



The Spanish Kitchen: Regional Ingredients, Recipes, And Stories from Spain

Clarissa Hyman

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Spanish food has been shaped by many influences: among them Roman, Arabic, Jewish, and the products brought back by the Conquistadores from the New World. There are many common threads within the cooking of Spain, from salt cod to saffron, and on the whole, Spanish home cooking throughout the Peninsula is simple, uncomplicated, and direct, with a singular lack of adornment on the plate. This could be austere, were it not for the strong, true flavors of prime ingredients rooted in the local terra (terroir) that need no disguise or affectation. Yet, for both historical and geographical reasons, the sense of regional identity and separatism remains strong in the many provinces (kingdoms) of Spain, and this is also proudly reflected in the cooking. The North-West of Spain, for example, probably has more in common with other Celtic countries than it does with Moorish Andalusia. Centuries of isolation from the rest of Europe has also safeguarded many wonderful ingredients that even now remain unknown both outside their region of origin and outside of the country.

Nonetheless, in the last 30 years change has been rapid: the Spanish are fully part of new Europe; they are interested in new modes of eating, new dishes, new lifestyles. Many Spanish kitchens now boast Maldon Salt and Parmesan cheese as status symbols, and magazines offer Spanish takes on Chinese cooking and low-fat recipes for modern Spanish mothers. Although there has been a rush to industrialize food production-TV commercials advertising ready made paellas, for example, are no longer seen as subversive-there has been a parallel growth in Spanish pride in quality products and a determination to safeguard their unique Iberian heritage. Perhaps more than any other people in Europe, the Spanish have one foot in their unique culinary past, one in the global present. The future of Spanish food, cooking, and traditions, remains an open and intriguing question.

The book is divided into 17 chapters, each highlighting a different ingredient or ingredients from a different region of Spain. These introductory narratives tell the story of each ingredient in terms of culture, history, cultivation, traditions, location, context, and so on, and above all bring the products to life by talking to the producers themselves. Each essay is then followed by a selection of five recipes using the product.

The ingredients have been selected so they represent a cross-section of Spanish produce: some familiar, others less so, some expected, some surprising, some artisan, and some larger-scale.

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