes for a juicy, soft interior (melosa). Slide onto a serving plate and rest for at least 10 minutes before slicing into wedges.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not fear the oil.**

The massive volume of olive oil is strictly for the confit process. You will strain away and save 90 percent of it. Don't skimp in the pan, or the potatoes will fry unevenly and stick.

- **Potato substitution is a science.**

American Russets are too starchy and will crumble; Red potatoes are too waxy and will repel the egg. Yukon Golds perfectly mimic the texture of Spain's traditional Monalisa potato.



Ensalada Mixta

en-sah-LAH-dah MEEEX-tah

Growing up, this was the salad that anchored the center of the table almost every night. It wasn't a sad afterthought; it was the main event of a gentle evening, requiring minimal cooking but delivering maximum flavor. The genius here lies in restraint and basic chemistry. We embrace the Spanish reverence for premium pantry staples—glorious, olive-oil-packed tuna and tender, jarred white asparagus—and we strictly obey the abuela's law of the aliño. Salt first to penetrate the fresh vegetables, vinegar second to dissolve the salt, and the extra virgin olive oil last to seal it all in.

INGREDIENTS

1 large head	romaine lettuce <i>washed, dried thoroughly, and chopped into bite-sized pieces</i>	12 oz	canned white asparagus <i>drained</i>
2 large	firm tomatoes <i>cut into wedges</i>	1/2 cup	canned sweet corn <i>drained</i>
1/2 med	white onion <i>sliced paper-thin</i>	1/2 cup	Spanish green olives <i>pitted</i>
1 large	carrot <i>peeled and grated</i>	3 large	large eggs
6 oz	canned tuna in olive oil <i>lightly drained but kept in large chunks</i>	1/2 tsp	flaky sea salt
		2 tbsp	sherry vinegar
		4 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil

PREPARATION

- **Submerge the thinly sliced onion in a small bowl of cold water with a splash of vinegar for ten minutes.**

Drain well before assembling; this old trick removes the harsh, raw bite that would otherwise overpower the delicate asparagus and tuna.

- **Hard-boil the eggs for exactly ten minutes, then immediately shock them in a bowl of ice water.**

The ice bath halts the cooking process, guaranteeing a firm but creamy yolk and preventing an unappetizing green ring. Peel and quarter them once cool.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Arrange a crisp bed of romaine on a wide, shallow platter to prevent the ingredients from crushing under their own weight.**
2. **Scatter the grated carrot and sweet corn evenly across the lettuce.**
3. **Arrange the tomato wedges and quartered eggs around the perimeter of the platter like a clock face.**

1. Scatter the drained onions and olives, then lay the white asparagus spears down so they radiate outward from the center.
2. Place the large, meaty chunks of olive oil packed tuna directly in the middle of the platter.
3. Bring the undressed salad to the table and apply the dressing in this exact chemical order: salt, then vinegar, then oil.

The salt must go first to penetrate the vegetables' moisture, followed by the water-based vinegar to dissolve it; the hydrophobic olive oil goes last to form a luxurious seal over the flavors.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Embrace high-quality canned goods without apology.**

In standard American cooking, canned vegetables often carry a stigma, but Spanish conservas—like olive-oil-packed Bonito del Norte and pristine white asparagus—are a premium art form capturing ingredients at their peak.

- **Never mix the vinaigrette beforehand.**

Pre-mixing the dressing or applying the oil first coats the lettuce in a waterproof film, causing the salt to bounce off and the vinegar to pool at the bottom in a sad, greasy puddle.



Sopa de Ajo Castellana

soh-pah deh ah-hoh kah-steh-yah-nah

This is the unapologetic cooking of necessity—cocina de aprovechamiento. When the Spanish winter bites and the pantry is nearly bare, a grandmother's alchemy turns stale bread, garlic, and good olive oil into something deeply restorative. Ignore the internet blogs trying to elevate this with onions, cumin, or jalapeños. This is about honoring the austere beauty of Castilian tradition, where a few humble ingredients, treated with absolute respect, yield the exact taste of the homeland.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

6 large cloves garlic
peeled and thinly sliced (do not mince)

3 oz	Jamón Serrano or dry Spanish chorizo <i>diced into small cubes</i>	1 pinch	cayenne pepper <i>optional</i>
1/2 large	loaf stale rustic bread <i>sliced thick</i>	6 cup	low-sodium chicken broth
1 tbsp	sweet smoked Spanish paprika	4 large	eggs
		to taste	sea salt

PREPARATION

- **Slice the garlic.**

Peel and thinly slice the garlic cloves. Do not mince them, or they will burn too quickly in the oil.

