

MONDAY, JULY 20, 1992

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Olives and olive oil have ancient history

I really can't tell you which I enjoy more, strolling through a Greek grocery breathing in air scented with Calamatta olives or stirring a few anchovy-stuffed olives in a vodka on the rocks.

I love olives! Whether they're served on a steaming botana or sliced and tossed with some cherry tomatoes and a light vinaigrette, I love 'em even more.

Olive history

The olive is one of the oldest known fruit crops. Man grew olive trees even before recorded history. It is not known when the wild olive was first brought under cultivation. But records point to the limestone hills of Attica, the Greek peninsula, as the seat of its first cultivation. The olive is frequently mentioned in the Bible.

The Spaniards brought the olive to California in 1769. In the early Franciscan missions, the fruit was pressed for oil and used in cooking and for lamp fuel.

At last count, there were over 15 million acres of olive trees in the world. Each year, over 9 million metric tons of olives, and more than 3 million tons of olive oil are produced. There's no doubt that olive oil, especially the more trendy upscale pressed virgin varieties, are hot sellers in local delis and specialty stores.

Prices range from under \$2 for domestically produced varieties to more than \$30 for some of the more exotic venues.

The countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea grow most of the world's olives, with Italy and Spain taking top honors in both the production of olives and olive oil.

The olive tree is adapted to a hot, dry climate; and does well on many different soils. For bearing fruit, it must have water, along with good drainage. Trees come into production at five years of age, but are not in full production for at least another 10-15 years. They are long-lived however, because it is known that trees brought to the United States by the Spaniards are still bearing fruit.

Harvesting methods

For the production of high quality table olives, the fruit must be picked by hand. Harvesting olives for oil is usually done mechanically, either by knocking the fruit from the trees or by shaking.

Methods for processing olives for the table vary widely. There are three different methods. The traditional Spanish method which has unique yellowish-green olives being fermented. Secondly, the American method in which half-ripe reddish fruit is fermented, and lastly, (my favorite) the Greek method, in which fully ripe, dark purple fruit is preserved.

In most processing methods, a weak solution of lye is applied to neutralize the bitter principle. The lye penetrates the olives and hydrolyzes the bitter taste. Then the lye treated olives are immediately rinsed and soaked in water with frequent changes to remove the lye.

The washed olives are then placed in fermentation tanks and barrels and covered with brine. The use of lye is not allowed in Greece; instead, they rely on the brine to lessen and mask the bitterness, hence the different taste.

Processing olives

Olive oil is produced by mechanical extraction of the ground fruit. Traditionally, this involves three steps — the crushing of the fruit, the pressing (usually two-four times), and the separating of the oil from the liquor.

Most table olives are prepared commercially in ready-to-serve form, using one of these methods. Canned or bottled green Spanish olives are usually pitted with the pit cavity being stuffed with pimentos, onions, almonds, anchovies or other edibles.

Canned, ripe American olive production is centered in California. The olives are picked when they are yellow to red in color, cured, and packed in enamel-lined cans, covered with a salt solution, sealed, and sterilized.

Black, naturally ripe olives from Greece are kept on the trees until they are fully matured and completely dark. The fruit is brined with a frequent change of water to hasten the softening of the bitterness. Sold mostly by bulk in Greek groceries and some smaller stores, they come whole with pits intact.

Olives are low in calories with the average large olive coming in at about five calories each. So the next time you want to sizzle one in your martini, what the heck, ask for two!

See recipes inside.



E • X • P • L • O • R • E SPAIN



In the spirit of the summer Olympic games, embark on a culinary voyage to Espana, the land of explorers. Discover culinary treasures like paella and gazpacho.

By KEELY WYOGNIK
STAFF WRITER

The party is just beginning in Spain. There are two events to celebrate — the summer Olympic games, and 500th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus whose voyage was financed by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain.

Don't forget Spanish explorer Juan Ponce DeLeon who discovered Florida in 1513 while searching for the mythical fountain of youth. Now it's your turn to explore and discover Spain's culinary delights.

"Spanish food is not hot, but it has a lot of flavor from herbs like rosemary, thyme and cilantro," said Angelica Rivasdenira of Beverly Hills who lived in Spain for two years.

Like Michigan, Spain is on a peninsula bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. Fish and shellfish are abundant and featured in many dishes. Vegetables and fruits of all kinds flourish. Spain is known for olives, and Valencia oranges. Olive oil, garlic, saffron, paprika, rice, chickpeas, and smoked sausage are also prevalent in Spanish cooking.

