

Colin Moody
The Happy Palate



IT'S PRIME TOMATO TIME

We are in the prime harvest season for heirloom tomatoes on the Central Coast, and you will find the best prices all year on your favorite vined fruit. There are more than 3,000 varieties of heirloom tomatoes, with many new hybrids coming into the market every year. These tomatoes come from a time before commercial farms and grocery stores; when they were grown for flavor, not shelf life.

We are so fortunate right now. There has been such an exponential increase in these wonderfully flavorful tomatoes available to us. Over the last 20 years, with strong public support, we have seen the largest increase in heirloom varieties ever — not only in tomatoes, but in almost every fruit and vegetable. This biodiversity is important for the produce world, just as it is for our world. Diversity keeps us strong and resilient to disease.

Brandywine, purple Cherokee, banana legs, Caspian pink, dingwall Scotty, druzba, zebra stripe and just plain "delicious" are just a few of the eclectic names you will find as you discover the wonderful world of heirlooms.

There are tiny ones 3/4 of an inch in diameter and huge ones as big as 5 pounds! Some that are pineapple scented, some that look like bell peppers (both inside and out), some with stripes, and every color you can think of.

It is a constant learning process for us as chefs. We get educated by the organic farmers and, in turn, try to educate the guests we serve. We get so inspired by the farmers, and that enthusiasm then translates into the dishes we prepare.

Dina, my main organic farm supplier from ALBA organics in Salinas, will call me up bursting with energy and excitement from her morning walk in the fields. Bubbling with joy, she tells me of the sweet smells and flavors, "fresh off the vine!" And the wonderful rustic dishes they would create quickly from the day's offerings.

These tomatoes, rich in flavor, at the peak of ripeness, make a chef's job easy. The trick is not to get in the way of the already abundant flavor; rather, one needs to only highlight and accentuate what nature has already given you. Find flavors that naturally build on each other to make your whole tongue happy. For example, tarragon and tomato; the slight acid in the tomato blends beautifully with the sweet nosey aroma of the tarragon. Add a slight hint of orange to bring out fruity flavor of the tomato, and you have yourself a full-palate experience. Then serve with a roasted garlic-brie baguette for some crispy-creamy textures.

The following recipe (Chilled Heirloom Tomato Soup) does just that. The second recipe (Avocado Faux Gras, Heirloom Tomato Chutney and Crab Toast) is a little more daring. You can check out at the NatureSweet Carmel TomatoFest at Quail Lodge in Carmel Valley this Sunday between noon and 4 p.m. I will be there, along with 50 other chefs making the most from nature's bounty.

Chilled Heirloom Tomato Soup with Roasted Garlic-Brie Baguette
(Makes 6-8 servings)

For the soup
3 lbs. of your favorite heirloom tomatoes (6-8, depending on size)
2 tsp. champagne vinegar,
1 tsp. wildflower honey, or other honey
3 T. fresh orange juice
1 T. fresh tarragon, finely minced
Sea salt and white pepper to taste

For the toast
1 bulb of garlic, with top third cut off
3 T. olive oil
1 baguette (sourdough or sweet), sliced 1/4- to 1/2-inch thick
6-8 oz. brie, sliced to fit on baguette slice
Sea salt and white pepper to taste

Please see Moody page D4

Monterey County
Taste

www.montereyherald.com

Coming in Go!

Tomato time!
NatureSweet Carmel TomatoFest gets ready to celebrate nature's bounty



D

Culinary adventures in an isolated land — inside the beautiful colonial city of Old Havana



A man relaxes on the seawall overlooking Boca de Colimar in Havana.

MARIE PERUCCA-RAMIREZ/Special to The Herald

COCINA
Cubana

By **MARIE PERUCCA-RAMIREZ** and **JULIO RAMIREZ**
Herald Correspondents

Cuba lies 90 miles off the Florida coast — an island nation shimmering in the Caribbean sun — just off shore, yet a world away. The combination of a strict trade embargo imposed by the United States and the nature of a socialist regime has effectively isolated Cuba from U.S. tourism, mass marketing, retail fads and fashions, chain stores and shopping malls.

We wanted to see this, Castro's Cuba, before the golden arches, T-shirt shops and investors from Miami invaded.