- **Prepare the bread.**

If your bread isn't already stale, slice it thick and toast it in a 300°F oven for 10 to 15 minutes to dry it out completely.

- **Dice the meat.**

Cut the jamón or chorizo into small, bite-sized cubes.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Infuse the olive oil with garlic.**

Heat the olive oil in a heavy pot over medium-low heat, add the sliced garlic, and cook gently until it turns a pale, toasted gold. Do not walk away; if it burns, throw it out and start over.

- 2. Render the cured meat.**

Add the diced jamón or chorizo, stirring for about a minute until the fat renders.

- 3. Toast the bread in the fat.**

Toss the stale bread slices into the pot, stirring so they soak up the garlic-infused oil and toast slightly.

1. Bloom the paprika off the heat.

Remove the pot entirely from the heat, then stir in the paprika and cayenne for exactly 15 seconds to release the oils safely without burning the delicate sugars.

2. Simmer and thicken the soup.

Immediately pour in the chicken broth to stop the paprika from cooking, then return to medium-high heat. Once boiling, reduce to low, cover, and simmer for 15 minutes until the bread softens into a rich, silky texture.

3. Poach the eggs in the broth.

Uncover the pot and carefully crack the eggs directly into the gently simmering soup. Cover and simmer for 3 to 4 minutes until the whites set but the yolks remain runny.

4. Serve immediately.

Ladle the hot soup into bowls, ensuring each gets an egg and soaked bread, ready to break the runny yolk into the smoky broth.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The bread must be truly stale.**

American supermarket bread is often too soft. Drying it out in a low oven is critical to prevent it from turning into a slimy paste in the broth.

● **Keep it strictly traditional for Lent.**

To return this dish to its vegetarian origins, omit the meat and substitute the chicken broth for high-quality vegetable stock or heavily salted water.



Pimientos del Piquillo Rellenos de Atún

pee-MYEN-tos del pee-KEE-yo ray-YEN-os de ah-TOON

In America, canned food is usually an act of desperation. In Spain, conservas are a high art. If you've ever had the misfortune of eating watery, lemon-soaked deli tuna stuffed into a generic red bell pepper, banish it from your memory. The real deal, exactly the way a grandmother in Navarra makes it, relies on one transformative trick: gently confiting the jarred piquillos in olive oil and their own juices to strip away any tinny acidity. Stuffed with premium olive oil-packed tuna and tightly bound with mayonnaise and hard-boiled egg, this is a brilliant, zero-pretension weeknight dinner that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

12 oz	jarred Pimientos del Piquillo <i>drained, preserving liquid reserved</i>	3 tbsp	sweet onion <i>very finely minced</i>
2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil	6 large	green olives <i>finely minced</i>
2 med	cloves garlic <i>peeled and sliced paper-thin</i>	3 tbsp	mayonnaise
1/2 tsp	granulated sugar	1 tbsp	tomato sauce or ketchup
1 pinch	kosher salt	1 pinch	freshly ground black pepper
10 oz	olive oil-packed Spanish tuna <i>aggressively drained and flaked</i>	1 tbsp	fresh parsley <i>minced</i>
2 large	eggs <i>hard-boiled, cooled, peeled, and finely minced</i>	1 pinch	flaky sea salt

PREPARATION

- **Seek out authentic ingredients.**

Find real D.O.P. Lodosa piquillo peppers in the international aisle; do not substitute large, watery roasted red bell peppers. Likewise, water-packed tuna will ruin the texture—only use tuna packed in olive oil.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Infuse the olive oil with garlic.**

In a wide skillet over medium-low heat, gently warm the olive oil and sliced garlic for 1 to 2 minutes until fragrant but not browned.

- 2. Confit the peppers in their own juices.**

Lay the empty peppers flat in the skillet in a single layer, sprinkling the sugar and kosher salt evenly over the top, then pour in the reserved pepper juice from the jar. Turn the heat to low and simmer gently for 15 to 20 minutes, flipping halfway through, until the liquid reduces to a sticky glaze. Remove from heat and let cool in the pan to room temperature.

1. Mash the filling into a cohesive paste.

In a medium bowl, vigorously mash the flaked tuna, minced eggs, onion, olives, mayonnaise, tomato sauce, and black pepper with a fork. You want a thick, spreadable paste that holds its shape, not a chunky deli salad.