Paella is the national dish. According to legend, it originated centuries ago in Valencia when field workers cooked a communal lunch of rice, vegetables, seafood, chicken, and sausages in a shallow iron skillet (paella pan).

"In Spain when families have picnics they cook paella outside over a fire made from orange tree branches," said Rivasdenira. "The orange wood gives it a special flavor."

Gazpacho, a colorful, chilled tomato, cucumber soup, is another popular dish.

"Spain is old in tradition, the cuisine is part of that tradition, and it continues," said Ismael Durin, manager of Don Ricardo's Spanish restaurant in Redford Township.

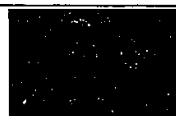
Lunch is the main meal of the day in Spain, and is served at 1 p.m. Dinner is served, 8:30-10:30 p.m. Tapas, (appetizers) precede dinner, and are served around 6:30 p.m.

See Spanish recipes inside.



Spanish wine producers make Olympic strides

FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

SELECTIONS

Conde de Valdemar
Rioja:
• '87 Concha \$9
• '88 Reserva \$11
Miguel Torres:
• '90 Val de Sol \$6
• '90 Gran Vins Sol \$11
• '86 Coronas \$7
• '86 Gran Coronas \$15
• Cordon Rojo
Cordon Rojo \$9

Spain's acceptance this year as a member of the European Economic Community has given Spanish wine producers a challenge. They've been forced to compete on a quality level with the best wines of Europe or drown in a sea of wine.

During the decade of the 1980s, Spanish producers prepared for the quality challenge in a country with unusual grape varieties perfectly adapted to the soil and climate. One short feature doesn't do Spanish wines justice. There are sherries, cava (Spanish sparkling wine) and magnificent Riojas at the threshold of greatness to be enjoyed.

If you've not discovered these wines, let the Olympic spirit get you started searching out the superior wines of Vega Sicilia and Pesquera from the Ribera del Duero region. Producers such as Miguel Torres in Penedes and Conde's Raimat estate are soaring to new heights with well-priced bottlings.

Try your hand at matching Spanish wines with tapas — the appetizer-sized dishes unusual to the Spanish way of life which offer the perfect excuse to chat with friends over a glass of wine.

The origin of the word tapa, which literally means cover, goes back to Andalusia in the south of Spain, around the middle of the last century, from the name given to a slice of ham, cheese or bread used to cover the wineglass served to the horsemen as they arrived at the roadside inn tired and thirsty. The tapa protected the wineglass from dust or rain. In fact, the tapa was free — the patron paid only for the wine.

Before lunch, and the dinner hour in Spain, bars and taverns fill with friendly groups carrying on animated conversations while nibbling small portions of anything edible, from almonds and olives to tiny fried fish or sausages.

Not far from the French border, close to the Pyrenees, the Rioja region has been producing table wines since the 12th century. The name Rioja is a contraction of the Rio Oja, a mountain stream in the area which flows into the River Ebro. More than 40 bodegas (wineries) are currently producing Riojas that you will recognize as sensibly priced, flavorful wines made principally from tempranillo and mazuero grapes.

The character of red Rioja wines, rich in color and tannin, develops from the unusual, extended aging in oak casks which is a regional tradition. Conde de Valdemar, a producer with more than a century's experience producing Rioja is relatively new on the Ameri-

can wine scene. About 20 years ago, this fifth generation family bodega began to depart slightly from the traditional Rioja wines. Today, they are without a doubt some of the finest Riojas on the market.

The Torres family has owned vineyards in the Penedes near Barcelona, and produced wine since the 17th century. Their entry into the world market began in 1858. Today, Torres is the largest individually owned producer of premium Spanish wines, and the number one selling Spanish table wine in the United States.

Available in bookstores "The Catalan Country Kitchen," (\$22.95), authored by Marimar Torres, President of Torres Wine North America, includes 100 recipes and sample menus. It is an excellent way to learn how to prepare tapas, paellas and just about everything that's culinary Spanish. It also includes valuable information on pairing food and wine.



Spanish wines: Discover flavorful Codorniu Brut Classico, Vina Sol and Gran Coronas produced by Miguel Torres. Wine courtesy of Cloverleaf Market in Southfield.

KEELY WYOGNIK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER