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Catalan feast

This year's Chef's Table fund-raiser features cuisine of northeastern Spain. Food IC-1



Roasted piquillo peppers stuffed with breadcrumb brought color and smoky flavor to a Chef's Table benefit dinner for the AIDS Support Group of Cape Cod, held Thursday night at the Wellfleet home of Teresa Parker.

Photos by BOB SCHLESSEL for Cape Cod Times



Trained as a chef in Barcelona, Teresa Parker cooks food of northeastern Spain at her Wellfleet home to raise money for the 14th annual Chef's Table.

Catalonia is known for its simple earthy food with vivid flavors. The food of the region has influences from French, Italian, Moorish and Roman cooking.

A Catalan feast

By LAURIE HIGGINS
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Picture a candlelit room with soft music playing in the background. Vases overflowing with pink peonies and pale yellow tulips punctuate a linen-covered table set for 12. At each place setting is a menu with the meal's courses described in both Spanish and English.

While the setting and food could easily bring to mind a restaurant, "Spanish Journeys: A Catalan Feast" took place in the Wellfleet home of Teresa Parker and her husband Ed Miller, as part of the Chef's Table fund-raiser for the AIDS Support Group of Cape Cod.

This year is the 14th year of the Chef's Table fund-raiser and, June 3, Parker's guests were among 730 diners who enjoyed gourmet meals at 81 host sites. In previous years the hosts have all been restaurants, but this year three home chefs opened their kitchens and cooked their specialty for friends and strangers.

Parker is a trained Barcelona chef specializing in Catalan cuisine.

"My goal is first of all to celebrate with people who support what the AIDS Support Group does, but also to show people a little bit more about Catalan food," she said, explaining that Americans tend to think of Spanish cuisine as hot, spicy and similar to the Mexican food that most have been exposed to.

Instead, Spanish cooking has regional influences just like

GRILLED QUAIL

Scallops take flight with these small fowl. C-3

Photo by CATALAN IC-3

Cooking Catalan with Teresa Parker

Guatlles al agredolce (Grilled Sweet and Sour Quail)

12 quail (ask your butcher for partially deboned quail)

3 tablespoons pomegranate syrup

3 tablespoons honey

2 cloves of garlic, minced fine

1 sprig of rosemary, minced fine

Salt and pepper

Arrange the quail on a platter and salt and pepper them generously. Smear on the garlic, then sprinkle on the rosemary. Drizzle the quail with pomegranate syrup (it's very tart) and honey (which balances the pomegranate). Let the quail marinate for 30 minutes or so while you start a hot fire on the grill. Grill 3 or 4 minutes on each side.

An alternative way of preparing this, if you don't have pomegranate syrup is to smear on a couple of tablespoons of Dijon mustard as a counterpoint to the honey. Serves 6.

On the side, we served grilled scallions:

Grilled Scallions

18 to 24 scallions

Olive oil

Kosher or coarse sea salt

Pepper

Wash the scallions well and trim the root end close to the bulb. Drizzle lightly with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper and grill until they get tender — about 5 to 7 minutes (there is not much to them but they need a little time to get tender). Turn the scallions frequently as they cook. It's OK if they get a bit brown or charred in spots, but you don't want them totally charred. Remove scallions to a platter and cover

them with foil while the quail go on the grill.

And a Romesco sauce. This is a classic rustic Catalan sauce. Catalan cooks make lots of different versions of this sauce. It's nice on grilled fish and poultry as well as with any grilled vegetables. And it's good to make ahead because you can keep it for days in the refrigerator — just whisk it a bit if it separates, and serve at room temperature. I've never found nyoras here in the US (the dried peppers used there for this sauce — I bring them back from Spain when we travel there). Dried ancho chiles work fine.

Romesco Sauce

1 large or two small dried ancho chiles, soaked

1/4 cup hazelnuts or a combination of hazelnuts and almonds, toasted

4 tomatoes, roasted, peeled and seeds removed

3 cloves garlic, peeled

1/2 cup minced parsley

1/2 cup olive oil

1 to 2 teaspoons Kosher or sea salt

Prepare the chiles, tomatoes, and nuts: Put the chiles in a bowl and cover with very hot water; let soak about one hour. While chiles soak, heat oven to 350 degrees, place the tomatoes in a small baking dish and bake for 10 minutes and set aside. When they're cool enough to handle, peel off the skin then cut the tomatoes crosswise and push out most of the seeds.

