

CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL



Brazil's **Mile-High Pizza** | *Chili-Ginger* **Oven-Fried Cauliflower**

L.A.'s **Fried Shrimp Tacos** | *Italy's* **Tomato-Basil Bread Soup**

CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL'S

MILK STREET

◆ CHANGE THE WAY YOU COOK



MAY - JUNE 2022 • \$6.95 ◆



**Calabrian
Ricotta
Dumplings**
*Southern Italy's
Best Chicken Soup*

Sweet-and-Salty *Peanut Noodles* | **Sticky Soy-Glazed** *Baby Back Ribs*

RECIPE INDEX



Chicken Soup with Dumplings Page 26



Beef Chili Colorado Tacos Page 19



Pasta with Ricotta and Tomatoes Page 28



Greek-Style Baked White Beans Page 24

Cookish: Throw It Together

Chili-Soy Noodles with Bok Choy; and Ginger-Curry Pork with Green Beans 6

Oven-Fried Gobi Manchurian

These crispy cauliflower bites are oven-roasted and tangy-salty-sweet 7

Fast & Slow: Char Siu-Style Baby Back Ribs

Sweet-and-savory ribs that are fall-apart tender thanks to the Instant Pot 8

Brazilian-Style Pizza Dough & Tomato Sauce

São Paulo-style pizza crust is crispy-tender and topped with a light, fresh sauce 10

Thai Chicken Pizza with Bean Sprouts & Peanut Sauce

Inspired by pad Thai, this pizza is topped with chicken and spicy peanut sauce 11

Portuguese Pizza

A super savory pizza piled high with ham, olives and hearts of palm 12

Pizza Carbonara

Channeling Italian flavors, this pizza gets extra richness from grated egg yolks 12

Pizza with Ricotta, Za'atar & Arugula

Peppery arugula balances rich ricotta cheese and tangy za'atar 13

Pizza Calabrese

This pizza piles it on with three cheeses and hot Italian sausage 14

Tuscan-Style Spring Vegetable Soup

Tender vegetables meet a rich, meaty broth in this light Italian-inspired soup 15

Fried Shrimp Tacos with Salsa Roja

Crispy shrimp tacos are finished with fresh tomato salsa and cool, creamy avocado 17

Beef Chili Colorado Tacos

A classic Mexican taco filling that combines succulent beef with a red chili sauce 19

Drunken Shrimp with Tequila (Camarones Borrachos)

Garlicky, spicy shrimp get big, bold flavor from a liberal pour of tequila 21

Greek Meatballs with Tomato Sauce (Soutzoukakia)

A tangy-sweet sauce balances savory, richly spiced meatballs 23

Greek-Style Baked White Beans in Tomato Sauce

In Crete, simple white beans take on deep garlic-tomato flavor 24

Greek Beef and Tomato Stew with Orzo (Giouvetsi)

Tender orzo is the perfect foil for warmly spiced beef and tomatoes 25

Chicken Soup with Ricotta Dumplings

Calabria's simple, satisfying twist on chicken soup, starring feather-light dumplings 27

Pasta with Ricotta, Tomatoes and Herbs

Rome's best no-cook pasta sauce is packed with tomatoes, cheese and fresh herbs 28

Chocolate Olive Oil Cake

For the moistest, most luscious chocolate cake ever, just add olive oil 29

Japanese-Style Rice with Corn, Butter and Soy Sauce

Simple but deeply flavorful, this dish is Japan's three-ingredient supper solution 30

[E V E R Y I S S U E]

Meze: Lessons and discoveries from Milk Street 2

Tuesday Nights at Milk Street: Casual dinners. Fast 4

Kitchen Counts: Spice blends, by the numbers 30

Off the Air: Questions from Milk Street Radio, answered 31

Kitchen Cabinet: Marika Contaldo Seguso's Tomato and Bread Soup 32

Book Reviews 32

Sketchbook: Tropical fruits from around the world 33



Pizza Carbonara Page 12



Tomato and Bread Soup Page 32



Oven-Fried Gobi Manchurian Page 7



Chocolate Olive Oil Cake Page 29

Front Cover Photo: Connie Miller of CB Creatives; Styling: Christine Tobin
 Front Cover Illustration: Bill Sanderson; Back Cover Photo: J.M. Hirsch

[EDITOR'S NOTE] Christopher Kimball

The Pies of Augustina Garcia Lorenzo

I CLIMBED OFF THE BOAT, a 22-foot-long water taxi loaded with propane tanks and plastic jugs of gasoline, up onto the concrete jetty in Yelapa, a beachfront village in Mexico down the coast from Puerto Vallarta accessible only by water. A short walk brought us to a beach filled with umbrellas, a few tourists, and a couple of bars and restaurants. It was a small, rustic version of hundreds of similar beaches scattered from the Caribbean to Vietnam.

Walking inland to the town itself, the landscape quickly transformed into narrow dirt paths and tree-shaded walkways. We passed the recycling center, a mishmash graveyard of metal parts, then small construction sites. Farther on, there were slow-moving horses and cattle, two frisky goats, a ramshackle rodeo fairground and a swaying suspension bridge across a wide shallow riverbed that swells during the summer rainy season. This was what I had come to see—the authentic Yelapa, not tourists on the beach.

I soon met Gustavo Lorenzo Garcia. His mother, Augustina Garcia Lorenzo, bakes pies that her son sells to the tourists. Gustavo had moved away from town for a couple of years, then came back to help his mother. “These are the pies of Augustina Garcia Lorenzo, and I am her son, Gustavo, and proud to be selling them,” he told me. He moves from group to group, his technique warm, disarming and expert, as he wraps each piece in foil to be enjoyed later. His livelihood is based on the beachfront Yelapa, the one with the day-tripping tourists.

Vacationers often come to see the waterfalls and leave without contributing to the local economy, a frequent topic of conversation. But life is now better for many as the town has grown. Until 20 years ago, Yelapa had no electricity and just one telephone located in an open-sided booth off the main street. Today, there are a few shops and hotels, and locals are returning to town, reinvigorating the community. In Puerto Vallarta, a miniature Miami, economic growth is everywhere. My friend and



guide, Paola Briseño-González, grew up there and pointed out that though the Puerto Vallarta of her childhood has vanished, life is better for most locals.

Most of us who travel seek an “authentic” experience, a place that stands outside of time, that offers a fresh perspective on life. The problem is that it’s easy to confuse parts of the world with which we are less familiar with something that is inherently meaningful. Walking through Hmong villages in northern Vietnam or

driving through the Congo in the 1960s both felt like adventures at the time, but one doesn’t need to travel far to discover meaning; at an Egyptian food cart in Berlin or tlacoyos (thick blue corn tortillas stuffed with fillings) sold on the streets of Mexico City. Authenticity comes from a wellspring of people adapting to their environment in compelling ways, whether it’s an 80-year-old grandmother making a living selling scallion pancakes in a back alley of Taipei or a food activist who serves home-cooked lunches to busy office workers in Beirut at Souk El Tayeb.

That evening in Puerto Vallarta we went off the beaten path to a storefront taco joint, La Mucca, which specializes in workaday tacos filled with grilled beef, beans, cilantro, guacamole, salsa, cheese and onions in hand-made blue corn tortillas. Bright light spilled onto the dark sidewalk, where a few of us stood two-handed, trying to manage the overstuffed tacos. As with Gustavo and Augustina, there’s a personal story here, a chef who labors to elevate a simple street taco on a warm winter’s night off a cobblestone street in Puerto Vallarta. This experience was every bit as authentic as my trip earlier that day to Yelapa and just as delicious.

Destinations will always disappoint if you arrive with a suitcase full of expectations. Travel with your eyes wide open. Seek out the people, not the landscape.

Don’t love the experience you want; love the one you’re with. ♦

CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL'S

MILK STREET

MAGAZINE

President and Founder

Christopher Kimball
Media Director and Co-Founder
 Melissa Baldino

Editorial Director - J.M. Hirsch

Creative Director, Recipes and Products - Matthew Card
Art Director - Jennifer Baldino Cox

Managing Editor - Shaula Clark

Books & Special Editions Editor - Michelle Locke

Food and Recipe Editor - Dawn Yanagihara

Food Editor - Bianca Borges

Social Media Director - Whitney Kimball

Senior Staff Writer - Albert Stumm

Social Media and Marketing Writers - Hannah Packman,
 Priyanka Shahane

Social Media Coordinator - Sydney Manning

Science Editor - Guy Crosby

Culinary Researcher - Elizabeth Mindreau

Magazine Design - Joe Dizney

Production Manager - A.K. Summers

Art Director, Digital - Devin Sullivan

Graphic Designer - Sophia Valentini

Director of Recipe Development - Diane Unger

Culinary Manager - Wes Martin

Assistant Director of Recipe Development - Courtney Hill

Senior Recipe Developer - Erika Bruce

Recipe Developer - Rose Hattabaugh

Assistant Recipe Developer - Malcolm Jackson

Contributing Recipe Developer - Lynn Clark

Culinary Assistant - Kevin Clark

Kitchen Assistant - Hector Taborda

Director of Education - Rosemary Gill

Assistant Director of Education - April Dodd

Cooking School Coordinator - Karsyn Tall

Media Relations Director - Deborah Broide

Vice President of Marketing - David Mack

Director of Video Production - Colin Davy

Production Coordinator - Brittany Flynn

Video Editor/Videographer - Katlyn Kreie

Director of Underwriting - Lisa Hensiek

Marketing Project Manager - Cate Yochum

Television and Video Executive Producer - Carly Helmetag

Executive Producer of Development - Robert Gustafson

Radio Executive Producer - Annie Sinsabaugh

Television and Radio Producer - Sarah Clapp

Associate Producer - Amelia Maguire

Audience Development Director - Saloni Mahapatra

Digital Content Manager - Milane Haboon

Digital Content Specialist - Kevin Ngo

Director of E-Commerce - Missy Sternlicht

E-Commerce Buyers - Beth Tudor, Julianne Webster

E-Commerce Operations Manager - McKenzie Lewis

E-Commerce Culinary Coordinator - Rebecca Richmond

E-Commerce Culinary Associate - Haley Laube

E-Commerce Merchandising Coordinator - Bella Orcutt

E-Commerce Data Coordinator - Emily Kimball

E-Commerce Customer Service Associates - Tonya Johnson,

Sara McManus, Daniel Pickett, Gianna Wright

Executive Asst./Office Manager - Maria DeRobertis

Circulation Director - Stuart Jordan

Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Magazine (ISSN 2473-7305), number 33, is published bimonthly by CPK Media LLC, 177 Milk Street, Boston, MA 02109. Copyright 2022 CPK Media LLC. Periodicals postage paid at Boston, MA and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Magazine*, P.O. Box 37338, Boone, IA 50037-0338. For subscription and gift subscription orders, subscription inquiries or change-of-address notices, go to service.milkstreetmagazine.com or write to us at *Christopher Kimball's Milk Street*, P.O. Box 37338, Boone, IA 50037-0338.

Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Cooking School offers online classes and workshops. For options and our schedule, go to 177milkstreet.com/cookingschool.

Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Radio is broadcast weekly on public radio stations nationwide. Our weekly podcast is available on iTunes. For more, go to milkstreetradio.com.

Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Television airs weekly on public television stations nationwide.

You can write to us at *Christopher Kimball's Milk Street*, 177 Milk Street, Boston, MA 02109, or email us your cooking questions at questions@177milkstreet.com.

Printed in the U.S.A.

Meze *Shop the World*



These aprons are handmade from vintage Indian textiles.

Vintage Saris to Vibrant Aprons

FOR NEARLY 2,000 years, India's tradition of kantha embroidery has been a colorful way to give new life to old cloth, upcycling worn-out saris into beautifully decorated quilts or other hand-stitched items. With their expertise in artisanal textiles, the husband-and-wife team behind J. Catma applies this distinctive approach to exclusively sourced vintage fabrics, resulting in soft, durable, one-of-a-kind **kantha aprons**. These colorful, hand-stitched pieces come directly from artisans in India, who craft them in small batches. Because of their handmade nature, no

two are alike. Available for \$59.95 at 177milkstreet.com/mj22-apron.

Grind Guac with Whimsy

THE MOLCAJETE is an essential part of the Mexican kitchen. Used since pre-Hispanic times, this wide-bowled mortar is carved from volcanic rock. Its rough surface makes it ideal for blending, grinding and pulverizing chilies, whole spices and other ingredients with its accompanying tejolote (pestle). And for a whimsical twist on this traditional tool, we love Ancient

Cookware's **pig molcajete** for making salsa, guacamole and more. Unlike a food processor, it offers total control over the texture of your ingredients. And while some mortar and pestle sets can be clunky, this one is sized just right: light enough to easily handle, yet large enough to prepare ample ingredients without spillage. Available for \$64.95 at 177milkstreet.com/mj22-pig.

When Truffles Meet Caviar

NOTHING ADDS a bit of luxury and savory depth to a dish like a touch of real truffle. One of the most elegant ways to do it is with Tartuflanghe's caviar-like **Black Truffle Pearls**. They're made from the famous rare black



Black truffle essence, packed into tiny pearls of "caviar."

winter truffles of Alba, Italy. The juice is gently extracted, then fashioned into tiny spheres that burst open on the tongue for a pop of truffle flavor. Naturally, these work wonderfully anywhere you'd use shaved truffles—or caviar, for that matter. Try them on beef tartare, or dollop them over crème fraîche-topped blinis for a stunning canapé. Available for \$34.95 at 177milkstreet.com/mj22-truffle.



The Best Hazelnuts Also Are the Most Buttery

WE NEVER REALIZED just how delicious buttery hazelnuts could be until we tried **Ash Creek Roasted Hazelnuts**. Nut oils are particularly delicate (which is why they're prone to going stale on supermarket shelves). But the extraordinary care taken to preserve the quality of these hazelnuts shines through in their rich, clean flavor. A fifth-generation family farm nestled in Oregon's Willamette Valley, Ash Creek cultivates the Jefferson varietal, especially



A festive molcajete for salsas, sauces, guacamole and more.

Photos: Eric Magnusen

“Cheese is milk’s leap toward immortality.” — Clifton Fadiman



prized for its size and flavor. If you can resist snacking on them straight from the bag, try them in salads, desserts or other dishes. Available starting at \$9.95 at 177milkstreet.com/mj22-nuts.

Never Drop a Pizza Again

NOTHING IS BETTER than homemade pizza. But if you haven’t mastered your peel technique, your artisan pie is liable to end up on the bottom of your oven. The solution? The **Fiero Forni Italian Pizza Stone**.

What truly sets this stone apart is its ingenious metal frame, which includes a “pizza backsplash”—a metal lip that keeps your pie from sliding off when maneuvering it in and out of the oven. The stone heats quickly and consistently, ensuring a crisp crust, while its porous surface helps produce steam that prevents burning. And unlike other pizza stones, the exceptionally thick, heat-resistant material works just as well on the grill as it does in the oven. Available for \$149.90 at 177milkstreet.com/mj22-pizza.



A two-in-one tool combines salad spinner and colander.

A Clever Way to Clean Greens

TOO MANY salad spinners do a poor job of drying produce. So we were thrilled to find DreamFarm’s **Spina**, which works double duty as a salad spinner and colander, and excels at both. In one configuration, it’s a long-handled colander. But with a quick twist, the handle can be snapped into place over the top of the bowl, ready to spin. High concave walls ensure that food stays in the bowl while spinning—no bulky lid required. Available for \$29.95 at 177milkstreet.com/mj22-spin.



Make pro-level pies at home with this ingenious pizza stone.

Christopher Kimball’s Milk Street is changing how we cook...

...by finding bold, simple recipes from around the world for home cooks everywhere. Find all our recipes, shop our favorite products and learn more about public television’s **Milk Street Television, Milk Street Radio** and our online and in-person **Milk Street Cooking School** at:

177MILKSTREET.COM



Making the Most of Za’atar

Equally tangy, savory and herbal, za’atar is a staple of the Milk Street pantry. The Middle Eastern spice blend—often little more than a blend of sesame seeds, sumac, salt, thyme and oregano or za’atar (also the name of a wild herb similar to oregano)—is used to season everything from warm flatbread to roasted meats and vegetables. So we asked the members of the **Milk Street Facebook Community** for their favorite ways to use za’atar.

JOLENE BOSCHÉ, of O’Fallon, Illinois, sprinkles it onto salmon fillets along with some salt, then drizzles on olive oil before oven-roasting or cooking them in a smoker. To get the same flavor more easily, we added a little smoked paprika to the za’atar, plus some grated lemon zest to balance the fattiness of the salmon.



Oven-roasted butternut squash and sliced red onion seasoned with za’atar, then finished with tahini and pine nuts, is the creation of **JUDIE SPERO**, of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. We added just a couple accent ingredients—yogurt for a touch of acidity and a drizzle of pomegranate molasses for tangy-sweet fruity notes that complement the other deep, earthy flavors.



And **JESSICA G.**, of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, makes a fantastic traybake of za’atar-seasoned chicken parts, cauliflower and potatoes, all roasted together on the same baking sheet. A cut-up lemon at the center of it all yields tangy-sweet juice and fragrant oils that flavor a tahini-enriched pan sauce.



For MILK STREET’s versions of all three recipes, go to 177milkstreet.com/communityrecipes.

Tuesday Nights

Dinner. Fast. Bold. Casual.

Greek Chicken and Potato Traybake

1 teaspoon dried oregano
 ¼ to ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
 Kosher salt and ground black pepper
 Four 12-ounce bone-in, skin-on chicken breasts or 3 pounds bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs, trimmed and patted dry
 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1½ pounds medium Yukon Gold potatoes, unpeeled, cut into 1-inch-thick wedges
 2 lemons, halved crosswise
 8 medium garlic cloves, peeled
 ½ cup pitted Kalamata olives, chopped
 2 tablespoons drained capers
 3 tablespoons chopped fresh dill, divided

▪ **Heat the oven to 475°F** with a rack in the middle position. In a large bowl, combine the oregano, pepper flakes, 1½ teaspoons salt and ½ teaspoon black pepper. Sprinkle 2 teaspoons of the mix onto all sides of the chicken. To the remaining seasoning mix, add the oil, potatoes, lemon halves and garlic; toss to combine. Place the garlic in the center of a rimmed baking sheet, then arrange the chicken, skin up, around the garlic. Arrange the lemons, cut sides up, and the potatoes around the chicken.

▪ **Roast until the thickest part** of the breasts (if using) reaches 160°F or the thickest part of the thighs (if using) reaches 175°F, about 30 minutes. Transfer the chicken and lemons to a platter. Mash the garlic to a paste. Add the olives, capers and 2 tablespoons of the dill to the baking sheet, then stir and toss with the potatoes, scraping up any browned bits. Transfer the mixture to the platter and sprinkle with the remaining 1 tablespoon dill. ♦



Stir-Fried Noodles with Kimchi and Pork



10 ounces dried udon noodles
 2 teaspoons plus 2 tablespoons grapeseed or other neutral oil
 2 to 3 tablespoons gochujang
 2 tablespoons soy sauce
 4 teaspoons white sugar
 1 tablespoon kimchi juice, plus 1½ cups drained kimchi, roughly chopped

2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil
 8 ounces ground pork
 1 bunch scallions, sliced on the diagonal, whites and greens reserved separately
 2 tablespoons salted butter, cut into 4 pieces
 Kosher salt and ground black pepper
 3 tablespoons sesame seeds, toasted

▪ **In a large pot**, bring 4 quarts water to a boil. Add the noodles and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender. Drain in a colander and rinse under cold water until cool to the touch. Drain again, toss with the 2 teaspoons neutral oil, then set aside.

▪ **In a small bowl**, whisk together the gochujang, soy sauce, sugar, kimchi juice, sesame oil and ¼ cup water; set aside.

▪ **In a 12-inch nonstick skillet** over medium-high, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons neutral oil until shimmering. Add the pork and scallion whites; cook, breaking the meat into small bits, just until no longer pink, about 3 minutes. Increase to high and add the butter, kimchi and ½ teaspoon pepper. Cook, stirring often, until browned, about 2 minutes.

▪ **Add the noodles** and toss, then add the gochujang mixture. Cook, stirring and tossing, until the noodles are heated through and the sauce clings, 2 to 3 minutes. Off heat, toss in the scallion greens and sesame seeds. Taste and season with salt and pepper. ♦

Photos (this page and opposite): Connie Miller of CB Creatives; Styling: Christine Tobin

Each Tuesday Night recipe makes four servings.

Strip Steaks with Spicy Tomato-Basil Sauce

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to serve
 2 medium garlic cloves, thinly sliced
 2 or 3 oil-packed anchovy fillets, chopped
 ½ to ¾ teaspoon red pepper flakes
 28-ounce can whole peeled tomatoes, crushed by hand
 ½ cup lightly packed fresh basil, divided
 Kosher salt and ground black pepper
 Two 1-pound beef strip steaks, each about 1 inch thick, trimmed and patted dry
 1 tablespoon grapeseed or other neutral oil

■ **In a 12-inch skillet** over medium-high, heat the olive oil until shimmering. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until beginning to turn golden. Add the anchovies and pepper flakes; cook, stirring, until fragrant. Stir in the tomatoes with juices, a few basil leaves and ¼ teaspoon salt, then simmer until a spatula drawn through the sauce leaves a trail, 12 to 14 minutes. Transfer to a small bowl, cover and set aside; wipe out the skillet.

■ **Season the steaks** with salt and black pepper. In the skillet over medium-high, heat the neutral oil until barely smoking. Add the steaks, reduce to medium and cook until well browned on the bottoms, 5 to 7 minutes. Flip and cook until the centers register 120°F for medium-rare. Transfer to a platter, tent with foil and let rest for about 10 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board and slice on the diagonal ¼ to ½ inch thick. Return to the platter and spoon on some of the sauce. Tear the remaining basil and sprinkle over the top, then drizzle with additional olive oil. Serve the remaining sauce on the side. ♦



Coconut-Curried Black-Eyed Peas



2 tablespoons coconut oil or neutral oil
 2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger
 2 teaspoons ground cumin
 1¾ teaspoons ground turmeric
 ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
 1 pound ripe plum tomatoes, cored and chopped
 Kosher salt and ground black pepper
 Two 15-ounce cans black-eyed peas, rinsed and drained
 14-ounce can coconut milk
 2 teaspoons lemon juice
 ½ cup lightly packed fresh cilantro, roughly chopped

■ **In a 12-inch skillet** over medium-high, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the ginger, cumin, turmeric and cardamom, then cook, stirring often, until aromatic, about 1 minute. Add the tomatoes, ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper, then cook, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes are completely soft, about 5 minutes.

■ **Add the peas and stir to combine**, then stir in the coconut milk and bring to a simmer. Reduce to medium and cook, uncovered and stirring occasionally, until the curry is slightly thickened, about 15 minutes. Off heat, stir in the lemon juice, then taste and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a serving bowl and sprinkle with the cilantro. ♦

MILK STREET Tuesday Nights Mediterranean, our follow-up to the award-winning *Milk Street Tuesday Nights*, offers 125 easy weeknight dinners that deliver the bold, fresh flavors of Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East to your table.



[**COOKish** *Throw It Together*]

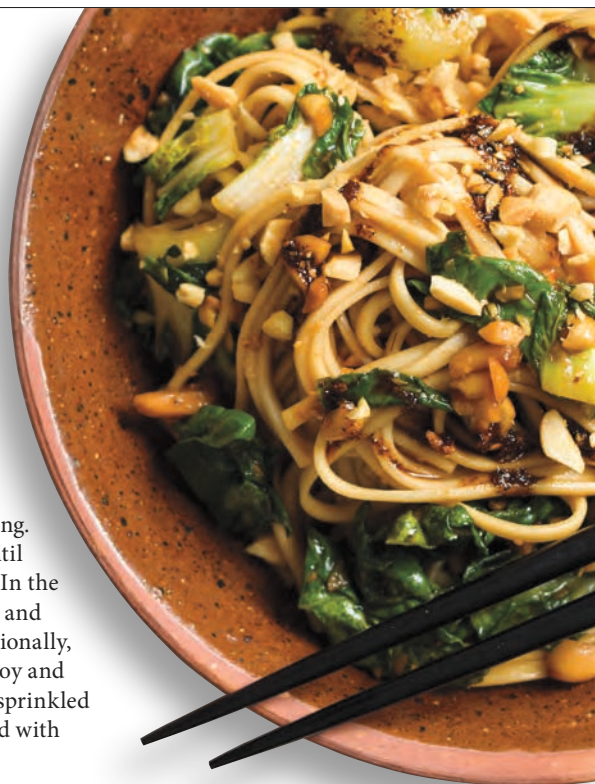
Chili-Soy Noodles with Bok Choy and Peanuts

Start to finish: 20 minutes | Servings: 4

THESE NOODLES are an irresistible combination of salty, spicy and sweet. For best results, use thick Asian wheat noodles, such as udon or lo mein, that cook up chewy. Chili crisp, a Chinese condiment sold in jars, is chili oil amped up with red pepper flakes and additional spices. If you can find it, it's a more flavorful alternative to standard chili oil. —CALVIN COX

10 ounces dried Asian wheat noodles
 1 tablespoon neutral oil
 1 pound baby bok choy, trimmed and sliced crosswise into ½-inch pieces
 ⅓ cup low-sodium soy sauce
 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
 1 to 2 tablespoons chili oil **OR** chili crisp (see headnote), plus more to serve
 ¾ cup unsalted roasted peanuts, finely chopped

Cook the noodles in a large pot of salted boiling water until tender. Drain, rinse and drain again. In a 12-inch skillet, heat the neutral oil until shimmering. Add the bok choy and cook, stirring, until the stems are tender; transfer to a plate. In the same skillet, mix the soy, sugar, chili oil and half the peanuts. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened. Add the bok choy and noodles, then toss until warmed. Serve sprinkled with the remaining peanuts and drizzled with additional chili oil.



Ginger-Curry Pork with Green Beans

Start to finish: 35 minutes | Servings: 4

THIS QUICK CURRY starts as a stir-fry and finishes as a braise. Boneless pork shoulder has a rich, full flavor; slicing it thin before cooking counters its chewiness. Green beans cook alongside, absorbing the spiced broth and providing a fresh, vegetal contrast. We use curry powder as a flavor base, but we add whole spices to boost the intensity. —COURTNEY HILL

2 tablespoons neutral oil
 1 pound boneless pork shoulder, trimmed, cut into 2-inch strips and sliced ¼ to ½ inch thick
 2 teaspoons curry powder
 Kosher salt and ground black pepper
 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped

OR 8 medium garlic cloves, chopped
OR both
 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
 3 cardamom pods, crushed **OR** 1 cinnamon stick **OR** 8 curry leaves **OR** a combination
 8 ounces green beans, trimmed and halved on the diagonal

In a 12-inch skillet over medium-high, heat the oil until barely smoking. Add the pork, curry powder, 1½ teaspoons salt and ½ teaspoon pepper. Cook, stirring once or twice, until the pork is well browned, about 4 minutes. Add the onion, ginger and cardamom; cook, stirring, until the onion is browned, about 2 minutes. Add the beans and 1½ cups water; bring to a simmer, scraping up any browned bits. Cover partially and cook, stirring occasionally, until the beans are tender and the sauce clings to the meat, about 15 minutes. Remove and discard the cardamom, then taste and season with salt and pepper. **Optional garnish:** Chopped fresh cilantro **OR** toasted sesame seeds **OR** fresh chopped chilies **OR** a combination

MILK STREET'S **COOKish** recipes use fresh combinations of flavors and textures to create casual, boldly flavored food fast.



Gobi Manchurian—no deep-frying required

The Secret Ingredient to Crisp Oven-Fried Cauliflower

Story by **SHAULA CLARK**

STREET CART VENDORS bent over roaring flames are a common sight in India, tossing piles of sauce-drenched cauliflower florets in enormous pans. Gobi Manchurian is wildly popular, and for good reason. It satisfies nearly every flavor craving, with crispy-creamy deep-fried florets doused in gloriously tangy-sweet-savory Manchurian sauce. Luckily, re-creating it at home isn't as daunting as you might think. No roaring flames or frying needed.

A simple trick—a sprinkle of cornstarch—ensures that this delicious fast-food favorite is easily made in any kitchen. And it's just as crispy.

Manchurian sauce, a distinctly Indo-Chinese creation, is a fairly recent addition to the Indian culinary canon. As the story goes, it was created in 1975, when Nelson Wang—a Kolkata-born restaurateur with Chinese roots—developed a chicken recipe that combined Indian and Chinese flavors, most notably by adding soy sauce to a mixture of classically Indian ingredients. Dubbed “chicken Manchurian,” the dish evolved into various forms from there. Today, tangy-sweet tomato-based Manchurian sauce is used on meats, vegetables and even paneer cheese.

“Indian-Chinese cuisine is a very integral part of Indian cuisine,” says Maneet Chauhan, chef and author of “Chaat: Recipes from the Kitchens, Markets, and Railways of India.” “There's a whole world of Manchurian,” she adds.

Gobi Manchurian comes in two main styles: the ultra-saucy “gravy” type, and the classic deep-fried, more lightly sauced “dry” variety.

For the average home cook, deep-frying can be a headache—messy, fussy and requiring a ton of oil. Instead, we prefer to let the oven do

the frying: We coat the florets in a garam masala-spiked cornstarch and toss them in oil before roasting in a ripping-hot oven. The cornstarch serves as a protective barrier, ensuring that the exteriors get nice and crispy while the insides cook up tender and creamy. We also discovered that cutting correctly sized pieces of cauliflower is key to striking this balance.

And, of course, it wouldn't be gobi Manchurian without the signature sauce. This one comes together easily thanks to several high-impact ingredients, including soy sauce, rice vinegar and ketchup—which, Chauhan points out, in fact plays a robust role in Indian cooking. Much maligned in the U.S., this tomato condiment often is used as a flavor base for Indian chutneys and sauces. And when combined with the bold, fresh flavors of hot chilies, chopped scallions, fresh ginger and garlic, the result is an irresistible snack you can have anytime.

Oven-Fried Gobi Manchurian

Start to finish: 1¼ hours
(35 minutes active) | Servings: 4 to 6

GOBI MANCHURIAN is a popular Indo-Chinese dish in which cauliflower (“gobi”), is battered and fried, then tossed in a tangy, salty-sweet “Manchurian” sauce. Though delicious, typical gobi Manchurian can be heavy, goopy and overseasoned. To lighten things up, in this version, we ditch the deep-fryer and instead oven-roast cauliflower that's coated with seasoned cornstarch and oil. The results are crisp, beautifully coated florets without greasiness or the hassle of battering and deep-frying. After cooking, the cauliflower is tossed in a sauce of ketchup, soy sauce and vinegar. We also use a good dose of scallions, chilies and ginger to keep the flavors fresh and bright.



A tangy-sweet sauce makes crispy oven-fried cauliflower florets irresistible.

Don't be shy about rubbing the oil and cornstarch mixture into the florets. This creates a coating that adheres and helps deliver a crispy, craggy exterior to which the sauce will cling. —COURTNEY HILL

- ½ cup plus 1 teaspoon cornstarch, divided
- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 2- to 2½-pound head cauliflower, trimmed and cut into 1½-inch florets
- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon grapeseed or other neutral oil, divided
- 3 tablespoons ketchup
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons unseasoned rice vinegar
- 3 serrano, Fresno or jalapeño chilies, stemmed, seeded and thinly sliced
- 3 scallions, thinly sliced, whites and greens reserved separately
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced
- ½ cup lightly packed fresh cilantro

■ **Heat the oven to 475°F** with a rack in the middle position. In a small bowl, whisk together the ½ cup cornstarch, garam masala and 1 teaspoon each salt and pepper.

■ **In a large bowl**, toss the cauliflower with the ½ cup oil, then use

your hands to rub the oil into the florets. Sprinkle with the cornstarch mixture and toss, pressing the cornstarch into the cauliflower, until evenly coated. Transfer the florets to a rimmed baking sheet, shaking off excess cornstarch and turning the pieces cut side down as much as possible. Roast for 20 minutes.

■ **Meanwhile, in a small bowl**, whisk together the remaining 1 teaspoon cornstarch with ¼ cup water until smooth. Stir in the ketchup, soy sauce, vinegar and ½ teaspoon pepper; set aside.

■ **Using a thin metal spatula**, flip the cauliflower, then continue to roast until deep golden brown, another 20 to 25 minutes. Scrape the cauliflower into a clean large bowl.

■ **In a small saucepan** over medium-high, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil until shimmering. Add the chilies, scallion whites, ginger and garlic. Cook, stirring often, until the mixture browns, about 3 minutes. Whisk the ketchup mixture to recombine, then pour it into the pan. Bring to a boil, whisking constantly; the sauce will thicken slightly.