2. Pipe the tuna mixture into the cooled peppers.

Transfer the filling to a heavy-duty zip-top bag, snip a half-inch off the corner, and squeeze the paste deep into each pepper without tearing the flesh.

3. Garnish with the pan drippings and serve.

Arrange the stuffed peppers on a platter, drizzle generously with the syrupy, garlicky red oil left in the skillet, and finish with flaky sea salt and minced parsley.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Make them ahead of time.**

These actually taste better the next day. Confit and stuff them on a Sunday, store them in the fridge, and pull them out ten minutes before dinner for a zero-effort weeknight meal.

● **Serve with heavily toasted bread.**

You will want rustic sourdough or a crusty baguette to mop up the garlicky, syrupy red oil left on the platter.



Revuelto de Espárragos Trigueros

reh-VWEL-toh de es-PAH-rah-gohs tree-GEH-rohs

Dinner on a weeknight doesn't need to be a massive, sprawling affair. In Spain, they understand the gentle evening meal—*la cena ligera*. When the wild trigueros sprout, abuelas don't bury them in heavy cream or cheddar cheese. They rely on good olive oil, a gentle flame, and the greatest trick of the Spanish kitchen: an extra egg yolk to build a velvety emulsion. It's not just scrambled eggs; it's a luscious custard coaxed into being, taken off the heat before it sets. This is how you make an ordinary Tuesday taste like the home you thought you left behind.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 lb	thin green asparagus <i>woody ends snapped off and cut into 1-inch diagonal pieces</i>	3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
3 large	pasture-raised eggs	2 oz	Serrano ham or prosciutto <i>finely diced</i>
1 large	pasture-raised egg yolk	1/4 tsp	sea salt
2 med clove	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	1/4 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

PREPARATION

- **Snap the asparagus spears.**

Don't chop them blindly with a knife. Bend each spear near the bottom until it naturally snaps exactly where the tough, woody stem ends, then cut the tender shoots into pieces.

- **Whisk the eggs and extra yolk.**

Crack the whole eggs and the extra yolk into a bowl and beat gently with a fork until just combined. Do not over-beat.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the aromatic base.**

Place a non-stick frying pan over medium heat and add the olive oil. Toss in the minced garlic and let it sizzle for 30 seconds until fragrant but not browned. If using the ham, stir it in now for a quick 30 seconds to render its fat.

- 2. Sauté the asparagus.**

Add the asparagus pieces, tossing them in the garlic oil. Lower the heat slightly and let them cook for 5 to 7 minutes until crisp-tender and brightly green, then add a pinch of salt.

1. Emulsify the eggs over a low flame.

Turn the heat down to the lowest possible setting and pour the beaten eggs over the asparagus. Using a rubber spatula, continuously and gently scrape the bottom and sides of the pan, folding the slowly setting curds over themselves.

2. Pull the pan early and let residual heat finish the job.

When the eggs are about 80 percent cooked—resembling soft, wet curds suspended in a slightly runny sauce—remove the pan from the stove entirely. The residual heat of the pan will finish cooking the eggs perfectly over the next 30 seconds.

3. Serve immediately.

A revuelto waits for no one. Slide it directly onto a plate and serve alongside toasted, crunchy artisan bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The extra yolk is the secret to peak creaminess.**

Standard eggs contain too much water to achieve a velvety texture alone. The extra fat from the yolk coats the proteins, impeding them from squeezing out moisture.

● **Dairy has no place here.**

Adding milk or water to the eggs will cause them to separate and water out in the pan, ruining the dense creaminess of a true Spanish revuelto.



Gazpacho Andaluz

Tradicional

If there's a dish that instantly transports a Spaniard back to their mother's kitchen on a sweltering summer afternoon, it's Gazpacho Andaluz. Forget the chunky, salsa-like bowls of cold tomato soup you find in American strip malls. Real gazpacho is a velvety, intensely refreshing emulsion born of necessity in the fields and perfected by generations of abuelas. The magic isn't complicated, but it demands absolute respect: treating humble supermarket vegetables to a proper maceration, coaxing them into a delicate emulsion with good olive oil, and passing the whole affair through a sieve. It's unpretentious, soul-reviving, and tastes exactly like southern Spain.

INGREDIENTS

2 1/2 lb	Roma tomatoes <i>cored and roughly chopped</i>	1 small clove	garlic <i>peeled</i>
1 small	Cubanelle or Anaheim pepper <i>cored, seeded, and roughly chopped</i>	1 large	slice day-old country white bread <i>crusts removed and torn into chunks</i>
1/2 med	English cucumber <i>peeled and seeded</i>	2 tbsp	sherry vinegar
1/4 small	white or red onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil
		1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt

PREPARATION

- **Respect the garlic.**

Slice the garlic clove in half lengthwise and dig out the inner green germ to prevent a harsh, bitter bite and save your guests from indigestion.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Macerate the vegetables and hydrate the bread to build a natural brine.**

In a large bowl, toss the tomatoes, pepper, cucumber, onion, and garlic with the salt and sherry vinegar. Bury the torn bread among the tomatoes so it absorbs their liquid, then let the bowl sit on the counter for 15 to 30 minutes to let osmosis do the heavy lifting.

- 2. Liquefy the base.**

Dump the entire bowl—vegetables, bread, and every drop of liquid at the bottom—into a blender and run it on medium-high until completely broken down, about 1 to 2 minutes.

- 3. Emulsify the olive oil with care.**

Drop the blender to its lowest speed and slowly stream in the olive oil. Hitting the oil too hard shears its polyphenols and turns it bitter, so be gentle and watch it transform into a creamy, vibrant orange-pink.

1. Strain the soup without compromise.

Pour the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a pitcher, aggressively working it through with the back of a ladle to discard the tough skins and seeds. This is non-negotiable if you want that luxurious, melts-in-the-mouth texture.

2. Chill it down, but keep ice away from it.

Adjust the salt, cover tightly, and stash it in the fridge for at least two hours.

Adding ice cubes is a cardinal sin that will instantly ruin the delicate balance you just built.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Sourcing the right peppers.**

Skip standard green bell peppers, which can be bitter and thick-skinned. Look for light green Cubanelle or Anaheim frying peppers at your local market for the authentic Andalusian flavor.

● **Serve with traditional tropezones.**

Provide small bowls of finely diced cucumber, green pepper, onion, and crispy homemade croutons on the table so guests can sprinkle texture into the smooth soup.



Tabla de Embutidos y Quesos

tah-blah deh em-boo-tee-dohs ee keh-sohs

Forget the chaotic, overflowing grazing boards polluting your feed. In Spain, a true tabla isn't an excuse to pile cheap pretzels and chocolate-covered berries onto a slab of wood—it's an elegant, deeply satisfying dinner that respects the centuries-old art of preserving meat. Your abuela didn't need to turn on a stove to feed you well; she just needed to let the meat sweat, give it room to breathe, and serve it with properly obliterated tomatoes on rustic toast.

INGREDIENTS

- | | | | |
|----------------|---|-------------|---|
| 1 large | rustic sourdough or ciabatta loaf
<i>cut into thick slices</i> | 4 oz | Spanish Serrano ham
<i>thinly sliced</i> |
| | | 4 oz | dry-cured Spanish chorizo
<i>thinly sliced</i> |

4 oz	salchichón or mild salami <i>thinly sliced</i>	2 med	highly ripe tomatoes on the vine <i>halved horizontally</i>
6 oz	aged Manchego cheese <i>cut into neat triangles</i>	1 large clove	garlic <i>halved</i>
6 oz	soft goat cheese	3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
1/2 cup	Marcona almonds	1 tsp	flaky sea salt
1/2 cup	Spanish green olives		
2 tbsp	membrillo or high-quality fig jam		

PREPARATION

- **Let the meat sweat.**

Take your cured meats and cheeses out of the refrigerator 30 to 60 minutes before serving. You are waiting for the fat to turn slightly translucent and glisten—unlocking the complex umami flavors that cold temperatures kill.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Organize the board with respect.**

Do not pile the ingredients like a supermarket display. Lay the meat slices flat or slightly overlapping on a large wooden board, giving everything enough negative space to breathe.

- 2. Corral the accompaniments.**

Place the olives and membrillo in small, separate bowls so their liquids don't ruin the meat, then scatter the almonds in small clusters.

- 3. Toast the bread.**

While the meats are coming up to temperature, toast the thick slices of rustic bread until they form a sturdy, rough crust.

- 4. Rub the toast with garlic.**

Take a halved raw garlic clove and lightly run the cut side over the hot, rough surface of the bread so it acts like a grater.

1. Destroy the tomato.

Hold a halved tomato and aggressively rub the cut flesh into the toast until the juices and pulp sink into the crumb, leaving only the skin in your hand to discard.