Meanwhile, toast the nuts, spread out on a cookie sheet, until they smell toasty and are just beginning to brown. Dump them out onto a clean kitchen towel and rub them a bit when they come out of the oven — this removes much of the tough skin. Once they're done soaking, remove stems and seeds



BON SCHLOERB/Cape Cod Times

Quail and scallions are ready for grilling at Teresa Parker's home.

from the chiles, you'll only use the softened flesh.

Put together the sauce: Place the chiles, nuts, tomatoes, garlic, parsley, olive oil, and salt in a blender and blend to chop up nuts and combine well. The sauce should remain a little chunky. Taste for salt and add more if needed.

Makes one cup of sauce (enough for grilled quail and vegetables for six):

Once you make the basic dough for these fritters, you can add just about anything.

Bunyols de llagosta

(Lobster fritters)

1 pound potatoes (boiled, peeled, mashed)

1/2 cup water

4 tablespoons butter

Pinch of salt

1/2 cup flour

4 eggs

Pinch of cayenne

1 clove garlic, minced fine

3/4-pound lobster meat in small chunks

Handful parsley, minced

Abundant oil for frying — olive oil or half olive oil, half peanut oil

Boil, peel, and mash the potatoes and set aside. Place the water, butter, and salt in a large saucepan and heat it to melt the butter then bring it to the boil. Add the flour all at once and stir vigorously, keeping the pan over the heat until the dough begins to form a

Please see **RECIPES /C-4**

continued from C-3

ball and pulls away from the sides of the pan. Take off the heat and add the eggs, one at a time, beating well to incorporate each egg. Add the lobster, potatoes, or whatever other flavoring you're featuring, season with the cayenne, garlic, and a pinch more salt if needed.

Pour about 1 1/2 inches of oil into a tall saucepan and heat it to about 350 degrees - hot but not smoky. Drop rounded teaspoonfuls of fritter dough into the hot oil and fry until deep golden. Remove fritters from the oil with a slotted spoon and place them on a plate with a paper towel to pick up any excess oil. Sprinkle hot fritters with parsley and serve.

Pebrots de piquillo farcits amb brandada de bacallà

(Piquillo peppers stuffed with salt cod brandade)

"Piquillo" peppers are small, very sweet, flavorful red peppers from Navarra in Spain. A couple of varieties are available in the U.S. - I get mine at Capone Foods in Somerville. They are also available on-line at tienda.com.

The flavor of the piquillos is really something special, but you could make this dish by preparing your own sweet red peppers. Wash small, sweet red peppers (as these are larger than piquillos, one per person is enough for a first course, but prepare some extras for the sauce), rub with a little olive oil, roast in a 350 degree oven until tender and beginning to brown; cool and gently peel off skins; cut around the stem and pull out seed pods with the stem - you'll stuff them at the stem end.

For 6 people as a first course:

For the peppers and sauce:

18 to 24 whole piquillo peppers (Pincha brand fits this many, tightly packed, into one 14-ounce can) OR 10 small fresh sweet red peppers, roasted and peeled, stem and seeds removed as described in the note above

1 1/2 cups heavy cream

A good handful parsley, minced

The brandade:

1 pound boneless dried salt cod (to be soaked for three days)

1 pound potatoes

3 cloves garlic

1 bay leaf

1 cup olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

Prepare the brandade filling. Three or four days before you plan to prepare the peppers, soak the salt cod, placing it in a bowl of cold water in the refrigerator and changing the water a couple of times each day. Once it is rehydrated, it should not taste overly salty.

Place the de-salted cod in a large skillet with the bay leaf and add cold water just to cover the fish. Bring the water to the boil then turn off the flame and let the fish poach 10 minutes. Drain and flake the cod. Meanwhile, boil the potatoes until tender, then cool, peel, and mash the potatoes in a large mixing bowl (you may use a mixer but not a processor - it makes them gummy). Add the flaked cod and continue mixing. Mince the garlic fine and add it to the brandade. Drizzle in the olive oil and keep mixing until the brandade reaches a smooth consistency; season to taste with salt and pepper. (This can be prepared a day or two in advance and kept in the fridge.)

Stuff the brandade gently into the prepared peppers and place them on a lightly oiled baking sheet large enough to hold the stuffed peppers in a

single layer. If you are using piquillos, stuff two per person, if you are using common sweet

peppers, one per person is enough for a first course. Reserve the additional peppers for the sauce. Bake the stuffed peppers for about 30 minutes at 350 degrees - until the filling is hot.

While peppers are baking, boil the cream in a saucepan for a few minutes, just to heat and thicken it slightly. Place the peppers in a blender, pour the cream over them and blend to make a smooth sauce. Serve the peppers with a good drizzle of sauce and a sprinkling of minced parsley.