■ **Immediately pour the sauce** over the cauliflower, add the scallion greens and toss. Taste and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a serving dish and top with the cilantro. ♦

[FAST & SLOW Instant Pot Cooking at Your Own Speed]

Char Siu-Style Baby Back Ribs

—Active time: 25 minutes | Servings: 4 to 6—



½ cup white sugar
¼ cup soy sauce
2 tablespoons hoisin sauce
1 tablespoon Shaoxing wine
or dry sherry
4 medium garlic cloves, finely
grated
2 tablespoons finely grated
fresh ginger

1 teaspoon Chinese five-spice
powder
Kosher salt and ground black
pepper
1 tablespoon molasses
(see headnote)
1 tablespoon honey
Two 3-pound racks baby back
ribs, cut into 4-rib sections

START In a large bowl, whisk the sugar, soy sauce, hoisin, Shaoxing wine, garlic, ginger, five-spice and 1 teaspoon each salt and pepper. To make the glaze, measure ½ cup of the mixture into a small bowl and stir in the molasses, honey and ½ teaspoon pepper; cover and refrigerate. Coat the ribs with the remaining mixture in the large bowl. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or up to overnight.

FAST

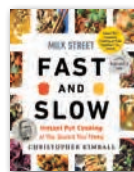
Start to finish: 1½ hours
Place the steam rack in a 6-quart Instant Pot, then add 1 cup water. Add the ribs upright in a circle, meaty parts facing out. Lock the lid in place and move the pressure valve to **Sealing**. Select **Pressure Cook** or **Manual**; make sure the pressure level is set to **High**. Set the cooking time for 25 minutes. When pressure cooking is complete, allow the pressure to reduce naturally for 15 minutes, then quick-release the remaining steam by moving the pressure valve to **Venting**. Press **Cancel**, then carefully open the pot. Cool for 5 minutes.

SLOW

Start to finish: 8½ to 9½ hours
Place the steam rack in a 6-quart Instant Pot, then add 1 cup water. Add the ribs upright in a circle, meaty parts facing out. Select **More/High Sauté** and bring the water to a boil. Press **Cancel**, lock the lid in place and move the pressure valve to **Venting**. Select **Slow Cook** and set the temperature to **More/High**. Set the cooking time for 8 to 9 hours; the ribs are done when a skewer inserted into the meat between the bones meets no resistance. Press **Cancel**, then carefully open the pot. Cool for 5 minutes.

A POPULAR STYLE of Cantonese barbecued meat, char siu means “fork roasted,” a reference to the traditional way it was prepared. Long, thin strips of pork cut from the shoulder or butt were marinated in a sweet, spiced sauce, then suspended from long forks around a fire and basted until deeply glazed. Today, you’ll find variations made with pork belly and even tenderloin, but here we use baby back ribs and cook them in an Instant Pot. Pressure cook them quickly or slow cook them for several hours—it’s your choice. Finished with a sticky glaze and broiled in the oven for a few minutes to get some flavorful caramelization, the ribs are deliciously and satisfyingly salty and sweet. Any type of molasses works, even blackstrap, so use whatever is convenient.

Don’t use pork spareribs. They’re larger than baby backs and won’t fit in the Instant Pot; they also require a slightly longer cooking time. —COURTNEY HILL



FOR **Fast & Slow**, MILK STREET uses the Instant Pot’s marriage of sauté pan, pressure cooker and slow cooker to control the pace of cooking, while keeping flavors fresh and bright. We also tested our recipes in several other popular multicookers and found they worked just as well.

FINISH Heat the broiler with a rack 6 inches from the element. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil. Transfer the ribs meaty side up to the baking sheet. Brush with a third of the glaze and broil until the glaze begins to bubble, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the broiler, brush with half of the remaining glaze and continue to broil until bubbling. Brush with the remaining glaze and cool for 5 minutes, then cut between the bones to separate into individual ribs. ♦

[MILK STREET On the Road]

The World's Best Pizza Isn't in Italy?

Bring a fork and knife, because
Brazilian pizza is
bold, brash & piled high

Story by J. M. HIRSCH

THE HILLY STREETS of Bixiga can be punishing, forcing you up and down a visceral cadence, swooping high and low with panting inclines and calf-wrenching declines. But as reward for your exhaustive clambering, you are transported. To another continent. Maybe another time. All of it deliciously.

Because climbing the cobbled streets of São Paulo's "Little Italy" neighborhood is a sensory immersion, a visit to a Neapolitan nonna's kitchen, the aromas of pungent garlic, sweet tomatoes and yeasty focaccia swirling around you.

At first, it smacks of culinary cognitive dissonance in this sprawling Brazilian metropolis, the largest city in the Southern Hemisphere. Except, this "Little" Italy is anything but. By some counts, roughly 15 million Italian immigrants and their descendants live in the state of São Paulo. For perspective, that's roughly triple the number of Italians living in Rome, Naples and Milan combined.

And it's on full display at shops like Padaria Italianinha, a wedge of an Italian food market, its shelves packed with jars of marinated artichoke hearts, piles of pasta, heaps of freshly baked bread, bins of olives, flasks of limoncello and olive oil, and—in a nod to Brazil's Portuguese heritage—rafters hung heavy with linguíça sausage. And it's been that way since 1896.

Sandra Franciulli runs the shop today. Her grandfather moved here from Naples, eventually buying the shop—tin ceiling painted white, storefront open to the street with foods spilling to the sidewalk—45 years ago. Their top seller? A family creation—rosca de calabresa, a thick roll of dough kneaded from local flours and woven with Brazilian pork and fennel.

It's a savory-spicy—and ridiculously tender, rich and fatty—example of cultures meshing, Italian methods marrying Brazilian ingredients. And that was just the start. Because, as I soon *Continued on page 11*



At Bráz Pizzaria, Luis Lopes de Macedo piles his pizzas high and elaborately.

"Although I have this heritage from Italy, we make a very Brazilian-style pizza," says Erik Momo.
"Usually, Italians don't like our style of pizza and we don't like theirs. It's a healthy discussion."

[**MILK STREET** *At Home*]

Brazilian-Style Pizza Dough & Tomato Sauce

*Start to finish: 30 hours (30 minutes active)
Makes enough for two 12-inch pizzas*

IN SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL, where reportedly half the population of more than 12 million is of Italian descent, pizza reigns supreme. An estimated 1 million pies are served up each day at the 6,000 or so pizzerias across the South American metropolis. But whereas Neapolitan pizza is defined by restraint and exacting standards, we learned firsthand that Brazilian pizza is made with an anything-goes attitude, particularly when it comes to over-the-top toppings. The result is some uniquely delicious pies. The crust of the typical São Paulo pizza is thicker than that of Neapolitan pizza so that it can provide good support for the generous toppings, whatever they may be. And though crisp on the bottom, it tends to be rather soft and tender. It generally is made with less water and given a longer fermentation. The sauce almost always is made from fresh tomatoes, uncooked and seasoned sparingly. To re-create São Paulo-style pizza crust, we found that unbleached all-purpose flour yielded the best results (in particular, Gold Medal brand, which has a protein content of about 10.5 percent). And to develop flavor as well as achieve the texture we sought, we allow the dough to rise at room temperature for a couple hours, then refrigerate it for 24 to 72 hours. It is all very easy to do, but just keep in mind that making this dough does require some planning. And read on for our versions of some of the best, most interesting pizzas we tasted in São Paulo; each recipe makes two pies.

Don't try to shape the dough while it's cold. It will be elastic and resist stretching. Give it ample time to come to room temperature, which will take about 4 hours. As it loses its chill, be sure to keep the dough covered with plastic wrap to ensure the surface doesn't dry out. Also, don't use cherry tomatoes for the sauce. We found them to be too jelly-like after chopping and draining.

—Adapted by DIANE UNGER



Brazilian pizza dough is sturdier than Italian, allowing it to support more toppings.

For the dough:

520 grams (4 cups) all-purpose flour, plus more as needed and for dusting
2 teaspoons white sugar
1½ teaspoons table salt
1 teaspoon instant yeast
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for the bowl
¼ cups warm water (100°F to 110°F)
Semolina flour, for dusting the peel

For the sauce:

1 pint grape tomatoes
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon dried oregano
⅛ to ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
Kosher salt and ground black pepper

▪ **To make the dough**, in a stand mixer with the dough hook, mix the all-purpose flour, sugar, salt and yeast on medium until well combined. With the mixer on low, drizzle in the oil followed by the water. Knead on low until the mixture forms a smooth, elastic dough that clears the sides of the bowl, 8 to 10 minutes; if the dough sticks to the sides of the bowl, knead in additional flour, 1 tablespoon at a time. The finished dough should be soft but not stick to your hands. Lightly oil a large bowl and transfer the dough to it. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the dough rise at room temperature until doubled in size, 1½ to 2 hours.

▪ **Mist the insides** of two 1-quart zip-close

Photo: Christopher Ward-Jones

plastic bags with cooking spray. Generously dust the counter with flour, scrape the dough out onto it and divide it in half. With floured hands, form each portion into a taut ball and dust with flour. Place 1 dough ball in each prepared bag, seal and refrigerate for at least 24 or up to 72 hours.

▪ **About 4 hours before** making pizza, remove the dough from the refrigerator. Brush a rimmed baking sheet with oil. Remove the dough from the bags and place on the baking sheet, spacing them apart. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let stand at room temperature until the dough has completely lost its chill, about 4 hours; after about 3 hours, heat the oven to 500°F with a baking steel or stone on the upper-middle rack.

▪ **After turning on the oven**, make the sauce. In a food processor, pulse the tomatoes until chopped into rough ¼-inch bits, about 13 pulses. Transfer to a fine-mesh sieve set over a medium bowl and let drain at room temperature for at least 30 minutes or until ready to use; occasionally shake the sieve to encourage the liquid to drain off and make sure the bottom of the sieve is not touching the liquid that has collected in the bowl.

The Sauce & Assembly

▪ **When ready to shape** the dough, blot the tomatoes dry and transfer them to a small bowl; discard the juices in the bowl. Stir in the oil, oregano and pepper flakes, then season to taste with salt and black pepper.

▪ **Dust the counter** with flour and transfer 1 portion of dough to the counter. Flour your hands and, using your fingers, press the dough, starting at the center and working out to the edges, into a 13-inch round, flipping the dough once. The round should be thin at the center, with slightly thicker edges.

▪ **Lightly dust a baking peel**, inverted rimmed baking sheet or rimless baking sheet with semolina flour. Transfer the dough to the peel or baking sheet and, if needed, reshape into a 13-inch round. Using the back of a spoon, evenly spread half of the tomato sauce (about ½ cup), leaving a ½-inch border around the edge. Top and bake the pizza as directed in the recipe you're making. After removing the pizza from the oven, shape, sauce, top and bake the second pizza in the same way. ♦

would learn, São Paulo is a city long built on, with and around pizza.

ITALIANS HAVE BEEN immigrating to Brazil since as far back as the 16th century. By the late 1800s, they were coming in droves, driven equally by a challenging economy at home and a strong demand for labor in post-slavery Brazil. This continued

in waves for decades, particularly in the years following the end of World War II.

The result: Brazil is home to the largest population of Italians outside Italy. So much so, some towns are nearly entirely descended from Italian immigrants. It shows in the architecture, the fashion, the wine, even the language, which has seen the local Portuguese gleefully *Continued on page 12*

Thai Chicken Pizza with Bean Sprouts & Peanut Sauce

THIS SURPRISINGLY tasty fusion pizza is based on one we enjoyed at Bráz Elettrica in São Paulo. You'll need shredded cooked chicken for topping the pies. A store-bought rotisserie chicken is an easy option; one average-size bird yields about 3 cups meat, just enough for the recipe.

- 1 cup peanut butter
- ½ cup warm water
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons lime juice
- ¼ cup chili-garlic sauce
- 3 cups shredded cooked chicken (see headnote)
- 1 medium red onion, halved and thinly sliced
- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil

- 1 recipe Brazilian-Style Pizza Dough and Tomato Sauce
- 1 cup bean sprouts
- 2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil, divided
- ½ cup lightly packed fresh cilantro
- Lime wedges, to serve

▪ **In a medium bowl**, whisk together the peanut butter, water, fish sauce, lime juice and chili-garlic sauce. In another medium bowl, toss together the chicken and 6 tablespoons of the peanut sauce. In a small bowl, toss the onion with the olive oil.

▪ **Top the shaped** and sauced dough with half of the chicken mixture, followed by half of the oil-tossed onion. Slide the pizza into the 500°F oven onto the hot baking steel or stone and bake until the crust is well browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Using the peel, transfer the pizza to a wire rack. Cool for a couple minutes, then top with half of the bean sprouts; drizzle with 1 teaspoon sesame oil, followed by half of the remaining peanut sauce. Scatter on half of the cilantro.

▪ **Shape, sauce, top and bake** the second pizza in the same way using the remaining toppings. Serve with lime wedges alongside. ♦



Photo: Connie Miller of CB Creatives; Styling: Christine Tobin



Portuguese Pizza

DESPITE ITS NAME, Portuguese pizza is a Brazilian creation. The toppings are tomato sauce, mozzarella, ham, olives, hard-cooked egg and onion. The version we tasted at 1900 Pizzeria also included sliced hearts of palm, which we loved.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, halved and thinly sliced
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 1 recipe Brazilian-Style Pizza Dough and Tomato Sauce
- 4 ounces thinly sliced deli ham, cut into thin ribbons
- 10 ounces drained jarred or canned hearts of palm, patted dry and sliced about ½ inch thick on the diagonal (about 1¾ cups)
- 1 cup pimento-stuffed green olives, roughly chopped
- 4 ounces whole-milk mozzarella cheese, shredded (2 cups)
- 4 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and chopped

- **In a 12-inch skillet** over medium, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the onion and ½ teaspoon salt; cook, stirring occasionally, until well browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a plate and set aside.
- **Top the shaped** and sauced dough with half each of the ham, hearts of palm, olives and mozzarella. Bake in the 500°F oven on the baking steel or stone until the crust is well browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Briefly cool on a wire rack, then sprinkle with half of the onion and half of the eggs; sprinkle with black pepper. Shape, sauce, top and bake the second pizza in the same way using the remaining toppings. ♦

Pizza Carbonara

THIS SUPER-SAVORY creation comes from Bráz Pizzaria in São Paulo. They finish their Carbonara pizza with raw egg yolk, drizzled on immediately after baking. For ours, we grate the yolks from hard-cooked eggs onto the hot pies as soon as they emerge from the oven.

- 4 ounces pancetta, finely chopped
- 1 recipe Brazilian-Style Pizza Dough and Tomato Sauce
- 4 ounces whole-milk mozzarella cheese, shredded (2 cups)
- 2 ounces pecorino Romano cheese, finely grated (1 cup)
- Yolks from 4 hard-cooked eggs, divided
- Ground black pepper

- **In a 10-inch skillet** over medium, cook the pancetta, stirring occasionally, until browned and crisp, 8 to 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to a paper towel-lined plate.
- **Top the shaped** and sauced dough with half each of the pancetta, mozzarella and pecorino. Slide the pizza into the 500°F oven onto the hot baking steel or stone and bake until the crust is well browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Using the peel, transfer the pizza to a wire rack. Cool for a couple minutes, then, using the small holes on a box grater, grate 2 egg yolks onto the pizza. Sprinkle with black pepper.
- **Shape, sauce, top and bake** the second pizza in the same way using the remaining toppings. ♦



adopt Italian-isms such as ciao and nonna.

And then there is the food. The demarcation between classic Italian and traditional Brazilian often is murky. More importantly, to the average Brazilian, it's inconsequential. Though local chefs such as Mara Salles are working hard to preserve indigenous cooking, many consider pasta, risotto and polenta as Brazilian as feijoada, moqueca and farofa.

But pizza. Indeed, pizza!

Brazilian pizza merits special consideration. Because nowhere—sorry, but not even in New York City, not in Chicago, not in Naples, from whence so many Brazilians came—is pizza more revered, more celebrated, more innovated, more consumed than Brazil. And in particular, São Paulo, a city where even children's hopscotch games end with a square topped by pizza.

Pizza in São Paulo is an affair of a different order. It is a fine dining, Sunday family dinner situation. It is sit down, not carry out. It is white tablecloth, not paper napkin. It is fork and knife, not greasy fingers. It is wedding food, not game night grub. It is anything but your basic pepperoni and mozzarella slice.

ERIK MOMO was my gateway to a week of eating my way across São Paulo's pizza scene to suss out what sets it apart. The flagship of his family's 1900 Pizzeria chain lives in a long brick building with soaring ceilings, a former railroad warehouse

Photos: Connie Miller or CB Creatives; Styling: Christine Tobin

his immigrant great-grandfather called home and his musician father wanted to convert into a music studio.

“A friend told him he never would make money, so he decided to make pizza,” Momo says. “Not every guy who came from Italy was a real cook, but they ate pizza and they tried to replicate it with what was available.”

By some counts, the city today is home to 6,000 pizzarias (as it is spelled in Brazil), so it seems at least some of them worked it out.

“Everything was so different. The flour, the tomatoes, the mozzarella. They had to

high. So high, it is eaten with fork and knife, never picked up by the crust.

In addition to silverware, all those toppings also require a different approach to crust. Classic Neapolitan dough typically ranges between 55 percent and 62.5 percent hydration. In Brazil, it often clocks in at no more than 50 percent; the lower moisture—and a long ferment, typically 48 hours—helps create a sturdier crust to stand up to the heft of the toppings.

From there, the topping onslaught continues. Momo’s Carpaccio pizza is the essence of a New York deli sandwich. Tomatoes, thinly sliced beef, capers, mustard and Brazilian Parmesan cheese. His Salmone pizza is your dream bagel, complete with smoked salmon and Catupiry, the local and fervently loved cream cheese, finished with dill, lime juice and olive oil.

THE CRUST AND TOPPINGS aren’t everything, of course. Tomatoes and timing matter—and differ—too. This I learn at Pizzeria Speranza, where third-generation owner Francesco Tarallo serves pies in the same red brick building his family lived in after immigrating in the 1950s.

“My grandfather was a construction worker and came to work in the city. But when he got to São Paulo, he found nobody had Neapolitan pizza. So he built an oven and brought the rest of the family over. They decided to stay and make pizza.”

When his grandfather tried to replicate the pizzas of his youth, the sauce proved perplexing. Where Italian tomatoes lean sweet, Brazilian go sour. The more acidic tomatoes called for a different approach than the sauces of Italy. And today, most Brazilian pizza sauce is made simply from finely ground fresh tomatoes, dried oregano and salt. Nothing more.

It sounds dull, but actually it’s brilliant. The tomatoes retain a bracing freshness and a pleasant texture. *Continued on page 14*



Pizza with Ricotta, Za’atar & Arugula

THIS PIZZA WAS INSPIRED by the “Napoli in Beirut” pie we tasted at Veridiana Pizzaria in São Paulo. Be sure to dress only half the arugula at a time and only just before adding it to the baked pie, otherwise the greens will wilt.

- 1 cup whole-milk ricotta cheese
- 7 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons za’atar
- 1 teaspoon ground sumac
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 1 medium red onion, halved and thinly sliced
- 1 recipe Brazilian-Style Pizza Dough and Tomato Sauce
- 4 cups lightly packed baby arugula
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice or red wine vinegar, divided

▪ **In a medium bowl**, stir the ricotta, 4 tablespoons of the oil, the oregano, za’atar, sumac and ½ teaspoon each salt and pepper. In a small bowl, toss the onion and 1 tablespoon of the remaining oil.

▪ **Top the shaped** and sauced dough with half of the oil-tossed onion. Slide the pizza into the 500°F oven onto the hot baking steel or stone and bake until the crust is well browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Using the peel, transfer the pizza to a wire rack. Cool for a couple minutes, then dollop on half of the ricotta mixture. Working quickly, in a medium bowl, toss half of the arugula with 1 tablespoon of the remaining oil and 1 tablespoon of the lemon juice, then top the pizza with the arugula. Shape, sauce, top and bake the second pizza in the same way using the remaining toppings. ♦

“How often do I eat pizza?”

How often do I eat?”—ERIK MOMO



Pizza in São Paulo is nearly always a fork and knife affair.

make their own style. So we made our own pizza culture. It gained its own life.”

That creative, sometimes over-the-top style is evident as the pizzas Momo tosses emerge from the oven, its chimney soaring three stories above. The timing is different. The toppings are different. And, indeed, the tastes are different. I learn quickly that Brazilians are unabashedly creative with their pizza toppings. Any dish from any cuisine is ripe for transformation.

We start with the relatively tame Calabresa, a Brazilian classic. A thin crust piled thick with onions, olives and sliced sausage, it’s a feat to lift a slice to my mouth without the toppings sloughing onto my plate. That, of course, is an important lesson. In Brazil, pizza is built high. Very

Photos: Christopher Ward-Jones (left); Connie Miller of CB Creatives (right); Styling: Christine Tobin



Pizza Calabrese

SÃO PAULO'S BRÁZ PIZZARIA puts the flavors of southern Italy on a Brazilian-style pizza. The restaurant uses nduja, a type of spicy, spreadable Calabrian salami. Nduja is not easy to source, so we opt for hot Italian sausage. We remove the casing and brown it in a skillet before use. Topping the kale with cheese anchors it so the leaves don't fall off when the pizza is put into the oven.

- 1 pound hot Italian sausage, casing removed
- 4 cups lightly packed stemmed and torn curly kale
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to serve
- 1 recipe Brazilian-Style Pizza Dough and Tomato Sauce
- 2 ounces whole-milk mozzarella, shredded (1 cup)
- 1 ounce Parmesan cheese, finely grated (½ cup)
- 2 ounces provolone cheese, shredded (1 cup)
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest, divided
- Ground black pepper

▪ **In a 12-inch skillet** over medium, cook the sausage, breaking up the

pieces and stirring occasionally, until the sausage is no longer pink, 10 to 12 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer to a paper towel-lined plate; set aside. In a large bowl, toss the kale with the oil until evenly coated.

▪ **Top the shaped** and sauced dough with half each of the sausage, mozzarella, Parmesan, kale and provolone. Slide the pizza into the 500°F oven onto the baking steel or stone and bake until the crust is well browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack. Cool briefly, then sprinkle with 1 teaspoon lemon zest, black pepper and a drizzle of oil. Shape, sauce, top and bake the second pizza in the same way using the remaining toppings. ♦

Tarallo's pizza makers—both have worked for the family going on 40 years—ladle it liberally onto rounds of dough to make basic margheritas, then slide them into a wood-fired domed oven. That's when I notice the unhurried pace of it all.

In Naples, pizzas are cooked at a blistering speed and temperature—60 to 90 seconds at 430°C to 480°C. But that doesn't work with Brazilian pizzas and their thick layers of toppings. Pizza here is cooked at a relatively tepid 330°C for roughly 2½ minutes, extra time that allows the crust to crisp more slowly while the heat works its way through the toppings.

FINALLY UNDERSTANDING what's happening under the hood, I decide it's time to explore the deliciously gaudy side of Brazilian pizza. When it comes to toppings, anything goes, and I wanted to taste all the extremes.

At Veridiana Pizzeria, Roberto Loscalzo continues his parents' tradition of robust flavors. His Caponata pizza is reminiscent of the Sicilian dish for which it is named, starting with layers of ricotta cheese and fresh tomato sauce, then diced eggplant roasted with olive oil, raisins, green olives and dried basil. The result is briny, smoky, sweet and tangy.

By contrast, his "Napoli in Beirut" pizza was relatively tame, yet one of my favorites. A classic Brazilian crust topped with goat cheese, then sprinkled with sumac-rich za'atar and diced tomato. It was a boldly herbal and tangy nod as much to São Paulo's Italian heritage as to its equally vibrant Lebanese community.

From there, I headed to Bráz Pizzeria. The small chain was started by five friends unafraid of experimenting. It showed in their Carbonara pizza, the delicious love child of Rome's most sumptuous pasta dish and Brazil's perfect pizza, complete with egg yolk drizzled over the cheese- and pancetta-topped crust while still piping hot from the oven.

Bráz also has a sibling set of restaurants, Bráz Elettrica, an effort by the company to challenge the very Brazilian notion that pizza is formal and eaten only at dinner. They've had mixed success convincing Paulistanos that lunchtime is pizza time, but not for a lack of creatively delicious pizzas. To wit, their this-changes-everything Pad Thai Pizza.

Stay with me on this one. Crisp crust. Tangy fresh tomato sauce, this time umami-spiked with a bare hint of fish sauce. Then chunks of cooked chicken, slices of red onion, generous red pepper flakes. As soon as it comes out of the oven, the whole thing is splashed with a lime- and sesame-rich peanut sauce, then cilantro, bean sprouts and paper-thin slices of fresh red chili.

"Pizza in São Paulo is almost a religion," says Juliana Fava, a Bráz spokesperson.

Pad Thai as a pizza made me a convert. ♦

Story by SHAULA CLARK

IN TUSCANY, the advent of spring doesn't signal the end of soup season. But it does mean the soups that are served take a different tone. Garmugia, for example, a specialty of the city of Lucca, bridges the seasons by marrying veal and pancetta with freshly picked artichokes, peas, fava beans and asparagus—the first tender vegetables of spring. Like the season itself, garmugia bursts with contrasts, at once tender and bold, and simultaneously lushly green yet robust and meaty.

“It is one of the best representations of microseasonality,” Giulia Scarpaleggia, a Tuscan food writer and cookbook author, says of the soup that makes the most of ingredients harvested in the region during the earliest part of spring. She notes that the window for making it is fleeting. “It’s a matter of a few weeks, maybe a month,” she says.

And while a hallmark of Tuscan cuisine is its rusticity, this soup is all about luxury. “This is not peasant food,” Scarpaleggia says. Thought to have originated during the Renaissance era, garmugia was feast-worthy fare for the rich and powerful. In stark contrast to the typical hearty Tuscan soups, which often cleverly repurpose scraps, only the finest ingredients go into garmugia, a pairing of pricey meats and the season’s freshest vegetables.

For our version, we aimed to capture garmugia’s push and pull between light and rich. And with the right combination of produce, we felt we could have a weeknight-simple soup fit for any time of year.

In garmugia, meat is a seasoning, not the main event. To that end, we found we could omit the veal, as the combination of beef broth and pancetta (plus a simmered rind of Parmesan) gave our soup a wonderfully savory depth that enhanced the vegetables without competing with them.

For their clean vegetal flavors and year-round availability, we opted for scallions, asparagus, artichoke hearts and frozen peas. By cooking the vegetables in sequence—starting with



Tender vegetables meet a rich, meaty broth in this light Tuscan-inspired soup.

Packed with green vegetables and rich broth,
garmugia is light but meaty

Tuscan Spring Soup

the sturdiest, ending with the most delicate—each ingredient retains its character, ensuring that they’re not overcooked. The artichoke hearts are simmered first, then the asparagus, followed by the peas, all topped with a finishing sprinkle of scallion greens for a burst of zingy freshness.

Each bite of the finished soup is a spoonful of spring in a bowl, no matter the season.

Tuscan-Style Spring Vegetable Soup

Start to finish: 30 minutes
Servings: 4

IN TUSCANY, garmugia is a seasonal soup that celebrates the vegetables of spring: peas, asparagus, artichokes and fava beans. But it’s definitely not vegetarian—pancetta, meat stock and chunks of ground

beef or veal lend the soup a meaty backbone. For our garmugia-inspired soup, we omit the ground meat but use pancetta and beef broth so the finished dish is satisfying without being heavy. And we like to simmer the optional Parmesan rind into the mix to boost the broth’s umami notes. Canned artichoke hearts do well here, but frozen artichokes also work—just defrost and pat dry before use (you’ll need about 2 cups). To serve on the side, we make savory Parmesan toasts that are perfect for dipping into the broth.

Don’t use ultra-slender asparagus to make this soup, as they will end up overcooked. Look for spears about the thickness of a pencil. To retain the bright-green color of the peas, don’t allow the soup to boil after the peas are stirred in.

— COURTNEY HILL

- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided, plus more to serve
- 3 to 4 ounces pancetta, chopped
- 4 scallions, thinly sliced, whites and greens reserved separately
- 4 thyme sprigs
- 1½ quarts low-sodium beef broth
- 1 chunk Parmesan rind (optional), plus ½ ounce Parmesan cheese, finely grated (¼ cup)
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 8 ounces crusty white bread, sliced ½ inch thick
- 14-ounce can artichoke hearts, rinsed, drained and quartered (see headnote)
- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1-inch lengths on the diagonal
- ½ cup frozen peas, thawed

▪ **Heat the broiler** with a rack about 6 inches from the element. In a large saucepan over medium, combine 1 tablespoon of the oil and the pancetta. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the pancetta has rendered its fat and begins to brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the scallion whites and thyme. Cook until the scallions are lightly browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the broth, Parmesan rind (if using) and ½ teaspoon pepper, then bring to a boil over medium-high.

▪ **Meanwhile, brush both sides** of the bread slices with the remaining 3 tablespoons oil, then place in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Sprinkle with the grated Parmesan, then broil until lightly browned. Set aside.

▪ **When the soup reaches a boil**, add the artichokes, reduce to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Add the asparagus and cook, stirring occasionally, until the asparagus is just tender, 2 to 4 minutes. Stir in the peas, reduce to medium-low and cook, stirring, until the peas are heated through, about 3 minutes; do not allow the soup to boil.

▪ **Off heat**, remove and discard the thyme and Parmesan rind (if used). Stir in the scallion greens, then taste and season with salt and pepper. Ladle into bowls, drizzle with additional oil and serve with the Parmesan toasts. ♦

[**MILK STREET** On the Road]

Tacos de camarón, sobaqueras, flautas, pescado zarandeado & camarones borrachos—just a few of the foods that make Los Angeles a hub of Mexican cooking

Mariscos Jalisco

On Olympic Boulevard, in Boyle Heights

RAUL ORTEGA is a quiet, cheerful fireplug of a man, like a boxer who left the sport with his features still intact, his face topped by short graying hair, rising above a black-striped white Hollister shirt, featuring a sleepy, ready smile. He also is the founder of the food truck Mariscos Jalisco on Olympic Boulevard, east of downtown Los Angeles in Boyle Heights.

Twenty years ago, he opened a truck selling tacos that combine two styles: a taco ahogado (“drowned”), which is smothered in salsa, and his signature shrimp taco, a taco de camarón that, to this day, lives at the pinnacle of the L.A. taco world. He has endured dozens of copycats, including former employees who walked away with his

recipe, but he is affable and resilient, and he enjoys a cult following.

Shrimp is payday food for many people, but Ortega figured out how to make the shrimp taco affordable by using less shrimp while optimizing flavor. The crisp-fried tortilla is well sauced with tomato salsa and topped with avocado, while the interior has a firm crustacean chew. The secret filling ingredient, other than shrimp, is still debated. It was the best taco I ate during my



Javier Cabral (right) guides us through L.A.'s Mexican street food scene.



Highly regional taco styles, including Los Dorados' flautas, can be found throughout Los Angeles.

The Streets of Los Angeles

Story by **CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL**

Los Angeles taco crawl, guided by Javier Cabral: taco expert, associate producer for the Netflix series “Taco Chronicles” and thoroughly local denizen, having grown up in East Los Angeles.

Starting in the 1920s, Boyle Heights became one of Los Angeles' most diverse neighborhoods, home to large Jewish and Japanese communities. Today, it is primarily Latino, mostly Mexican and Central American. But the power of Ortega's shrimp taco draws people from all over the world. Ortega comes from San Juan de Los Lagos, an inland town in Jalisco, Mexico—a region known as tequila country. His menu also includes fiery aguachile, raw shrimp sauced

with lime juice and a whole lot of dried red chilies with a whisper of sweet.

Burritos La Palma *Hyper-regional on four wheels*

THE MEXICAN FOOD TRUCK is at the epicenter of the city's convergence of culture. It represents an economic foothold for immigrants who make a living selling the foods of their hometowns, from all over Mexico, from Sonora to Oaxaca. Even hyper-regional dishes find a ready audience in L.A. given the sheer size and diversity of the local population. *Continued on page 18*

Photos: Jan Maliszewski (Christopher Kimball and Javier Cabral); Christopher Kimball (food truck)

[MILK STREET At Home]

Fried Shrimp Tacos with Salsa Roja

Start to finish: 1¼ hours | Makes 8 tacos



AT MARISCOS JALISCO, Raul Ortega's food truck in the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles, the tacos de camarón, or shrimp tacos, are the main attraction, and for good reason. Ortega stuffs a perfectly seasoned shrimp filling into tortillas and fries the tacos to golden brown crispness before finishing them with tomato salsa and avocado. His recipe is a closely guarded secret, but in her version of those tacos, food writer and recipe developer Paola Briseño-González attempts to replicate that delicious melding of flavors and textures. The shrimp are chopped in a food processor to make the filling, so though the recipe specifies shrimp of a certain size, just about any size will work.

Don't try to bypass the step of warming the corn tortillas before filling them. Straight from the package, the tortillas likely will be brittle and will crack when folded. After warming the tortillas, be sure to keep them wrapped in a towel so they remain pliable until you're ready to fill the tacos. —PAOLA BRISEÑO-GONZÁLEZ, adapted by COURTNEY HILL

For the salsa roja:

- 1 pound ripe plum tomatoes, cored, halved and seeded
- ¼ large white onion, chopped (about ½ cup)
- 2 medium garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
- 1 tablespoon dried Mexican oregano
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 1 cup finely chopped green cabbage
- 1 cup lightly packed fresh cilantro, chopped

▪ **To make the salsa**, in a food processor, combine the tomatoes, onion, garlic, oregano and 1 teaspoon salt. Process until smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to a medium bowl; reserve the food processor bowl and blade. Stir the cabbage and cilantro into the puree, then taste and season with salt and pepper. Cover and set aside until ready to serve.



Crispy shrimp tacos are first filled, then fried.

For the tacos and serving:

- 8 ounces ripe plum tomatoes, cored, halved and seeded
- ¾ large white onion, chopped (about 1 heaping cup)
- 2 medium garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
- 1 teaspoon dried Mexican oregano
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons plus 1 cup grapeseed or other neutral oil, divided
- 8 ounces large (26/30 per pound) shrimp (see headnote), peeled (tails removed) and deveined
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- Eight 6-inch corn tortillas
- 1 ripe avocado, halved, pitted, peeled and sliced
- Lime wedges, to serve

▪ **To make the tacos**, in the food processor, combine the tomatoes, onion, garlic, oregano, 1 teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Pulse to a coarse puree, about 10 pulses. Transfer to a small bowl. To the food processor, add the shrimp and pulse until finely chopped, about 4 pulses.

▪ **In a 10-inch skillet** over medium, heat the 3 tablespoons oil until shimmering. Add the tomato-onion puree and cook, stirring occasionally, until most of the moisture has evaporated, 7 to 9 minutes. Add the flour and cook, stirring, until well incorporated, about 1 minute. Add the shrimp and cook, stirring constantly, until the shrimp turn pink and the mixture has thickened, about 1 minute. Set aside off heat.

▪ **Heat a 12-inch skillet** over medium until water flicked onto the surface immediately sizzles and evaporates. Add 2 tortillas in a single layer (it's fine if they overlap slightly) and heat, flipping them once, until warm, about 30 seconds per side. Transfer to a kitchen towel and wrap loosely to keep warm and pliable. Repeat with the remaining tortillas, stacking and wrapping them in the towel. Add the remaining 1 cup oil to the skillet; keep warm over low while you fill the tortillas.

▪ **Lay 4 of the tortillas** on a work surface and divide half of the shrimp mixture evenly among them, placing the filling on one side of the tortilla. Fold the unfilled sides over and press lightly; leave the edges open (do not seal them). Fill the remaining tortillas with the remaining shrimp mixture in the same way.

▪ **Return the oil to medium** and heat until shimmering (about 350°F). Carefully add 4 of the tacos and cook until golden brown and crisp on the bottoms, about 3 minutes. Using a thin metal spatula, flip each taco and cook until golden brown on the second sides, about 3 minutes, then transfer to a paper towel-lined plate. Fry the remaining tacos in the same way, adjusting the heat as needed.

▪ **Transfer the tacos** to a serving platter and spoon on some of the salsa. Top with the avocado slices and serve with the remaining salsa and lime wedges on the side. ♦



At **Mariscos Jalisco**, owner Raul Ortega serves up salsa-smothered, crisp-fried shrimp tacos.



(deep-fried cigar-shaped tacos with lamb, chicken, chorizo or potato and topped with salsa roja, guacamole and cotija cheese), and tacos de canasta or basket tacos.

The most unusual item I had turned out to be the chicharrón burrito at Burritos La Palma—the once-crispy chicharrón was served soft and gelatinous, bathed in a fresh salsa and wrapped in a soft flour tortilla.

And Los Angeles' taco trend goes beyond Mexican fare: In 2008, Roy Choi's Kogi Taqueria started a fusion-taco trend with its Korean tacos, and Little Llama Peruvian Tacos is a new up-and-comer.

These entrepreneurs are up against restaurants with higher fixed costs who feel threatened and a city that wants to collect taxes; this leads to shutdowns and confiscations. (The city makes it dangerously easy to report what they consider to be an illegal food cart.) Back when Ortega started, Cabral notes, street vending had not yet been legalized, and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health might ambush

The list is strong, with everything from tacos filled with stingray (cured by salting and then rehydrating them), Middle Eastern-influenced tacos Árabes (meat cooked on a spit with onion and salt served on flatbread with Oaxacan cheese, avocado and chili salsa), flautas

you, dump your cooked meat and even confiscate your truck. Protesters started selling T-shirts that read, "Carne Asada Is Not a Crime." This has led to the evolution of how tacos are made in Los Angeles. As one taco truck worker said, "I make the tortillas with my hands,



Rolled up and deep-fried, flautas are filled with meat or potato and topped with salsa roja, guacamole and a sprinkling of cotija cheese.

not a press—they cannot confiscate my hands." These days, the situation is slightly better—street vending was recently legalized.

Food trucks also offer fertile ground for an argument about Mexican-American cuisine. Cabral is a believer in cross-cultural exchange; he is happy to enjoy food from one place that is transformed in another setting. Tex-Mex, which is "gringo bullshit" to many purists, is just another sign of culinary adaptation to Cabral.

His wife, Paola Briseño-González, however, prefers to preserve tradition and recipes from her hometown, Puerto Vallarta, without compromising time-honored ingredients. No matter what your opinion, the taco truck is a unique culinary pathway into the heart of Mexican cooking and the people who make it.

El Ruso

Sobaqueras and smoky carne asada

WALTER SOTO arrived in Los Angeles several years ago from Tijuana and brought with him another northern Mexican specialty, the sobaqueras that he serves at El Ruso. These are huge handmade tortillas—the term comes from the slang for "armpit" since they are shaped by slinging the tortillas back and forth over your forearms. I watched *Continued on page 20*



El Ruso specializes in sobaqueras, huge handmade tortillas named for the slang term for "armpit."

Photos: Christopher Kimball

[MILK STREET At Home]

Beef Chili Colorado Tacos

Start to finish: 3¼ hours
(45 minutes active)
Servings: 6 to 8

CARNE EN CHILE colorado is a Mexican classic, and one of the delicious offerings that appear on the rotating menu at Walter Soto's El Ruso taquería trucks that operate in a couple locations in and around Los Angeles. The word "colorado" translates from the Spanish as "red-colored," an apt name for the succulent, stewy dish of meat—which is sometimes shredded, sometimes not—in a sauce of pureed dried red chilies. Pork is commonly used to make chili colorado, but this version is Paola Briseño-González's ode to El Ruso's rich, robust beef

in red chili sauce. The cut of choice is a boneless chuck roast, which boasts plenty of fat and connective tissue so that long, slow cooking yields rich, tender, full-flavored meat. Either guajillo or New Mexico chilies work here; you can even use a combination. Both are a deep red color, have bright, fruity notes with subdued earthiness, and contain only mild chili heat. El Ruso also is well known for its flour tortillas, so that's the type to serve with the chili colorado for making tacos.

Don't worry if the beef is not entirely submerged in the chili puree when the chunks are added to the pot. As it cooks, the meat will release some juices. However, if, after about an hour of simmering, the beef is not covered with liquid, stir in ½ cup water to ensure even cooking and prevent drying.

—PAOLA BRISEÑO-GONZÁLEZ,
adapted by COURTNEY HILL



This rich, meaty taco filling combines tender, fall-apart beef with a red chili sauce.

12 medium (about 2½ ounces) guajillo or New Mexico chilies, stemmed, seeded and roughly torn
4 medium garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
1 teaspoon Mexican oregano
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
2½ pounds boneless beef chuck roast, trimmed and cut into 3-inch chunks
2 tablespoons grapeseed or other neutral oil
1 medium yellow onion, ½ roughly chopped, ½ finely chopped, reserved separately
2 bay leaves
Warm flour tortillas, to serve
½ cup lightly packed fresh cilantro, chopped

▪ **In a medium saucepan**, combine the chilies and enough water to cover by about 1 inch. Bring to a boil over medium-high, pressing on

the chilies to submerge them. Remove from the heat, cover and let stand until the chilies are fully softened, 15 to 20 minutes.

▪ **Drain the chilies**, discarding the water, and put them in a blender along with the garlic, oregano, cumin, 4 cups water and 1½ teaspoons salt. Blend until smooth, about 2 minutes; set aside.

▪ **Spread the flour** in a pie plate or other wide, shallow dish. Add the beef, turning to coat all sides. In a large Dutch oven over medium-high, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the beef, shaking off the excess flour, and cook, turning occasionally, until well browned on all sides, about 10 minutes; transfer to a large plate.

▪ **Pour off and discard** any fat in the pot. Add the chili puree and bring to a simmer over medium, scraping up any browned bits. Stir in the roughly chopped onion and bay, then add the beef and any accumulated juices. Return to a simmer, then cover, reduce to medium-low and cook, stirring occasionally and increasing the heat as needed to maintain a vigorous simmer, for 1 hour. If at this point the braising liquid no longer covers the beef, stir in ½ cup water and return to a simmer. Cook, covered, until a skewer inserted into the largest piece of beef meets no resistance and the sauce has the consistency of heavy cream, about another 1 hour. Remove from the heat and let stand, covered, for about 30 minutes. Remove and discard the bay.

▪ **Using 2 forks**, shred the beef. Return to a simmer over medium, stirring occasionally. Taste and season with salt and pepper. Serve with flour tortillas and with the finely chopped onion and cilantro for making tacos. ♦

After a short walk down the driveway, one arrives in a large leafy backyard with a dozen picnic tables and a small wood-paneled maritime-themed kitchen shack where Peñuelas does the cooking—bold, briny seafood with exclamations of chili and citrus.

Soto's partner, Julia Silva, shape them, starting with small balls of dough and ending up with something resembling a small blanket or bed-sheet, another slang term for these sizable tortillas. (Cabral claims that Tijuana has better tacos than Mexico City.)

Soto learned his trade making many styles of tacos in Sinaloa and Sonora, and now he does a clean, smoky carne asada. The sobaquera burrito is a work of art, filled with either grilled asada or chili colorado. The latter starts with beef braised in water, shredded and then slathered in a red chili sauce. According to Cabral, older Mexican generations do not love extra spices, and so this chili colorado is simple: dried California chilies and dark red guajillos. The asada often is served with a covering of beans, and there are lots of topping options, but the chili colorado is primal—a soft, overstuffed pouch of tender beef and rich chili sauce, dripping with flavor and bright red juice. Don't wear office clothes and be sure to grab a stack of napkins.

106 Seafood Underground

In the snook whisperer's backyard

MEXICAN SEAFOOD CHEF Sergio Peñuelas specializes in the cooking of Sinaloa and Nayarit—regions on the Pacific coast just across from the tip of Baja, south of Sonora. Peñuelas is known for his way with snook, a large tropical fish. (The late food critic Jonathan Gold referred to Peñuelas as the “snook whisperer.”) Stocky and mustachioed with short brush-backed hair, he emanates a deep sense of satisfaction. Having done the rounds of many well-regarded restaurants in Los Angeles (Coni Seafood, Mariscos Chente, etc.), he decided to strike out on his own, opening a backyard restaurant, a stone's throw from LAX. These underground eateries, fueled by social media, are another trend that accelerated during the pandemic.

When we showed up at 106 Seafood Underground, there was no hint of lunch other than cars and pickups in the driveway, but you knew

you were near LAX: Jets loomed large overhead, clawing for altitude. My first thought was that we were about to be arrested for trespassing, since there was no sign of commercial activity. But after a short walk down the driveway, we arrived in a large leafy backyard with picnic tables and a small wood-paneled maritime-themed kitchen shack where Peñuelas does the cooking, equipped with a deep fryer, a large range and a well-seasoned grill. His wife, Maria de Los Angeles Peñuelas, pitches in with the prep and works the “front” of the house.

This is not the tlayudas and moles of Oaxacan cuisine, nor the slow cooking of carnitas. It's bold, briny seafood with exclamations of chili and citrus.

I watch as Peñuelas butterflies a whole fish in seconds using a large chef's knife, brushing it with sauce before it hits the grill. This is his signature dish: pescado zarandeado, a whole 4- or 5-pound fish, butterflied, smeared with a paste of hot sauce (often Huichol, a famous Mexican hot sauce) with a base of mayonnaise and Worcestershire, then cooked low and slow over tropical wood such as mangrove. The secret is cooler embers and a long cooking time, which produces the signature meaty—almost velvety—texture. Peñuelas also is known for camarones borrachos, a spicy “drunken” shrimp dish that starts off with a bright showing of garlic and chili, then finishes with a complex flambé of tequila. He uses red pepper flakes instead of a local Mexican chili, a sign of the merger of Mexican and North American cuisines.

Peñuelas once told Cabral, “Uno ahí en Sinaloa, no es por presumir, pero es tonto y raro el cabrón que no sepa hacer un aguachile—de verdad,” which translates, “It would be weird and someone would have to be an idiot to be from Sinaloa and not know how to prepare an aguachile, for real.” Maybe it is time that we learned more about the vast and diverse cooking of Mexico “for real.” And one of the best places to find it is on the streets of L.A. ♦

Javier Cabral, editor-in-chief of the website *L.A. TACO* and associate producer for the Netflix show *Taco Chronicles*, contributed to this story.



Sergio Peñuelas, seafood chef and “snook whisperer,” runs his own backyard restaurant near LAX.



[MILK STREET At Home]

Drunken Shrimp with Tequila (*Camarones Borrachos*)



These garlicky, spicy “drunken shrimp” get big, bold flavor from a liberal pour of tequila.

Start to finish: 35 minutes

Servings: 4 to 6

THESE CAMARONES BORRACHOS—or “drunken shrimp,” translated from the Spanish—are food writer and recipe developer Paola Briseño-González’s version of a dish served up by Sergio Peñuelas at 106 Seafood Underground, a casual outdoor eatery located, literally, in the backyard of a residence in Inglewood, California. Peñuelas uses head-on shelled shrimp, which are amazingly flavorful but difficult to source. For this recipe, you can peel and devein the shrimp so they’re easy to eat or you can leave the shells on, as they

contain loads of shrimp flavor and do an excellent job of trapping the garlicky, spicy sauce. Use a tequila that’s labeled as “blanco,” “plata,” “white” or “silver”—it should be clear and lack color—rather than a variety that’s rested (reposado) or aged (añejo). If you like, serve with rice on the side, as Peñuelas does, and with lots of napkins if you’ve kept the shells on the shrimp.

Don’t forget to reduce the heat to medium before adding the shrimp to the skillet. Gentle cooking helps ensure that the shrimp cook up plump and tender.

—PAOLA BRISEÑO-GONZÁLEZ,
adapted by COURTNEY HILL

Gentle cooking helps ensure that the shrimp cook up plump and tender.

2 pounds extra-large (21/25 per pound) shrimp, peeled and deveined (if desired; see headnote)

2 teaspoons lime juice, plus lime wedges to serve

Kosher salt and ground black pepper

½ cup tequila (see headnote)

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

3 tablespoons salted butter, cut into 3 pieces

6 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 to 3 teaspoons red pepper flakes

¼ cup lightly packed fresh cilantro, roughly chopped

½ cucumber, peeled and thinly sliced

½ small red onion, thinly sliced

▪ **In a large bowl**, stir together the shrimp, lime juice and ½ teaspoon salt; set aside. In a liquid measuring cup or small bowl, combine the tequila and 1 cup water.

▪ **In a 12-inch skillet** over medium, heat the oil and butter until the butter foams. Add the garlic and cook, stirring often, until fragrant but not browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the tequila-water mixture, red pepper flakes, 1 teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon black pepper. Bring to a simmer over medium-high and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is reduced to about ⅓ cup and turns red, 6 to 9 minutes.

▪ **Reduce to medium**, add the shrimp and cook, stirring and turning occasionally, until pink and opaque throughout, about 3 minutes for shelled shrimp or about 5 minutes for shell-on shrimp.

▪ **Off heat**, stir in the cilantro, then taste and season with salt and black pepper. Transfer the shrimp to a shallow serving bowl and garnish with the cucumber and onion. Serve with lime wedges. ♦

[**MILK STREET** On the Road]

Meze Makes the Meal



At Manousakis Winery in Crete, the bevy of meze items flows as freely as the wine, both some of the best we had.

The rustic cooking of Crete is fresh, tangy and a perfect balance of sweet and savory

Story by J. M. HIRSCH

MIMALIS PAHTIKOS' tiny workshop is a glorious clutter of sharpening stones, slabs of Damascus steel, fragments of bone, grinding wheels and—of course—knives. So many knives. Knives for sale in the window. Knives half-made and

scattered on his workbench. Knives small enough to fit in a pocket and large enough to butcher a cow.

I'm in the knife-making corner of Chania—a seaside town on the northwest corner of Crete—where a cluster of shops hone a long tradition of handmade blades, some elegant, some workaday brutish. Pahtikos has been at it since he was

a child, apprenticing with his father and grandfather, the latter having opened the shop after arriving from Constantinople in 1912.

As he finishes one of the knives for me—slightly snub-nosed, like a Japanese santoku, but with a blade thick and heavy like a cleaver, and a handle made from ringlets of brass, white sheep's bone, and amber and

black stones—he tells me he wasn't allowed to sell any knife he made until he was 16. When he did, it was etched with a poem: "On my knife, a fly doesn't sit."

"Lots of people still bring back knives my father and grandfather made for sharpening," he says. Such is the strength of tradition. And it's an important lesson about Crete, its people and, of course, its food. It's a lesson I'd taste repeatedly as I ate my way across Chania, the mountains around it, and the olive tree valleys between.

A lesson that also was on display during a wine-soaked lunch at the foothills of the Lefka Ori Mountains in nearby Vatolakkos. Alexandra Manousakis and her husband, Afshin Molavi, had invited me to their Manousakis Winery, producer of easily the best wines I tasted during a week of much tasting on this vineyard-rich island.

But clearly for Manousakis and Molavi, the wine almost is a byproduct of the deeper pull of family, food and tradition. Manousakis' father, Ted, had left Vatolakkos as a child to immigrate to the U.S. As an adult, he was drawn home and by 1993, he'd planted his first grapevines on these hills. Fourteen years later, Alexandra joined him.

"This place *is* our family," she tells me over a table laden with meze on an almost cinematically beautiful stone terrace. "And that's important to Greek immigrant families.... It's about committing to your family and friends through food. And we just happen to make the wine that goes with it."

The meal that day overwhelms. For Manousakis and Molavi, the emotions run as strong as the bold, fresh flavors—

Continued on page 24

Photos: Christos Maniagos



Packed with herbs and spice, soutzoukakia are as light as they are rich.

[MILK STREET At Home]

Greek Meatballs with Tomato Sauce (Soutzoukakia)

Start to finish: 1 hour 20 minutes
Servings: 4 to 6

THESE CIGAR-SHAPED meatballs seasoned with cumin and garlic and simmered in tomato sauce are known as soutzoukakia. The dish has origins in Smyrna, a former Greek settlement and now the Turkish city of Izmir on the Aegean coast. Our recipe is based on the soutzoukakia we learned about from Alexandra Manousakis and Afshin Molavi of Manousakis Winery on the Greek island of Crete. Made with a combination of ground lamb and beef, the meatballs have a deep, rich flavor perfectly matched by the tangy-sweet tomato sauce. However, if

you prefer, you can use 1 pound of either type of meat. An instant thermometer is the best way to check the meatballs for doneness; alternatively, cut one open—when done, the center is no longer pink. The meatballs are browned on the stovetop, then finish cooking in the same pan in the oven, so you will need a 12-inch oven-safe skillet for this recipe. Soutzoukakia typically are offered as part of a meze spread, but served with rice, they're a terrific main.

Don't use tongs to turn the meatballs in the skillet. Until they're browned on all sides, the soutzoukakia are quite delicate and easily marred by tongs. A thin

metal spatula is better for rotating them.

—Adapted by COURTNEY HILL

- 2 medium yellow onions, peeled
- 3 tablespoons panko breadcrumbs
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 1½ pounds ripe tomatoes, halved
- 8 ounces 80 percent lean ground beef (see headnote)
- 8 ounces ground lamb
- 4 medium garlic cloves, finely grated
- 4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, divided
- 4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint, divided
- 3 teaspoons dried oregano, divided
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon sweet paprika
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste

▪ **Set a box grater** in a medium bowl. Grate the onions on the large holes down to the root ends; reserve the box grater. Transfer half of the grated onion to a small bowl and set aside for the sauce. To the grated onion in the medium bowl, add the panko and ½ teaspoon salt; stir, then let stand until the panko is softened, about 10 minutes.

▪ **Meanwhile, grate the tomato halves** (start with the cut sides against the grater) into another medium bowl; stop when you reach the skin and discard it. Cover and set aside for making the sauce.

▪ **To the onion-panko mixture**, add the beef, lamb, half of the garlic, 2 tablespoons each of parsley and mint, 2 teaspoons of the oregano, the cumin, paprika, egg

and ½ teaspoon pepper. Mix with your hands until well combined. Cover and refrigerate for at least 15 minutes or up to 1 hour.

▪ **Heat the oven to 375°F** with a rack in the middle position. Divide the chilled meat mixture into 12 evenly sized balls (a scant ¼ cup each). With wet hands, shape each one into an oblong about 3 inches long.

▪ **In a 12-inch oven-safe skillet** over medium, heat 3 tablespoons of the oil until shimmering. Add the meatballs and cook, using a thin metal spatula or 2 spoons to gently and occasionally turn them, until lightly browned all over, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a large plate and set aside. Pour off and discard the fat in the skillet.

▪ **In the same skillet** over medium-high, combine the remaining 1 tablespoon oil, reserved grated onion, remaining garlic, ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Cook, scraping up any browned bits, until the moisture from the onion has evaporated and the onion and drippings are well browned, about 5 minutes; reduce the heat as needed if browning goes too quickly. Stir in the tomato paste and remaining 1 teaspoon oregano, then add the grated tomatoes; scrape up any browned bits. Bring to a simmer over medium-high and cook, stirring often, until the mixture is slightly thickened, 4 to 5 minutes.

▪ **Off heat**, nestle the meatballs in the sauce and add the accumulated juices. Transfer the skillet to the oven and cook until the center of the meatballs registers 160°F and the sauce is brown at the edges, 13 to 18 minutes.

▪ **Remove the skillet** from the oven (the handle will be hot). Serve sprinkled with the remaining parsley and mint. ♦

most of them wedded by tangy-sweet tomatoes—that so perfectly capture an afternoon of eating and drinking as new friends quickly become fast friends in a courtyard of fig and lemon trees. This... *this* is what food is about.

First, there is dakos, the Cretan salad of mizithra cheese, briny black olives, oregano, olive oil and tomatoes, the juices of which gently soften crunchy barley rusks beneath to create a Greek dish reminiscent of—yet wildly more robust than—Italian panzanella. “I eat this every day,” Manousakis says. “It fills every need for me.”

But the real stars are a trio of rustic sweet-and-savory dishes drawn, not unexpectedly, from family. First, there is gigantes plaki, or gigante beans baked in a rich tomato sauce. “The gigantes are my dad’s recipe,” Manousakis says as we spoon out the massive white beans and their richly sweet sauce. “He will sit here and eat three bowls.” Easily understood.

Then there is giouvetsi, a beef stew loaded with tomato, onion, garlic, sweet paprika and oregano, all of it warmed wonderfully with cinnamon and nutmeg. Cooked with it, plumping as it soaks up the sauce, is orzo, tender oblongs of Greek pasta. The result is meaty and hearty, but not heavy.

Finally, from Manousakis’ aunt, soutzoukakia, or meatballs cooked in tomato sauce. “She claims to have the best soutzoukakia,” Manousakis says. “So we asked her for the recipe.” Made from beef and lamb, grated onion and a host of seasonings—garlic, mint, oregano, cumin and sweet paprika among them—the result is rich and tangy.

By the end of the meal, the draw here is obvious. The food is as much about the moment and the people—and the long traditions they represent—as it is the taste. It drew Manousakis’ father back. It drew her back. It will draw me back. ♦

[MILK STREET At Home]

Greek-Style Baked White Beans in Tomato Sauce

*Start to finish: 1¼ hours
(30 minutes active), plus soaking and cooling | Servings: 6*

GIGANTES PLAKI, or gigante beans baked in tomato sauce, is a Greek classic. The delicious version we tasted at Manousakis Winery on the island of Crete had us eager to re-create the dish ourselves. But we quickly learned that dried gigante beans, a type of large, white runner bean—they are not lima beans, contrary to what some sources say—are not widely available in the U.S. We discovered that great northern beans, though smaller, are an excellent alternative. (We prefer them over cannellini beans, which are slightly larger but have a tendency to cook unevenly and break down even if just slightly overdone.) If you are able to source dried gigante beans, they will require at least 50 minutes of covered cooking in the Dutch oven to become tender, and even when fully cooked, will have a firmer texture than great northers. This is a multi-step recipe but requires minimal hands-on time. First, the soaked beans are simmered in a pot in the oven until tender; meanwhile, a rich tomato sauce is cooked on the stovetop. The two then are combined and finished in the oven, where the flavors deepen and concentrate.

Don't try to take a shortcut by quick-soaking the beans. For even cooking and the best texture, the beans need to soak for at least 12 hours at room temperature prior to cooking. Don't



In Crete, simple white beans take on deep garlic-tomato flavor.

forget to add the salt to the soaking water, which helps produce more tender beans. —Adapted by

ROSE HATTA BAUGH

1 pound dried great northern beans
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
2 bay leaves
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 medium yellow onion, peeled
2 medium celery stalks
1 medium zucchini
1 medium carrot, peeled
¼ to ½ pounds ripe tomatoes, halved
3 medium garlic cloves, peeled
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to serve
6-ounce can tomato paste (½ cup)
1½ teaspoons dried oregano

▪ **First, soak the beans.** In a large bowl, stir together the beans, 3 quarts water and 2 teaspoons salt. Soak at room temperature for at least 12 hours or up to 24 hours. Drain and rinse the beans.

▪ **Heat the oven to 325°F** with a rack in the lower-middle position. In a large Dutch oven, combine the beans, bay, pepper flakes and 5½ cups water; bring to a boil over medium-high. Cover the pot, transfer to the oven and bake until tender, about 40 minutes.

▪ **Meanwhile, set a box grater** in a medium bowl. Grate the onion on the large holes down to the root end. Next, grate the celery into the bowl; discard the strings that remain. Grate the zucchini and carrot down to the stems; discard the stems. Set the mixture aside. Into another medium bowl, grate the tomato halves (start with the cut sides against the grater); stop when you reach the skin and discard it. Set the tomatoes aside. Finally, grate the garlic cloves on the small holes of the box grater; set aside.

▪ **When the beans are tender,** remove the pot from the oven. Increase the oven to 375°F. Transfer the beans with their liquid to a 9-by-13-inch baking dish; wipe out and reserve the pot. Remove and discard the bay; set the beans aside.

▪ **In the same pot** over medium, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the grated vegetable mixture (but not the tomatoes or garlic) and 1½ teaspoons salt; cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables begin to release some moisture, 2 to 3 minutes. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is softened but not browned, 8 to 10 minutes.

▪ **Add the garlic** and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the tomato paste and

cook, stirring, until it starts to brown and sticks to the bottom of the pot, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the grated tomatoes, oregano and 1 teaspoon black pepper. Bring to a simmer and cook, uncovered and stirring occasionally, until the sauce is thick and a few shades darker, 3 to 4 minutes.

▪ **Spoon the tomato sauce** into the beans, then stir to combine. Taste and season with salt and black pepper. Bake, uncovered, until bubbling at the edges and the surface is lightly browned, 35 to 40 minutes. Cool on a wire rack for about 10 minutes. Serve drizzled with additional oil. ♦

Greek Beef and Tomato Stew with Orzo (*Giouvetsi*)



Tender orzo is the perfect foil for warmly spiced beef and tomatoes.

Start to finish: 2½ hours
Servings: 4 to 6

GIOUVETSI (sometimes spelled *giouvetsi*) is a meaty, tomato-rich stew flavored with alliums, spices and herbs. The meat for this traditional Greek dish—that often is paired with orzo—is commonly lamb, but Alexandra Manousakis and Afshin Molavi of Manousakis Winery in Crete use beef. This is our adaptation of their recipe. Often the orzo is simmered right

into the braise, but we prefer to cook it separately, spoon it into bowls, then ladle on the stew. This way, the flavors and textures are more distinct. Anthotyros is the type of cheese Manousakis and Molavi use for finishing their *giouvetsi*, but we've opted for easier to find feta or Italian ricotta salata. The salty, tangy shreds serve as a perfect complement to the savory-sweetness of the stew.

Don't forget to uncover the

pot when the beef is just shy of tender, after about 1¼ hours of covered cooking. This allows some of the liquid to evaporate so the stew reaches the proper consistency and the flavors become deeper, richer and more concentrated.

—Adapted by DIANE UNGER

1 large yellow onion, peeled
1 pound ripe tomatoes, halved
6 medium garlic cloves, peeled
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
3 pounds boneless beef short ribs, trimmed, cut into ½- to ¾-inch chunks and patted dry
3 tablespoons tomato paste
1 tablespoon sweet paprika
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 cup dry white wine
3 bay leaves
3-inch cinnamon stick
¼ teaspoon grated nutmeg
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
12 ounces (about 1½ cups) orzo pasta
¼ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 ounces feta or ricotta salata cheese, shredded (1 cup)

▪ **Set a box grater** in a medium bowl. Grate the onion on the large holes down to the root end. Repeat the process with the tomato halves, grating them over the onion (start with the cut sides against the grater); stop when you reach the skin and discard it. Set the mixture aside. Grate the garlic cloves on the small holes of the box grater; set aside.

▪ **In a large Dutch oven** over medium-high, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil until barely smoking. Add the beef in an even layer and cook, without stirring, until well browned on the bottom, about 10 minutes. Turn the beef, distribute in an

even layer and cook without stirring until well browned, about another 4 minutes.

▪ **Stir in the tomato paste**, reduce to medium and cook, stirring, until the paste is well browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the garlic, paprika and oregano; cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in the wine and scrape up any browned bits. Bring to a simmer over medium-high and cook, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has fully reduced, about 5 minutes.

▪ **Add the onion-tomato mixture** and cook, scraping up any browned bits, until the moisture evaporates and the mixture begins to sizzle, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in 3 cups water, the bay, cinnamon, nutmeg and ½ teaspoon each salt and pepper; bring to a simmer, stirring occasionally. Cover, reduce to low and cook, stirring occasionally, until the meat is just shy of tender, about 1 hour 20 minutes.

▪ **Uncover and cook**, stirring often, until a skewer inserted into the largest chunk of meat meets no resistance and the sauce clings lightly to the beef, about another 20 minutes. Off heat, remove and discard the cinnamon and bay. Taste and season with salt and pepper; set aside.

▪ **In a large pot**, bring 3 quarts water to a boil. Add the orzo and 1 tablespoon salt, then reduce to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until the orzo is tender. Drain well in a colander, transfer to a medium bowl and toss with the remaining 2 tablespoons oil and the parsley. Taste and season with salt and pepper.

▪ **Return the stew** to a gentle simmer over medium, stirring often. Divide the orzo among individual bowls, ladle on the stew and sprinkle with the cheese. ♦

Story by SHAULA CLARK

THE WORD POLPETTE usually is translated as meatballs, but in Italy, it's a term that can entail so much more. Deliciously so. "Polpette just means something in the shape of a ball," says Calabrian-born cookbook author Rosetta Costantino.

And that's a freedom taken seriously in southern Italy, where polpette are made with everything—artichokes, cauliflower, zucchini, mushrooms, even tuna. "We make more polpette meatless than we do with meat," she says. Among her favorites? Ricotta polpette.

These surprisingly light cheese-based dumplings have been part of Calabria's tradition of cucina povera for centuries, making use of ingredients that historically were abundant and cheap, particularly stale bread. The most basic recipes involve mixing little more than breadcrumbs and creamy ricotta cheese with whole eggs and grated pecorino Romano cheese. The mild ricotta provides an ideal foil for the salty, savory, pleasantly sharp pecorino.

Today, these plump, feather-light ricotta polpette find their way into several recipes in Costantino's kitchen, using homemade ricotta and eggs from her own chickens.

Sometimes she does little more than bread and fry them. Other times, she simmers them in tomato sauce, or rolls them into bite-size morsels that she poaches in chicken broth. That latter option is the basis of polpette di ricotta in brodo, a lovely, light Calabrian dish that falls somewhere between matzo ball soup and chicken and dumplings.

We loved the elegant simplicity of the dish, at once rich and savory, yet still light and simple. For our version, we found that egg yolks were a better binder than the more traditional whole eggs. We also discovered that the dumplings benefited



A lighter twist on chicken and dumplings, this deeply savory soup features tender "meatballs" made with ricotta.

Calabria's simple, satisfying take on chicken soup, starring
tender, feather-light dumplings

Southern Italy's Chicken Soup with Ricotta Dumplings

from resting both before and after they were cooked.

A rest before cooking gave the flavors in the ricotta dumplings time to meld. It also allowed the breadcrumbs to more fully hydrate, ensuring that the polpette didn't fall

apart while poaching in the broth.

After the dumplings cooked, we found that a second rest helped them firm up just enough to ensure they would hold their shape without becoming dense or unpleasantly tough.

With polpette di ricotta in brodo,

a rich broth is crucial. For our version, we take a simple shortcut, by simmering chicken thighs in purchased broth. Thighs are flavorful and can withstand a longer cooking time, allowing the flavors to deeply infuse. This not only enriches the

In southern Italy, polpette are made with anything and everything: artichokes, cauliflower, zucchini, mushrooms, even tuna. "We make more polpette meatless than we do with meat," Costantino says.

Photo: Connie Miller of CB Creatives; Styling: Christine Tobin



1. To make the dumpling mixture, in a food processor, combine the pieces of torn bread and chunks of pecorino Romano. Process until finely ground, about 30 seconds.



2. Add the ricotta, egg yolks, nutmeg, salt and pepper; process until smooth, about 1 minute. Transfer to a bowl, cover and refrigerate while you prepare the chicken and broth.



3. Simmer the chicken thighs in the broth until tender. Transfer it to a bowl. Using a slotted spoon, remove and discard the vegetables, then season the broth with salt and pepper.



4. When the cooked chicken is cool enough to handle, shred the meat into bite-size pieces, using 2 forks or your hands, removing and discarding the skin and bones.



5. To form the dumplings, divide the chilled ricotta mixture into 16 even portions (each about a generous tablespoon) onto a parchment-lined baking sheet.



6. Using your hands, form the portions into balls, drop them into the flour and toss to coat. Return the dumplings to the baking sheet, then refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour.



7. To cook the dumplings, gently add them to the simmering broth, then return the broth to a simmer. Cover and cook for 10 minutes; the dumplings will rise to the surface.



8. Use a slotted spoon to place the dumplings in bowls; let rest for 5 minutes. Add the chicken and sprinkle with parsley. Ladle in the broth and sprinkle with grated pecorino.

■ **In a food processor**, combine the bread and pecorino chunks; process until finely ground, about 30 seconds. Add the ricotta, egg yolks, nutmeg, and ½ teaspoon each salt and pepper; process until smooth, about 1 minute, scraping the bowl as needed. Transfer to a medium bowl, cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 24 hours.

■ **In a large Dutch oven**, combine the broth, chicken thighs, onion, carrots and celery. Bring to a simmer over medium-high, then reduce to low, cover and simmer until a skewer inserted into the chicken meets no resistance, about 45 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat.

■ **Using tongs**, transfer the chicken to a medium bowl; set aside until cool enough to handle. Meanwhile, using a slotted spoon, remove and discard the vegetables from the broth. Taste the broth and season with salt and pepper; set aside. Using 2 forks or your hands, shred the chicken into bite-size pieces; discard the skin and bones. Cover and set aside until ready to use.

■ **Line a rimmed baking sheet** with kitchen parchment. Have ready the flour in a pie plate or other shallow dish. Scoop the chilled ricotta mixture into 16 portions, each about a generous tablespoon, onto the prepared baking sheet. Using your hands, form the portions into balls, drop them into the flour and toss to coat. Shake off the excess and return the dumplings to the baking sheet. Refrigerate uncovered for at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour.

■ **Return the broth to a simmer** over medium. Gently add the dumplings and return the broth to a simmer. Cover and cook, adjusting the heat as needed to maintain a simmer (do not allow the broth to boil), for 10 minutes; the dumplings will rise to the surface and expand.

■ **Using a slotted spoon**, divide the dumplings among individual bowls. Let rest for about 5 minutes to allow the dumplings to firm up; they will slump slightly as they cool. Divide the shredded chicken among the bowls and sprinkle each portion with parsley. Ladle in the hot broth and sprinkle with grated pecorino. ♦

broth, it also gives us perfectly tender meat to add later.

Chicken Soup with Ricotta Dumplings

Start to finish: 2 hours (1 hour active), plus chilling | Servings: 4

POLPETTE DI RICOTTA, or ricotta “meatballs” (named only for their round shape, not because they contain meat), is a dish from Calabria in southern Italy. In the humble soup known as polpette di ricotta in brodo, the “meatballs” are gently poached in hot broth, where they turn into light, tender dumplings. The mildness of the ricotta allows the savory, pleasantly funky flavor of pecorino to come to the fore. For our version, we enhance store-bought chicken broth by simmering in a few aromatic vegetables plus bone-in chicken thighs

that later provide shredded meat to make the soup more substantial. The dumpling mixture needs at least an hour or up to 24 to chill and hydrate before shaping, and the formed dumplings require at least 30 minutes in the refrigerator to firm up before cooking, so plan accordingly. If convenient, the broth can be made in advance and refrigerated in an airtight container for up to three days. If making ahead, it’s best to wait to shred the chicken until just before serving.

Don’t bother finely chopping the vegetables for the broth. Cut them into chunks that will soften and release flavor into the liquid but that still are large enough to easily scoop out with a slotted spoon. When removing the dumplings from the pot after poaching, be sure to handle them gently as they’re quite delicate.

—DIANE UNGER

3 slices (5 ounces) hearty white sandwich bread, crusts removed, torn into pieces

1½ ounces (without rind) pecorino Romano cheese, cut into rough ½-inch chunks, plus finely grated pecorino Romano cheese, to serve

1 cup whole-milk ricotta cheese

2 large egg yolks

¼ teaspoon grated nutmeg

Kosher salt and ground black pepper

2 quarts low-sodium chicken broth

2 pounds bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs, trimmed

1 large yellow onion, cut into large chunks

2 medium carrots, peeled and cut into thirds or fourths

2 medium celery stalks, cut into thirds or fourths

½ cup all-purpose flour

¼ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

*Tomatoes, cheese
and tons of herbs*

transform spaghetti

Rome's Best No-Cook Pasta Sauce

Story by J. M. HIRSCH

CACIO E PEPE and a foul temper. When you ask about Felice Trivelloni, you never hear about just one; they are inseparably synonymous with the Roman restaurateur. His take on this classic pasta was as epic as his tendency to gruffness.

It's something his grandson, Franco Ines, chuckles about. Felice, after all, translates as "happy." Now, Ines runs the family restaurant, Felice a Testaccio, a boisterously popular eatery tucked on a corner of Rome's once rough-and-tumble Testaccio neighborhood.

Which might explain Trivelloni's surly side; he often sent away would-be diners, even regulars and those with reservations. As family lore tells it, Trivelloni had a soft spot for his hardscrabble neighbors and kept seats open at the restaurant just in case they needed a meal.

Today, the vibe—in and outside the eatery—is a bit more refined. Trivelloni, who started the restaurant in 1936 after selling wine from a cart as a teenager, worked both the kitchen and dining room for 73 years.

Luckily, his recipes remain. Today, they are prepared by chef Emiliana Rossetti, who learned them from Trivelloni. The menu is an ode to Roman classics, including saltimbocca alla Romana. But really the focus is the pastas. As it should be.

There is carbonara, of course. And its cousins, gricia and all'Amatriciana. The rightful star is the cacio e pepe, a famously rich swirl of tonnarelli pasta coated with both pecorino Romano and Parmesan



Uncooked ease: Warm pasta blends a sauce of tomato, herbs and ricotta.

cheeses, as well as ample black pepper.

It deserves its reputation, striking a beautiful balance of creamy and rich with peppery and bright. But that fame risks overshadowing an equally delicious offering, a not-quite-natively Roman creation by Trivelloni himself.

The simply named spaghetti alla Felice marries perfectly al dente pasta to an entirely uncooked sauce of ricotta cheese, tomatoes and tons of herbs. The result is fresh and creamy with just hints of sweetness and acidity from the tomatoes.

And the process could not be simpler. Rossetti began by lightly crushing cherry tomatoes, then combining them with a riot of chopped herbs—basil, mint, oregano, thyme and marjoram—a bit of ricotta cheese and a sprinkle of salt.

When the pasta was ready, she tossed it repeatedly with the sauce, the heat of the spaghetti lightly warming it, drawing the flavors together. That was the extent of the cooking.

The taste was simple and summery. And it made me glad I didn't need to joust with Trivelloni's sour side to get a taste.

Pasta with Ricotta, Tomatoes and Herbs

Start to finish: 45 minutes | Servings: 4

A FAMILY-OWNED RESTAURANT that opened in 1936, Felice a Testaccio in Rome is known for serving up traditional fare, including tonnarelli cacio e pepe. But it was the spaghetti alla Felice that caught our attention during a recent visit. Piping-hot, just-drained al dente pasta was tossed with grape tomatoes, olive oil, a mixture of fresh herbs and ricotta cheese. The dish was creamy but not at all heavy, and the bright, fresh flavors and textures were simple and elegant. Adapting the recipe, we learned that good-quality whole-milk ricotta is key. Look for a brand made without gums or stabilizers; it will taste purer and sweeter and have a superior texture. As for the herbs, use a mix of a few types listed in the recipe to achieve a wide spectrum of flavors, from anise sweetness to menthol freshness, hints of citrus to earthy, woody notes. If you choose to add marjoram and/or oregano, do so sparingly, as they are very assertive herbs.

Don't use more than 7 cups of water to boil the pasta. It's a scant amount, but intentionally so. The pasta cooking water is added to the sauce and noodles as they're tossed; its starchiness loosens the sauce and helps it cling to the pasta.

—Adapted by DIANE UNGER

2 pints grape or cherry tomatoes, halved
¼ teaspoon white sugar
¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided, plus more to serve
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
1½ cups finely chopped mixed fresh herbs, such as mint, basil, thyme, oregano and/or marjoram (see headnote)
15- or 16-ounce container whole-milk ricotta cheese
1 pound spaghetti or linguine
Finely grated Parmesan cheese, to serve

▪ **In a large bowl**, combine the tomatoes, sugar, ¼ cup of the oil, 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper. Toss, then, using a potato masher, gently crush the tomatoes until they release some juice. Let stand at room temperature for at least 15 minutes or up to 1 hour, stirring occasionally.

▪ **To the tomato mixture**, add the herbs and fold until incorporated. Stir in 1 cup of the ricotta; set aside. In a small bowl, stir together the remaining ricotta, remaining 2 tablespoons oil, ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper; set aside.

▪ **In a large pot**, bring 7 cups water to a boil. Stir in the pasta and 1 teaspoon salt, then cook, stirring often, until the pasta is al dente. Drain the pasta in a colander set in a large heat-proof bowl. Shake the colander to remove as much water as possible, then add the pasta to the tomato-ricotta mixture; reserve the cooking water. Using tongs, toss to combine, adding reserved pasta water 1 tablespoon at a time until the sauce clings to the noodles.

▪ **Divide the pasta** among individual bowls, drizzle with additional oil and serve, offering the seasoned ricotta and Parmesan cheese on the side. ♦

Photo: Connie Miller or CB Creatives; Styling: Christine Tobin

Olive oil is the Mediterranean secret to a
richer, moister chocolate cake

Chocolate and Olive Oil Do Go Together

Story by SHAULA CLARK

CHOCOLATE AND OLIVE OIL might seem an unlikely pair, but in the Mediterranean, they are soul mates. And while the combination shows up in numerous desserts—from cookies to gelato—nowhere is this affinity more apparent than in the deliciously moist olive oil-based chocolate cakes made across Spain, Italy and Greece.

It's all part of a larger tradition dating to ancient times, when the region's bakers used olive oil rather than the butter favored in Northern Europe. It was a matter of practicality: In the warm climate of the Mediterranean, olives and their oil were plentiful, while butter spoiled quickly without refrigeration.

But there was another benefit, too. Olive oil happens to produce particularly luscious—and flavorful—chocolate cakes.

Of all the ingredients that go into a cake, fat is one of the most important. Fat coats flour, which limits gluten formation to help cakes bake up fluffy, not chewy. Oil is particularly good at this, creating a plusher mouthfeel and softer crumb than butter because it is liquid at room temperature. Butter solidifies as it cools, resulting in a tougher texture.

We loved the rich, brownie-like quality that olive oil lends to chocolate cake. And while the fruity, peppery notes of extra-virgin olive oil can be a marvelous foil for chocolate, we found that light olive oil—which has a far more subtle flavor—also worked beautifully.

As for the chocolate, we doubled down by using both bittersweet chocolate and cocoa powder. And we found we could enhance those flavors even further with two of

chocolate's other surprising bedfellows: espresso and lemon. We often use espresso powder to amplify chocolate, as its roasty depth underscores the chocolate's pleasant astringency. And it turns out that lemon juice balances both with a shot of citrusy brightness. Additionally, the acidity of the juice adds a bit of lift by reacting with the baking soda.

The finished chocolate olive oil cake is as deeply decadent as it is simple to make—and what's not to love about that?

Chocolate Olive Oil Cake

*Start to finish: 1¼ hours
(35 minutes active), plus cooling
Servings: 10 to 12*

THIS RUSTIC CHOCOLATE CAKE is made with two surprising ingredients: olive oil and lemon juice. Extra-virgin olive oil lends fruity, peppery flavor notes. For a less prominent flavor, use light olive oil (“light” indicates the oil is refined, not lower in fat). You could even use a combination of oils—for example, a robust extra-virgin olive oil tempered with a little neutral oil. The lemon juice brings a brightness that balances the richness of the oil and chocolate, and its acidity reacts with the baking soda to provide lift. We prefer the deeper, darker color that Dutch-processed cocoa gives the cake, but natural cocoa works fine, too, if that's what you have on hand. Serve with lightly sweetened whipped cream or with ice cream or gelato. Store leftovers well wrapped at room temperature for up to three days.

Don't overbake the cake. Be sure to test it by inserting a toothpick into the center; it should come out with a few moist crumbs attached, as if baking brownies. Don't be alarmed



This rich chocolate cake gets its tender, luscious crumb from olive oil.

when the center of the cake deflates as it cools; this is normal.

—ROSE HATTAUGH

43 grams (½ cup) all-purpose flour
 ½ teaspoon baking soda
 ½ teaspoon table salt
 113 grams (4 ounces) bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
 ¾ cup olive oil (see headnote)
 21 grams (¼ cup) cocoa powder, preferably Dutch-processed (see headnote), plus more to serve (optional)
 1 teaspoon instant espresso powder
 214 grams (1 cup) white sugar, divided
 4 large eggs, separated
 ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons lemon juice

▪ **Heat the oven to 325°F** with a rack in the lower-middle position. Mist a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray. In a small bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda and salt.

▪ **In a medium saucepan** over medium, bring about 1 inch of water to a simmer. Put the chocolate in a heatproof large bowl and set the bowl on top of the saucepan; be sure the bottom does not touch the water. Stir occasionally until the chocolate is completely melted. Remove the bowl from the pan. Add the oil, cocoa, espresso powder and 107 grams (½ cup) of the sugar; whisk until well

combined. Add the egg yolks and lemon juice; whisk until smooth. Add the dry ingredients and gently whisk until fully incorporated.

▪ **In a stand mixer** with the whisk attachment or in a large bowl with a hand mixer, whip the egg whites on medium-high until frothy, 1 to 2 minutes. With the mixer running, gradually add the remaining 107 grams (½ cup) sugar, then beat until the whites hold soft peaks, 1 to 2 minutes. Add about one-third of the whipped whites to the yolk-chocolate mixture and fold with a silicone spatula to lighten and loosen the base. Scrape in the remaining whites and gently fold in until well combined and no white streaks remain; the batter will be light and airy.

▪ **Gently pour the batter** into the prepared pan and smooth the surface. Bake until well risen, the surface is crusty and a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out with a few crumbs attached, 45 to 50 minutes; do not overbake.

▪ **Set the pan on a wire rack** and immediately run a narrow-bladed knife around the edge of the cake to loosen the sides. Cool in the pan for at least 1 hour before serving; the cake will deflate as it cools. When ready to serve, remove the pan sides and, if desired, dust with cocoa. ♦

Tomorokoshi gohan is Japan's three-ingredient supper solution

Corn and Butter Turn Rice into Dinner

Story by **SHAULA CLARK**

THERE IS A DELICIOUS REASON a basic bowl of white rice is the starting point of so many meals around the world. It's affordable, filling and comforting, as well as accommodating of practically any flavor. That versatility means it can take just a few bold strokes to transform white rice into a satisfying meal.