2. Finish and serve.

Drizzle the tomato-soaked bread generously with your best olive oil, hit it with flaky sea salt, and bring it to the table alongside the sweating board.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Weeknight Hack.**

If you can't find individual packs of authentic Spanish meats, look for "Spanish Charcuterie" trio samplers at specialty grocers or Trader Joe's. They provide the exact authentic trio (Serrano, Chorizo, Salchichón) without breaking the bank or requiring a trip to a specialty butcher.



El Domingo y La Sobremesa

Sacred weekend feasts, communal pans, and the lingering hours of conversation that follow.

Sunday in a Spanish household isn't a day of rest—it's a marathon. The dining table becomes a chaotic, beautiful battleground of overlapping voices, stained napkins, and heavy pans dropped dead-center. This is the domain of the Sunday paella, its edges fiercely defended for the best scrape of socarrat, and the massive communal empanada passed down the line until hands are slick with oil. There is no precious plating in the kitchen; you eat from the source.

Then comes the sobremesa. The plates are pushed aside, but nobody stands up. This is the sacred, indefinite hour where a late lunch bleeds into the evening. Fortified by the burnt-sugar crack of a crema catalana or the dense caramel gravity of abuela's flan, the table surrenders to strong coffee and cold chupitos. It is a stubborn, glorious refusal to let the weekend end, built on the simple truth that the best parts of life happen over the ruins of a massive meal.





Fideuá Rápida de Marisco

fee-deh-WAH RAH-pee-dah deh mah-REES-koh

Paella gets the glory, but fideuá is the true working-class hero of the Valencian coast. Born on fishing boats in Gandía out of pure necessity, it swaps rice for short, toasted noodles that drink up an obscene amount of savory marine broth. Boiling rockfish for hours is a weekend luxury, but you can get that exact, deeply unpretentious taste of a Spanish Tuesday night by fortifying a good boxed stock with your shrimp shells. Toast the dry noodles in olive oil until they smell like toasted nuts, let them drink that deeply savory broth, and blast them in a hot oven until they stand at attention—the true mark of a perfect fideuá.

INGREDIENTS

4 cup	boxed seafood stock	1 large	Roma tomato <i>grated on a box grater with skin discarded</i>
1 lb	large raw shrimp <i>peeled and deveined with shells reserved</i>	1 tsp	sweet smoked paprika
1/2 cup	dry white wine	1 pinch	saffron threads
1/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil	10 oz	fideo pasta or vermicelli <i>broken into 1-inch pieces</i>
1/2 lb	fresh squid tubes <i>cleaned and cut into bite-sized rings or squares</i>	1 pinch	kosher salt
1 med	yellow onion <i>very finely diced</i>	1/2 cup	high quality mayonnaise
3 med	garlic	1 small	garlic <i>grated into a paste</i>
clove	<i>minced</i>	clove	
		1 tsp	fresh lemon juice

PREPARATION

- **Whisk together the quick garlic alioli.**

Mix the mayonnaise, grated garlic clove, and lemon juice in a small bowl. It is a weeknight shortcut for a true mortar-and-pestle alioli, but its sharp, creamy bite is absolutely mandatory to cut through the rich, briny noodles.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Fortify the boxed seafood stock using the reserved shrimp shells.**

Heat a drizzle of olive oil in a saucepan over medium-high heat, sauté the shells for two minutes until bright pink, then pour in the white wine to cook off the alcohol. Add the stock, simmer for 15 minutes, and strain to create a quick, deeply marine fumet.

1. Preheat the oven to 450°F and quickly sear the seafood.

Heat the olive oil in a wide, heavy-bottomed, oven-safe skillet over medium-high heat. Sear the shrimp for 30 seconds per side, remove to a plate, then sear the squid for one minute until opaque and remove; leave the intensely flavored oil in the pan.

2. Slowly sweat the onion to build the aromatic base.

Lower the heat to medium-low, add the diced onion, and gently coax out its sweetness for 6 to 8 minutes until translucent. Make a small well in the center, add the minced garlic, and cook for one minute until fragrant.

3. Stir in the smoked paprika off the heat, followed by the grated tomato.

Pull the skillet off the burner for 10 seconds so the paprika doesn't burn and turn bitter, then stir it in rapidly. Return to the heat, add the tomato pulp, and cook until the water evaporates into a thick, dark, jammy paste that separates from the oil.

4. Toast the dry noodles in the flavored oil.

Pour the dry fideos directly into the skillet and stir continuously for 3 to 4 minutes until they take on a deep, golden-brown, nutty color—this is the most crucial technique in the dish, so do not rush it.

5. Simmer the toasted noodles in the hot fumet.

Crush the saffron threads into the pan, pour in 3 cups of the hot broth, and give the skillet one gentle shake to distribute the noodles evenly into a flat layer. Simmer untouched over medium-high heat for 5 minutes until the liquid dips below the noodles, then arrange the reserved shrimp and squid over the top.

6. Blast the skillet in the hot oven to crisp the noodles.

Transfer the skillet to the preheated oven and bake for 3 to 5 minutes. The dry ambient heat will force the remaining moisture to evaporate rapidly, causing the noodle tips to curl upward and stand on end.

7. Let the fideuá rest before serving.

Remove the pan from the oven, cover with a clean kitchen towel for 5 minutes to let the starches settle, and serve directly from the center of the table.



Empanada Rápida de Atún

em-pah-NAH-dah RAH-pee-dah deh ah-TOON

The smell of slowly poaching onions and peppers is the universal beacon of a Spanish kitchen. The traditional empanada gallega is a weekend project, but this is the rápida version—the weeknight secret weapon of working families across Spain. The magic isn't in a yeasted dough, but in the zaragallada, a heavily caramelized pepper and onion base. The ultimate trick is draining the fragrant, orange-tinted oil from those vegetables and painting it directly onto an all-butter puff pastry crust. Combined with the classic hack of hitting olive oil-packed tuna with a splash of vinegar to replicate the bright tang of Spanish escabeche, it transforms a Tuesday night in Ohio into a proper Sunday table.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup	extra-virgin olive oil	1 tbsp	sherry vinegar
2 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	2 large	egg <i>hard-boiled, peeled, and roughly chopped</i>
1 large	red bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>	1/4 cup	pitted green Manzanilla olives <i>sliced</i>
1 large	Cubanelle pepper <i>finely diced</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
2 med clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper
1 tsp	sweet paprika	2 large sheet	all-butter puff pastry <i>thawed</i>
1/2 cup	smooth marinara sauce	1 large	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
15 oz	solid white albacore tuna in olive oil <i>drained</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Thaw the pastry.**

Allow the puff pastry to thaw overnight in the refrigerator rather than on the counter so the butter stays cold and maintains its structure.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the zaragallada.**

Heat the extra-virgin olive oil in a large skillet over medium-low heat, add the onions, red bell pepper, Cubanelle pepper, and kosher salt, and poach slowly for 20 to 25 minutes until deeply sweet and completely collapsed.

- 2. Fortify the base.**

Stir in the minced garlic and sweet paprika, cooking for one minute until fragrant, then add the marinara sauce and simmer for 5 minutes until the mixture is thick and jammy.

1. Harvest the infused oil.

Transfer the vegetable mixture to a fine-mesh strainer set over a bowl and press gently to extract the orange-red oil; reserve this liquid gold and allow the vegetables to cool completely to room temperature.

2. Mix the filling.

In a bowl, toss about 5 ounces of the drained tuna with the sherry vinegar to simulate the sharp bite of traditional Spanish escabeche, then gently fold this, along with the remaining tuna, chopped hard-boiled eggs, olives, and black pepper, into the cooled vegetables.

3. Assemble the base.

Unroll one sheet of puff pastry onto a parchment-lined baking sheet and spread the cooled tuna filling evenly over it, leaving a strict 1-inch bare border around all edges.

4. Seal and vent the empanada.

Drape the second sheet of pastry over the top, roll the bottom edge up and over the top edge, and firmly twist and crimp to seal. Cut a dime-sized hole in the dead center of the top crust to act as a chimney, allowing steam to escape so the bottom crust doesn't become a soggy mess.

5. Paint and bake.

Whisk one tablespoon of the reserved vegetable oil into the beaten raw egg and brush this mixture entirely over the pastry. Bake at 400°F for 30 to 35 minutes until puffed, deeply golden brown, and crisp.

6. Cool and serve.

Let the empanada rest on the baking sheet for at least 15 minutes before slicing into large squares; it is meant to be eaten warm or at room temperature.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the cool down.**

Never spoon warm filling onto raw puff pastry, or the butter will prematurely melt and destroy your flaky crust.

- **The escabeche trick.**

Authentic recipes mix standard oil-packed tuna with a can of vinegar-marinated tuna (escabeche); hitting one can of albacore with a splash of sherry vinegar replicates this crucial acidic bite perfectly.



Garbanzos con Langostinos

In the coastal taverns of Andalusia, fishermen originally threw this stew together using the day's unsold catch and whatever was lying around the pantry. Over the years, it evolved into a beloved Sunday classic. But the true soul of this dish—the secret the old women know—doesn't lie in complex technique or expensive ingredients, but in the violent extraction of flavor from head-on shrimp. Crushing those shells into hot olive oil yields a liquid gold that transforms humble canned chickpeas into a velvet-rich masterpiece you can pull off on a busy weeknight. It is the unpretentious, unmistakable taste of a real Spanish home.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	large head-on Gulf shrimp <i>heads and shells removed and reserved, meat refrigerated</i>	3 cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>
30 oz	canned chickpeas <i>rinsed and drained well</i>	1/2 cup	crushed tomatoes
3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	1/4 cup	dry sherry or dry white wine
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 tsp	sweet paprika
1 small	green bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>	1	bay leaf
		2 cup	water
		1 tbsp	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Separate the shrimp meat from the heads and shells.**

Peel the shrimp completely, placing the raw meat in a covered container in the refrigerator while keeping the heads and shells in a separate bowl on the counter—they are the soul of the recipe.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Fry and crush the shrimp shells.**

Heat one tablespoon of olive oil in a saucepan over medium-high heat, add the reserved shrimp heads and shells, and use a wooden spoon to aggressively smash the heads against the bottom of the pot until they release their rich orange juices.

- 2. Deglaze the pan to build the fumet.**

Once the shells are bright pink and toasted, pour in the sherry and step back as it bubbles up. Let the alcohol cook off for one minute, then add the water, bring to a boil, and simmer for 15 minutes.

1. Strain out the liquid gold.

Pour the simmering broth through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl, pressing down hard on the shells one last time to extract every drop of flavor before throwing the shells away.

2. Sweat the sofrito.

While the broth simmers, heat the remaining two tablespoons of olive oil in a heavy pot over medium heat, adding the onion, green pepper, garlic, and a pinch of salt to slowly sauté until the vegetables are profoundly soft and translucent.

3. Toast the spices and reduce the tomato.

Stir in the paprika for exactly fifteen seconds so it does not turn bitter, then immediately pour in the crushed tomatoes and bay leaf, cooking until the tomato darkens and reduces.

4. Simmer the stew.

Fold the rinsed chickpeas into the pot and pour in the strained shrimp broth, maintaining a gentle simmer for 10 to 15 minutes so the legumes absorb the seafood flavor and their starches naturally thicken the liquid.

5. Poach the shrimp with residual heat.

Turn off the heat completely, stir the cold, raw shrimp meat into the hot stew, and cover the pot with a lid for exactly three to five minutes until the shrimp are perfectly tender and never rubbery.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The blender trick.**

For a silkier, restaurant-style stew, pull the bay leaf out after cooking the tomatoes, transfer the sofrito to a blender with a splash of your shrimp broth, and puree until smooth before adding the chickpeas.

- **Do not compromise on the shrimp.**

Do not attempt to make this with pre-peeled or pre-cooked shrimp, as the fundamental flavor of the dish requires the hepatopancreas (the 'coral') found inside the heads. Check the freezer section of your local Asian market if the fresh seafood counter lacks them.



Flan de Huevo en Olla Exprés

flahn de WEH-vo

If you grew up in a Spanish household, you know the rattle and hiss of the olla exprés on the stove. Forget those dense, cloying pucks made with canned condensed milk. The genuine article—the flan your abuela whipped up to finish a Sunday meal—relies on nothing but whole milk, eggs, sugar, and a hit of lemon peel. It's an unpretentious, incredibly silky custard, gently steamed in a pressurized environment until barely set. We're using an electric pressure cooker here; it's the exact same mechanics, demanding the exact same respect.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup

granulated white sugar
divided

2 tbsp

cold water

1/2 tsp fresh lemon juice

2 cup whole milk

1 wide strip fresh lemon peel
white pith removed

4 large large eggs
room temperature

1 1/2 cup cold water
for the pressure cooker

PREPARATION

- **Prepare the equipment.**

You will need a 7-inch round metal cake pan or traditional flanera that fits inside your electric pressure cooker, along with a trivet that has handles for easy lifting.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Infuse the milk.**

In a small saucepan, gently warm the milk and lemon peel over medium-low heat until steaming, then remove from heat, cover, and steep for 10 minutes before discarding the peel.