Arriving in Old Havana we found a beautiful colonial city — designated a United Nations World Heritage site — yet sorely in need of a paint job. Many buildings in La Habana Vieja are crumbling, but they're still occupied and often overcrowded. Residents without water pressure haul buckets of water up several floors from the street on cables; laundry hangs from myriad balconies; electricity is intermittent.

It's hot and humid, but the streets are clean and bustling with European tourists and gregarious locals. Folks stop to buy pizza slices or Cuban sandwiches from tiny stalls, or sip the juice from coconuts with straws as they visit in doorways or peruse the book market in the Plaza de Armas. At sunset, the *malecón*, Havana's seaside walkway, is full of strollers catching the evening breeze. Bands play son, salsas and Latin jazz in restaurants and clubs. People shop at green grocers, bakeries and butcher shops; there are no supermarkets.

There are no billboards touting the latest in consumer goods — just omnipresent billboards extolling the virtues of the Cuban revolution. Most Cubans rely on buses, trucks and bicycles for transportation: private cars are expensive, and those few who do have autos are often driving lovingly maintained models from the '50s.

Like its vibrant music, the traditional food of Cuba is a reflection of its ethnic history. The use of wine, red vinegar, olive oil and bay leaf in many dishes — giving them that distinctive "Cuban" taste — is the legacy of Spain, as are olives, raisins and capers. Okra and plantains, found in many recipes, reflect Cuba's African

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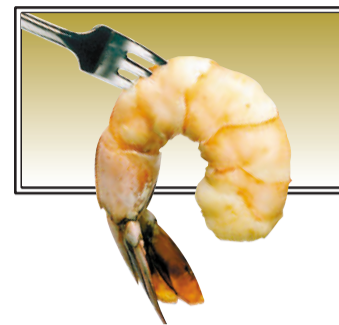
Above: Julio Ramirez samples habanero chiles. Left: American cars from the 1950s are common on the streets of Havana. Below: A family relaxes in front of their home as a young girl drinks from a coconut.

MARIE PERUCCA-RAMIREZ/Special to The Herald



Good to know

What's cooking?



Quick fix

Puerto Rican-style Chicken and Rice
(Serves 2)

1/2 med. green bell pepper, seeded and cut into cubes
4 med. garlic cloves, peeled
1/2 small onion, peeled and quartered
1 small tomato, cored and cut into quarters
1/2 cup cilantro leaves, plus 2 T. for garnish
1/2 cubanelle pepper, seeded and cubed
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 T. olive oil
2 bone-in, chicken-breast halves (about 1 lb. total), skin removed
1/2 cup long-grain white rice
1/2 cup beer
1 cup frozen peas
1 cup sliced sweet pimientos

Steps: Place bell pepper, garlic, onion, tomato, 1/2 cup cilantro and cubanelle pepper in a blender or food processor; blend until mixed. Add salt and pepper to taste. Set aside. Heat oil in a large, nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Brown chicken on all sides, about 5 minutes. Add the rice and sauté 1 minute. Add the beer, sofrito (vegetable mixture) and 1/2 cup water. Bring to a simmer, lower the heat and cook 15 minutes. Do not let the liquid come to a boil. Add the peas and pimiento. Cook 5 more minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle with remaining cilantro.

—From Linda Gassenheimer at www.DinnerInMinutes.com

On the shelf

Steam building up
Folks oriented to health foods may have been steaming their broccoli for years, but it was only recently that Green Giant and Birds Eye started selling veggies in little plastic bags ready to steam in the microwave. (The bags have a few little vents that allow the steam to escape.) And now you can harness the miracle technology of little holes in plastic bags yourself. With Glad's new Simply Cooking microwave steaming bags and Ziploc Zip'n Steam microwave steam cooking bags, you drop in a few servings of fresh or frozen vegetables or fish, seal the bag and zap away. Presto: You have a really hot bag (wait 30 seconds before opening) of steamed food.

Kitchen tips

Unbreakable
When chilling down hot coffee or tea to make iced, place a metal spoon or other utensil in the pitcher first. It will absorb quite a bit of heat, and prevent your glass pitcher from cracking from the sudden shock. —www.foodnetwork.com

Q&A

Q: How do I sun-dry tomatoes?
A: While it is possible to sun-dry tomatoes at home, it's the sort of thing that you need to be very, very careful with. The basics: Slice tomatoes in half (blanch and peel beforehand, if you want), place them on a rack, and lay them in the sun (ideally covered with cheesecloth) until completely dry. The problem with that, though, is that nighttime dew and moisture contribute to bacteria growth, so you'll have to monitor them carefully to make sure that's not an issue. If that seems too daunting, you can also dry them in the oven (a low oven for five to six hours is fine) or use a food dehydrator. When they're ready, they should be flexible and dry, not quite leathery but not brittle either.