In Japan, the solution is as easy as an ear of corn, a bit of butter and a dash of soy sauce. Called tomorokoshi gohan, the dish is white rice cooked with fresh sweet corn and seasoned with butter shoyu (a deeply flavorful combination of soy sauce and butter).

The natural sweetness of the corn is a perfect foil for the umami-packed richness of the butter shoyu, which adds salty, savory depth. Its simplicity means it's also easy to dress up further. Some versions use different grains or add smoked soy sauce and seaweed, while others are topped with fresh herbs or a dollop of fermented chili paste.

In Japan, tomorokoshi gohan is a summer dish, made when corn is in season. But we found frozen corn works well, too, creating a year-round meal made from just a few pantry basics.

For our version, we cook the rice and corn

with a tablespoon of soy sauce, then stir in the butter for richness. To finish, a scattering of scallions adds a burst of peppery freshness, resulting in a surprisingly simple dish with fresh, vibrant flavors—any time of year.

Japanese-Style Rice with Corn, Butter and Soy Sauce

*Start to finish: 50 minutes (10 minutes active)
Servings: 4 to 6*

FROZEN CORN KERNELS add color and sweetness to Japanese-style short-grain rice, with butter bringing richness and soy sauce adding umami. You can substitute ¼ cup rinsed and drained quinoa or pearly barley for an equal amount of the rice.

—LAURA RUSSELL

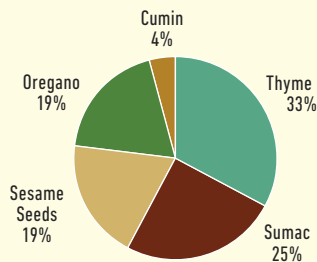
- 1½ cups Japanese-style short-grain white rice, rinsed and drained
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- Kosher salt and ground black **OR** white pepper
- 1½ cups frozen corn kernels, thawed and patted dry
- 2 tablespoons salted butter, cut into 6 pieces
- 4 scallion greens, cut on the diagonal into ¼-inch slices (about ¼ cup)



- **In a large saucepan**, stir together the rice, 2 cups water, the soy sauce and ½ teaspoon salt. Scatter the corn evenly over the top; do not stir. Cover and let stand for 30 minutes.
- **Set the pan over medium-high** and bring to a boil. Reduce to low and cook, covered and without stirring, until the rice has absorbed the water, about 18 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and let stand, covered, for 10 minutes.
- **Uncover, scatter the butter** on top, then fluff the rice with a fork, combining the rice and corn, until the butter is melted. Transfer to a serving dish and top with the scallions and a few grindings of pepper. **Optional garnish:** Toasted sesame seeds **OR** lemon wedges **OR** both

[KITCHEN COUNTS]

Charting Spice Blends

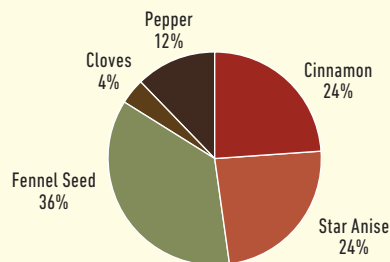


Za'atar

Makes roughly ½ cup

- 2 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons dried thyme
- 2 tablespoons ground sumac
- 1½ tablespoons dried oregano
- 1½ tablespoons toasted sesame seeds
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin

Around the world, spice blends are a one-stroke solution for easier, more flavorful cooking. There are numerous versions of classic blends, but the best balance the ratio of ingredients to create nuance and complexity, rather than

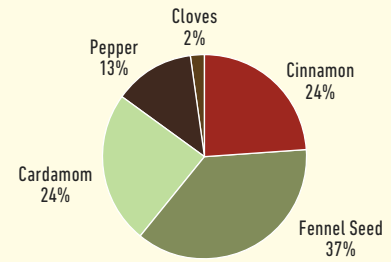


Five Spice

Makes roughly ½ cup

- 3 tablespoons fennel seeds, ground
- 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons star anise pod pieces, ground
- 1 tablespoon ground black or white pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves

one-note intensity. Since home blends almost always are fresher than purchased, it's good to know the proper proportions for making your own. Here, we deconstruct three common blends we use regularly. ♦



Garam Masala

Makes roughly ½ cup

- 3 tablespoons fennel seeds, ground
- 2 tablespoons green cardamom pods, ground
- 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves

Photo: Connie Miller of CB Creatives; Styling: Christine Tobin

Off the Air

Editors' Answers to Milk Street Radio Questions



Best Bets for Basil

KEEPING FRESH BASIL perky is a challenge. All too often, it wilts before it can be used. So what's the best way to store it for lasting freshness?

CUT BASIL IS particularly delicate. Not enough moisture, and it quickly wilts. But excess moisture on the surface of the leaves makes it spoil. Refrigerator storage can exacerbate the problem, as the cool temperatures promote condensation. We tested storing basil at room temperature and refrigerated. In both cases, we placed some sprigs in zip-close plastic bags with a paper towel, and others in jars of water either uncovered or tightly sealed with zip-close plastic bags. Both refrigerated and at room temperature, the uncovered basil stored in water had the worst longevity, wilting in just a couple days. The basil kept in the paper towel-lined bag at room temperature fared quite well, as the paper towels wicked away excess moisture. But the best method by far was storing basil with their stems in a jar of water at room temperature and covered by a bag. It stayed fresh for 11 days,

with only minor discoloration. Along the way, we learned two tips that gave our basil even better odds. First, just as with cut flowers, trimming the basil stems before storing prolonged their freshness. Second, it helped to periodically remove the bags and wipe out any moisture from condensation before re-covering the jars.

Marinara Mishaps

CANNED TOMATOES are an easy shortcut for whipping up a quick marinara, but their flavor can be tinny and overly acidic. Katie Plotkin, of Salida, Colorado, wonders: *Is there a way to adjust the acidity without using sugar?*

IN FACT, sweeteners only mask acidity (and often not that effectively) without actually adjusting the pH level of the sauce. We prepared identical batches of basic marinara with onion, garlic, olive oil and canned tomatoes. Some batches we altered by adding ingredients frequently suggested for de-acidifying tomato sauce—including sugar, honey, butter and baking soda. In one case, we grated the onion instead of chopping it (a trick we often use to promote the onion's natural sweetness). We also tried an unusual technique we came across in our research: simmering the marinara with a peeled and halved waxy potato. We then used a pH meter to measure the finished sauces' acidity. As expected, we found that adding sweeteners did little to mellow the tomatoes' bite. In fact, honey (itself slightly acidic) only intensified the problem. The best bet was adding baking soda,

an alkali often used to neutralize acids. To our surprise, the potato also was a winner. That's because potatoes contain alkaloids, which are weakly alkaline. More surprisingly yet, both techniques also produced better-tasting sauces. Just a pinch or two of baking soda yielded a richer, silkier sauce, while the potato produced a rounder, more balanced marinara.



Dough Lingo

HAVING RECENTLY taken up sourdough baking, Josh Mandel, of Albany, New York, found some of the terminology confusing. He wondered about the differences between a sourdough starter, a levain, a biga, a poolish and a preferment.

WE'LL START WITH the most basic: a preferment. This is a mixture of flour, water and yeast that creates ideal conditions for the yeast and lactic acid bacteria to feast on the flour's carbohydrates. This bubbly mixture can be used to leaven dough and impart tangy, complex flavors. There are several kinds of preferments, often described by their ratio of flour to liquid. That hydration level

determines the final texture of a given baked good. "Stiff" preferments have a low moisture content that gives them a dough-like consistency. "Liquid" preferments have far more moisture, making them as runny as pancake batter. And that's where sourdough starters, levains, bigas and poolishes come in. Preferments made with commercial yeasts include the biga (which is stiff) and the poolish (a liquid preferment). Biga typically is used in ciabatta, focaccia and other Italian breads. Poolish often is used in heavy, rustic doughs, such as rye bread. Both bigas and poolishes are not meant to be long-lasting; each fresh batch is used up entirely. Then there are wild yeast preferments, which rely on naturally occurring yeasts. These include sourdough starters, which can be maintained for years and must be continually "fed" by adding new flour to keep the yeasts alive and maintain acidity levels (the "sour" in sourdough). This method also requires discarding a portion of the old starter. On its own, a sourdough starter does not have enough leavening power for baking. But when some of that starter is mixed with additional flour and water and allowed to ferment for several hours, it becomes a levain (from the French "to rise"). Once fed, the levain—which can be either liquid or stiff—then is ready to be used in a recipe as a starter. ♦

Milk Street Radio is a weekly, hour-long public radio broadcast and podcast. Subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, TuneIn, Stitcher and Google Play.

Kitchen Cabinet

Marika Contaldo Seguso's Tomato and Bread Soup



FOR VENETIAN COOKBOOK author Marika Contaldo Seguso, pappa al pomodoro, or Italian tomato and bread soup, is a simple but satisfying meal that

comes together quickly with ingredients she typically has on hand. If your bread is fresh and you need to stale it in a hurry, cut it into ½-inch cubes, then dry it on a rimmed baking sheet in a 450°F oven for 5 to 7 minutes. To make the soup, in a large saucepan over medium, heat **3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil** until shimmering. Add **2 smashed and peeled garlic cloves** and cook, stirring, until lightly browned, about 1 minute. Stir in a **28-ounce can whole peeled tomatoes**, crushed by hand, with juices, and ½ teaspoon each **kosher salt** and **black pepper**. Bring to a simmer over medium-high, then reduce to medium and simmer, partially covered and stirring occasionally, about 10 minutes. Stir in **1 quart low-sodium vegetable or chicken broth** and **½ cup lightly packed, roughly chopped fresh basil**, then bring to a simmer over medium-high. Add **4 ounces day-old crusty white bread**, cut into ½-inch cubes, reduce to medium and simmer, uncovered and stirring occasionally, until the bread is completely soft, about 15 minutes. Off heat, taste and season with salt and pepper. Remove and discard the garlic. Ladle the soup into bowls, sprinkle with grated **Parmesan cheese** and additional basil, then drizzle with additional oil. ♦

BOOK REVIEWS | by Christopher Kimball



Tools for Food

By Corinne Mynatt

The digital age has produced innovations that give us the sense that we are smarter than earlier generations, a notion this book seeks to dispel. If metallurgy did not exist, how would one make a colander? The answer: an animal skin with holes burned into it with a hot iron. Or if one were roasting meat for hours, one might turn the spit using a dog-powered treadmill. We have nothing on our forebearers in terms of creative problem-solving, which gave us cassava squeezers, dough troughs, horsehair sieves and cheese keepers, as well as the duck press (used to press duck carcasses to make a blood sauce) and the soba kiri (a knife designed specifically to cut soba noodles). The iPhone is a great invention, to be sure, but no more so than, say, a Mongolian fire pot. They both change the way we think of ourselves as modern.



Tastes Like War

By Grace M. Cho

Grace M. Cho's mother was born in Korea when it was under the control of imperial Japan. A Korean war survivor, she lost much of her family by the time she was in her 20s. At age nine, she was separated from her family and found her way back to their now-abandoned home, living alone for most of a year, eating kimchi out of an earthenware jar buried in the backyard to stay alive. She later landed a job selling drinks at a U.S. naval base, where she developed a lifelong taste for cheeseburgers and met Cho's father, an American in the Merchant Marines. They moved to Chehalis, Washington, where Cho's mother was one of the first immigrants in town. She grew obsessed with foraging and became known as "the Blackberry Lady." Later on, she developed mental illness, probably schizophrenia. In later years, Cho started cooking for her mother, and their relationship deepened. Her mother taught her to make saengtae jjigae, a fish stew. The food so deeply connected her mother to her childhood that after she died, Cho visited the

funeral director and brought a piece of fried fish to cremate along with her. She laid the fish next to her mother and told her, "I didn't forget, Mama. I brought you the saengseon jeon." Many cookbooks tell the story of food connecting generations, but "Tastes Like War" goes deep, with an honest, no-holds-barred look at the dark underbelly of immigration and the unexpected joys of food memories that run sweet as well as bittersweet.



101 Thai Dishes You Need to Cook Before You Die

By Jet Tila

Jet Tila was born into the "first Thai food family" of Los Angeles. His parents opened Bangkok Market in 1972, followed by Royal Thai, among the first Thai restaurants in the area. Before becoming a chef, Tila worked many odd jobs (including as a deckhand for fishing charters) before eventually studying at Le Cordon Bleu and the California Sushi Academy. By 2009, Tila was running his first big restaurant, the Wazuzu at the Encore in Las Vegas. Though the title of his new book gave me pause, the recipes soon convinced me that Tila is a terrific translator; he understands how to take the notion of salty, savory, sour, spicy and sweet and package it for a North American audience. He has chosen the recipes we are most familiar with (including Thai omelet, pad Thai, drunken noodles and street-style basil pork), creating a collection that instills confidence and maximum food appeal. Tila is a good storyteller: He holds the record for the biggest stir-fry ever at 4,000 pounds, and he talks about his family's market supplying the set of "Star Trek" with durian and jackfruit since, at the time, it looked like food for Klingons. Tila also is a good culinary instructor, pointing out that sweet needs salt (bravo!), highlighting Thai cuisine's Indian and Malaysian influences, and revealing one of the main secrets of Thai cooking: how a handful of ingredients can be used in dozens of different dishes. Lesson learned. ♦

Hear interviews with Corinne Mynatt, Grace M. Cho and Jet Tila at 177milkstreet.com/radio.

TROPICAL FRUITS

MORE THAN 3,000 FRUITS NATURALLY GROW IN THE TROPICAL BAND THAT SPANS ASIA, AFRICA AND THE AMERICAS. UNTIL RECENTLY, HOWEVER, FEW WERE AVAILABLE OUTSIDE THEIR NATIVE REGIONS. MANY HIGHLY PERISHABLE SPECIES FROM ASIA AND SOUTH AMERICA NOW ARE GROWN IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND FLORIDA, WHILE ADVANCES IN SHIPPING METHODS MEAN THEY ARRIVE FRESH. HERE'S A LOOK AT SOME OF THE TROPICAL FRUITS BECOMING INCREASINGLY AVAILABLE IN PRODUCE AISLES IN THE UNITED STATES, AS WELL AS HOW TO ENJOY THEM.



DRAGON FRUIT

Of the three main varieties of dragon fruit, the most common has a white pulp dotted with edible black seeds. The texture and flavor are reminiscent of kiwi mixed with pear and watermelon. It's called pitaya, or pitahaya, in its native Central and South America, where it grows on a climbing cactus. Slice it or cut into quarters, then peel off the skin. When shopping, look for even-colored skin that gives slightly when pressed. If it's not sweet or tastes bland, the fruit was picked too early.

MANGOSTEEN

Mangosteens can be confused for passionfruit, given their similar shape and purple color, but they differ in featuring five or six woody nodules on top. The nodes equal the number of sweet, white segments inside, which have a floral, banana-peach flavor and mild acidity. Mangosteens are grown throughout tropical parts of Asia, but also are popular in the Caribbean. Open it by scoring the skin with a knife around the middle, then peel. Be careful with the purple juice; it will stain.



JACKFRUIT

Weighing up to 40 pounds, jackfruit is the largest tree fruit in the world. Its thick, bumpy peel hides meaty chunks of yellow flesh that varies from savory when unripe to quite sweet and banana-like when fully ripe. Underripe jackfruit, which is mostly sold in cans in the U.S., has become a common meat substitute. Shredded and stewed with tomato paste, spices and a little brown sugar, it makes a decent facsimile of pulled pork.

RAMBUTAN

Native to Malaysia—"rambut" in Malay means hair—this furry, anemone-looking relative of the lychee has soft spines and a cream-colored, slightly chewy white center. Peel the skin apart with your fingernails like an orange to pop out flesh that tastes similar to lychee, but more tart and with subtle strawberry and grape aromas. They're usually eaten fresh, but many cultures add them as a sweet element to balance a spicy curry. The pit looks like an almond but isn't edible.



STAR FRUIT

Also called carambola, this elongated 5-inch fruit usually has five ridges; slice it crosswise and the English name becomes clear. The juicy, crisp flesh has a floral-fruity aroma and a sweet-tart combination of lemon, plum and pineapple flavors. Its thin, waxy skin is edible, as are the seeds. Native to Southeast Asia, carambola trees have leaves that fold at night and open to the sun.





◆ *Mihalis Pahtikos crafts Damascus steel knives the way his grandfather and father taught him.* —CHANIA, CRETE ◆