- 2. Start the caramel.**

In another small saucepan, combine half a cup of the sugar, the 2 tablespoons of cold water, and the lemon juice over medium heat.

- 3. Swirl, do not stir.**

Watch the pan closely, swirling occasionally. Once the sugar melts into a deep mahogany amber, immediately remove from heat, pour it into your 7-inch metal pan, and swirl to coat the bottom.

- 4. Blend the custard.**

In a large bowl, whisk the eggs and the remaining half cup of sugar until completely smooth, then slowly stream in the warm, infused milk while whisking continuously.

1. Strain and seal.

Pour the custard mixture through a fine-mesh strainer directly into the caramel-lined pan, then cover the pan tightly with aluminum foil to ensure no pressurized steam gets in.

2. Cook under pressure.

Pour the 1 1/2 cups of cold water into your pressure cooker insert, place a trivet inside, and lower the sealed pan onto the trivet. Cook on High Pressure for 10 minutes.

3. Let it rest.

When the cooking cycle finishes, do absolutely nothing. Allow the pot to naturally release its pressure for at least 15 minutes so the residual heat can gently and evenly set the eggs.

4. Chill and unmold.

Carefully remove the pan, let it cool to room temperature, and chill in the fridge for at least 6 hours. To serve, run a thin knife around the edge, place a rimmed plate over the top, and swiftly invert.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the natural release.**

Venting the pressure cooker immediately will cause the liquid inside to boil, resulting in a rubbery flan riddled with bubbles. That slow drop in pressure and temperature is what yields a perfectly silky curd.

● **The lemon juice is non-negotiable.**

A few drops of acid in the caramel prevent the sugar from crystallizing in the pan, ensuring a smooth, fluid sauce when you unmold.



El Carajillo Quemado

el kah-rah-HEE-yoh keh-MAH-doh

You've probably seen a Carajillo shaken over ice with a bright yellow liqueur at some trendy downtown restaurant. That's a modern invention. This is the Carajillo Quemado, the uncompromising, blue-collar digestif of Spanish taverns and long Sunday afternoons. It requires fire, a little physics, and the patience to let the table linger. By flambéing dark rum with lemon, cinnamon, and coffee beans, you burn off the harshness and build a deeply aromatic syrup. It is exactly how the grandfather would have ordered it, and how the grandmother would have known to make it.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 oz	dark rum or Spanish brandy	1 small	cinnamon stick <i>lightly broken</i>
1 tbsp	granulated sugar	3	whole roasted coffee beans
1 small	lemon peel <i>cut into a 2-inch strip, avoiding all bitter white pith</i>	2 oz	espresso or strong dark-roast coffee <i>freshly brewed</i>

PREPARATION

- **Carefully peel the lemon.**

Use a vegetable peeler to shave off a strip of the bright yellow skin, ensuring absolutely no bitter white pith comes with it.

- **Brew the coffee.**

Pull a fresh shot of espresso or brew a dense, dark roast in a stovetop Moka pot just before you begin the flambé process.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the aromatic base in a small heatproof glass.**

Add the dark rum, sugar, lemon peel, cinnamon stick, and coffee beans together in a sturdy glass.

- 2. Warm the alcohol in the microwave.**

Room temperature liquor is stubborn to light. Microwave the glass for exactly 30 seconds to release the vapors and ensure a safe, effortless ignition.

- 3. Ignite the mixture and stir continuously.**

Using a long kitchen lighter, catch the vapors on fire. Immediately stir with a long spoon for 30 to 45 seconds to dissolve the sugar, extract the essential oils, and burn off the harsh alcoholic bite.

1. Smother the flame to end the flambé.

Once the syrup has reduced to your liking, simply place a small saucer flat over the top of the glass to cut off the oxygen.

2. Float the hot coffee over the syrup to create the layers.

Rest the back of your spoon just above the surface of the heavy syrup. Slowly pour the hot espresso over the spoon so it floats, leaving you with distinct layers of syrup, dark coffee, and golden crema.

3. Serve immediately and stir before drinking.

Despite the beautiful presentation, the drink must be vigorously stirred by the guest right before consuming to mix the sweet base with the bitter coffee.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not attempt a mass flambé.**

If making these for a large Sunday crowd, do not try to ignite a large bowl of liquor indoors. Prepare them individually or in pairs to respect the flame and ensure the right ratio for every glass.

● **Choosing the right glass.**

Use a small, thick-walled glass like a traditional vaso de cristal or a Gibraltar glass that can safely withstand both the microwave and the direct heat of the flame.