All about wine

Our online wine expert George Edwards of WineMarket in Pacific Grove writes about muscat. Read Edwards' columns or ask him a wine-related question of your own. Go to www.montereyherald.com, click on columnists and find "All About Wine."



TASTE

Cuba

From page D1

heritage, while the heavy use of Native American roots and tubers — especially yucca, malanga, boniato and potato — underscores the contribution of the island's indigenous peoples.

In the past, being a chef in Cuba was considered a humble, low-class occupation — the legacy of slavery and colonialism. The Asociación Culinaria de Cuba (The Cuban Culinary Association) has worked to change that perception as well as to develop the art of cooking. While chefs are trained in the continental style so they can cater to European tourists, one of the objectives of the Asociación Culinaria has been to encourage the preservation and promotion of the traditional Cuban cuisine, and some restaurants such as Bodeguita del Medio, a favorite of Hemmingway's, proudly specialize in the classic Criollo dishes such as Pierna Asada (roast citrus-marinated leg of pork) and Picadillo (ground beef in a spicy tomato sauce with capers, raisins and olives).

In Cuba, restaurants have set menus; there are no daily specials. Because the restaurants are state run, they can only buy from one purveyor, an agency of the state; food is allotted according to need and availability. Often kitchens are out of ingredients, so many dishes may be either missing ingredients, have substitutions or be dropped from the menu. A chef's creativity is limited: He can't decide to order unusual ingredients for a new dish he's creating — he won't be able to get them.

Despite the difficulties, the chefs we talked to were proud of their professions and their cuisine. One talented chef, who has dreams of cooking outside of Cuba one day, invited us to enjoy a five-course meal that she prepared to showcase Criollo cuisine: a feast that included *croquetas* with ham, *tostones* (twice-fried plantains) and *chicharones* (crisp-fried pork skins); then *tamal in cazuela* (a thick soup of tender corn with pork), *ropa vieja* (shredded beef simmered in spicy *sofrito*), *yuca con mojo criollo* and, for dessert, *torrejas elegantes* (an elegant bread pudding with coconut and cinnamon).

In contrast to the state-owned restaurants, *paladares* are small, private, family-run restaurants usually operating in homes. When Castro opened Cuba to international travel in '93 to bolster a failing economy, he



MARIE PERUCCA-RAMIREZ/Special to The Herald

One of the omnipresent political billboards in Havana, this one proclaiming "Every Cuban an Army."

allowed the licensing of these small family restaurants. The *paladares* were to be heavily taxed, serve only Criollo food, be limited to 12 seats and not permitted to serve beef or lobster (these high-end items being reserved for export or for the state-owned restaurants). "However," we were told, "that doesn't mean that you can't get beef or lobster in a *paladar* — many things are possible with the right 'incentive.'"

We enjoyed eating at the *paladares*. They often offered more variety and creative cuisine than state-run restaurants but, like the state-run restaurants, *paladares* had the same difficulty obtaining food items. One *paladar* we ate at was out of all the pork dishes on its menu except one — a smoked chop. They were also out of mint (so no mojitos!) and out of Cristal beer.

At Havana's central marketplace, we were surprised at the lack of vibrancy, abundance and activity usually found in marketplaces in other Latin American countries. There was no friendly calling out to passers-by to sample fruits, no bargaining or negotiating prices. Because the vendors don't own the produce they're selling — it belongs to the state — there's no incentive to compete for customers. We found roots and tubers, avocados, coconuts, guavas, papayas, onions, citrus, pineapples and plantains — primarily New World crops — set out for sale, but not displayed in the artful piles often seen in Mayan or Andean markets.

Upstairs in the meat section, only a few stalls were open and very little meat was available. In one stall, the vendor was

offering a baloneylike meat sausage; in another, a man was butchering goat heads; in a third stall the vendor was selling tongues. Hearts, livers and lungs were also available, but there were no "prime" cuts of meat. Rationing and the embargo have affected the marketplace and the available food choices.

The people we met in Havana were warm, welcoming and proud. We left the city looking forward to meeting the



Cuban picadillo with brown rice and a side salad.

country folk — and sampling the cuisine of the Cuban countryside (look for that article soon!).

Picadillo

(Serves 8 to 10)

This is a very popular dish in Cuba; every family has its own recipe. Use it to make sloppy Joes with a twist, or as a filling for tacos or serve it, as they do in Cuba, with rice and black beans. Tastes even better reheated; freezes well.

- 3 T. olive oil
- 1 onion, diced (about 1½ cup)
- 1 large green bell pepper, seeded and diced, (about 1 cup)
- 3 T. minced garlic
- 2 lbs. lean ground beef
- 4 tomatoes, peeled, seeded and diced (about 3½ cups)
- 6 oz. tomato paste
- ½ tsp. ground cumin
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- ½ tsp. ground cloves
- ½ tsp. oregano
- 1 T. red wine vinegar
- 1 cup green olives with pimientos, sliced in thirds
- ½ cup raisins
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 2 T. kosher (coarse) salt (or to taste)

1 tsp. pepper
3 T. capers, drained (optional)
Steps: Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat; sauté the onion, bell pepper, and garlic until the onions are softened, about 6 minutes. Add the beef and, using a wooden spoon, break up the meat pieces and mix well with the sautéing ingredients. Cook for 7 minutes, no longer, then add the tomatoes, tomato paste, cumin, cinnamon, cloves, oregano, and vinegar; mix well; cover; reduce heat to medium

low and cook for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add olives and raisins. Stir, cover, and cook for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add sugar, salt and pepper, and cook 15 minutes more, stirring occasionally. Add capers (optional), stir and remove from heat. Serve hot.

Black beans Cubano

(Makes 12 servings)

These Cuban beans are creamy, slightly sweet and flavorful. They're a great make-ahead dish; use in tacos, burritos or as sides for eggs, pork, beef, BBQ, burgers. They're easy to reheat: Eat some now and save half for another day.

- 2 lbs. black beans, sorted, rinsed, and drained
- 4 cups chopped onions
- ½ lb. bacon, cut into ½-inch pieces, gently cooked (not crisp) to render out grease; discard grease
- ½ cup olive oil
- 4 T. minced garlic
- 3 serrano chiles (or more to taste), sliced in half
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- ½ cup red wine
- 3 quarts chicken stock (homemade or use "boxed" broth)
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 T. sugar
- 1 tsp. oregano
- 1 tsp. cumin
- 1 tsp. slightly ground black pepper
- 1 T. plus 1 tsp. kosher (coarse) salt-or to taste

½ cup sweet rice vinegar
Steps: Combine the beans, onions, bacon, oil, garlic, chiles, bell pepper, stock, wine and bay leaves in a heavy pot. Bring to boil, reduce the heat to low and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until beans soften and the liquid thickens and becomes creamy — about three to four hours. If the beans become dry before they soften, add water — don't let them scorch. When the beans are soft, add sugar, cumin, oregano, salt and pepper. Cook for 15 to 20 minutes more: you want the flavor of the spices to penetrate the beans. Then add the vinegar, stir, cover and turn off the heat. Let the beans rest for 45 minutes to one hour, stirring occasionally.
Pick out the chiles and bay leaves, then serve. Store in refrigerator for up to a week or freeze.



COLIN MOODY/Special to The Herald

Moody

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For soup: Chop tomatoes and, in a food processor, purée with vinegar, honey and orange juice, until smooth. Pour purée through a sieve into a bowl, pressing hard on solids. Discard solids (compost). Stir in minced tarragon and season to taste with the sea salt and white pepper. Soup may be made 1 day ahead and chilled and covered. Re-season soup before serving.

For toast: Preheat oven to 380 degrees. Place garlic bulb (cut side down) in a small roasting dish with 3 T. olive oil. Cover with foil. Bake for approximately 35 minutes, or until garlic is tender and cut side is a deep golden brown. Remove garlic from pan and let cool at room temperature for 30 minutes. Bring the oil, from the roasted garlic, to the sliced baguette. Lay the sliced baguette on a cookie sheet and brush with leftover garlic oil. Place in the oven for approximately 10 minutes, or until light brown. Let cool. Squeeze the roasted garlic cloves out of the bulb. Place one slice of brie and one garlic clove on each slice of baguette. Serve with the chilled heirloom tomato soup.

Avocado Faux Gras with Heirloom Tomato Chutney and Dungeness Crab Brioche Toast

(Makes 6 appetizer portions)

- Avocado Faux Gras:**
- 2 ripe Hass avocados, pitted and skin removed
- 1 T. lime juice
- 2 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1 sheet of gelatin, dissolved in warm water
- ½ tsp. fresh tarragon, finely chopped
- ½ tsp. fresh chives, finely sliced
- 2 cloves of roasted garlic
- Pinch of white pepper
- 1 cup shell-off pistachios, chopped
- 1 tsp. Hawaiian salt (pink) or sea salt

For the chutney
2 cups mixed-color heirloom tomatoes, peeled seeded and medium diced
2 tsp. passionfruit purée, or flesh of two passionfruit
1 T. champagne vinegar
2 tsp. vanilla sugar (or 2 tsp. sugar, plus 1 drop of vanilla extract)
Sea salt to taste

For the crab toast
6 thick sliced brioche bread, or substitute your favorite bread
½ cup melted butter

- ½ cup shaved Parmesan, or asiago cheese
- ¾ cup Dungeness crab meat (shells removed)

For the avocado: In a food processor, place avocado, lime juice, mustard, gelatin, garlic and pepper. Purée until mixed well. Add tarragon and chives; pulse until just incorporated.

Lay down a 12-inch by 12-inch piece of wax, or parchment paper. With a rubber spatula, scrap out the avocado mixture onto the wax paper along one edge so that you can roll it into a "log" shape. Carefully roll into 1-inch-thick roll. Gently pick up from both ends and place in the freezer for 2-3 hours.

Lay down chopped pistachios and spread out evenly on a clean surface. Take out the avocado roll and unwrap the wax, or parchment. Place the avocado roll on the pistachios and roll back and forth to coat the roll evenly. Wrap this in plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator until ready to use. Reserve the salt for garnish.

For the chutney: In a 1-quart saucepan over medium heat, place the chopped tomatoes, passionfruit, vinegar and sugar. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to simmer and cook until it begins to thicken, about 30 minutes (it should have an oatmeal-like consistency). Add salt to taste, and reserve in the refrigerator until ready to use.

For the toast: Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cut each slice of brioche into two triangle pieces of bread and place on a cookie sheet. Brush the melted butter evenly on each piece of bread. Place equal amounts of crab on each piece, then sprinkle the shaved Parmesan over the crab. Place in the oven and bake until edges of bread turn brown and the cheese is melted.

To plate, slice the avocado log into six equal pieces (1½ inches to 2 inches wide), and stand each piece on end on every plate. Then place two pieces of crab toast on each plate next to the avocado. Then put two spoonfuls of chutney on each plate. Sprinkle the Hawaiian salt or sea salt on top of every avocado section. Make sure to eat a little of each component in every bite. Enjoy!

Colin Moody is executive chef at Asilomar Conference Grounds and president of the American Culinary Federation, Monterey Bay. He is passionate about local and sustainable foods. Contact Moody at chefmoody@sbcglobal.net.

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The Farm

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An authentic Cuban mojito.

Cuban mojito (Serves 1)
This makes the perfect mojito — a little more time-consuming than other recipes, but delicious.

- 1 lime (yielding 2 T. of juice)
 - 17 fresh mint leaves
 - ½ oz. (3 T.) simple syrup (see note)
 - 3 oz. silver rum
 - Ice
 - 6 oz. club soda
 - 4 slices lime (garnish)
 - 1 small mint sprig (garnish)
- Steps:** Quarter the lime, squeeze the juice into a glass, then add the lime quarters, 12 mint leaves and simple syrup, muddle the mixture well, extracting the rest of the juice and oils from the lime peel and mint; press mixture through a small sieve into a highball glass (discard the remains in the sieve), add rum, ice, soda, three slices of lime and five whole mint leaves to the glass. Stir. Garnish the rim with the fourth lime wheel; top with the mint sprig. Serve with a straw.
Note: Make simple syrup by combining equal parts water and sugar, bringing to a boil and cooling.