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FROM A
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ENRIQUE OLVERA'S MEXICO CITY

Enrique Olvera, more than any other chef, convinced the world that Mexico City is an essential pin on every global map of food. Now he shares the classic places that inspire his brilliant Mexican cooking.

BY JOHN BIRDSALL
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOBBY FISHER
FOOD PHOTOGRAPHS BY CON POULOS

GHOSTS ARE EVERYWHERE in Mexico City, looming massively over the living. At the highest point in Bosque de Chapultepec, the city's gracefully scrubby central park, the dead are stacked up like churros in David Alfaro Siqueiros's 1957 mural of martyrs to the Revolution. Closer to earth, in the posh apartment zone of Polanco, chef Enrique Olvera's dead grandfather—photographed like a silver-screen star—gazes like a specter on everyone entering or leaving the city's most famous restaurant, Pujol.

I'm in Mexico City for a ghost tour of my own: I want to find the dishes that haunt Olvera's memory. This is the food that inspires the 39-year-old hero of modern Mexican gastronomy, both at Pujol and at his year-old New York City restaurant, Cosme.

Olvera, more than any other chef, convinced the world that Mexico City is an essential pin on every global map of food. He grew up in and around here, heading to the US to study at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. In 2000, he opened Pujol—a slurring of *pozole*, his nickname in school, a burn for being pudgy. His food was heavily influenced by *The French Laundry Cookbook: New American* tweaked with Mexican ingredients, as in foie gras with guava. It wasn't until 2005 that Olvera found his own identity, and an audience.

Dinner at Pujol can invade your senses like a distillation of Mexico. You feel its sweep in a series of small, expressive gestures: the first spring escamoles (ant larvae), bursting from a single pea pod, a statement of birth. Or the contrasting moles: a two-year-old mole madre, brown as earth, perpetually fed with new mole; and a brick-red mole nuevo. Both are spread on the plate as a disk within a circle, like some reductive Aztec calendar. Olvera is a chef who thinks a lot about time.

When Cosme opened, critics pored over the dishes to divine some authentic expression of Mexico. Some found it. Others focused on Olvera's genius as a restaurateur, his charisma, the way he studies his clientele and gives them what they want in a place thousands of miles from his source of inspiration.

Right now, kitty-corner from me at the massive table in the private dining room at Pujol, just off the burnished galley of a prep kitchen that's animated by a dozen cooks, Olvera is trying to find his voice in the literal sense. After two months away, he got back to Mexico City with a raw throat ravaged by a cold. He's

Enrique Olvera at his Mexico City restaurant Pujol, on a quiet street in the posh Polanco neighborhood, OPPOSITE.

GHOSTS ARE

ipping an infusion of ginger and lime, poured from a murky French press one of his cooks has just delivered.

Olvera has come from his cardiologist. "Just a few..."—he flutters a splayed hand in front of his black V-neck tee—"...chest pains." His grizzled black beard frames his smile, spread wide in an expression of feral charm. "Don't worry," he says, lowering his face to sip, "I'm not dying. There's an old saying in Spanish." He brings his head back up to blast me with that smile again. "*Hierba mala nunca muera.*" A bad weed never dies.

Olvera looks slightly withered, though. This week while he's in Mexico, his life is a tight grid of two-hour calendar blocks. He just wrapped his epic English-language book for Phaidon, *Mexico from the Inside Out*, which traces the life of Pujol. Now he has to approve the type of padded envelopes that review copies will be mailed in, go over blueprints for Manta—a restaurant at The Cape hotel in Mexico's Los Cabos—and taste the tiny chia-seed tostada one of his sous-chefs has tracked him down to try. He also wants to take me to his

Dinner at Pujol can invade the senses like a distillation of Mexico: the tang of vinegar, BELOW, the fragrance of hoja santa leaves, OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT.



laid-back café, *Eno*, just down the street, where the menu is stocked with breakfast and lunch standards like eggs with chorizo and quinoa salad.

But this morning, Olvera is most interested in taking me around Mexico City to try the classic dishes he loves best. He says, "A lot of people in Mexico are like, 'Oh, now that you're in New York you don't give a shit about us anymore.' That's wrong: Pujol is the first, the most important restaurant."

At Pujol, Olvera's inspiration drips through a filter of thought and technique, but in New York City he traces a more direct line to the foods he loves, some since he was a kid. Cosme is where Olvera is freer to be himself, truer to his food memories. New York, in a weird way, brings Olvera closest to Mexico City.

On a Monday morning, just after 10, not a lot is happening at **Mercado San Cosme**. Olvera's grandfather lived six blocks away, in Colonia San Rafael, and little-kid Enrique hung out here. It's a market off the tourist circuit—stalls sell clothes and shiny pink backpacks for kids, plastic colanders and socks, piñatas like spiky Bethlehem stars at every stage of construction. In the illusory green light of fluorescent tubes, Olvera ambles down one of the lanes toward the skylit center, and the still-quiet, not-yet-open *comida corrida* booths, home to Mexico City's cheap midday meals. He points out sapotes negros—rich, chocolate-colored cousins of the persimmon—and a cardboard box of black-spotted bananas, each no bigger than a baby's foot.

"Fruit in Mexico is always overripe," he says, holding up a hand of decaying bananas, signaling to the girl that he wants to buy. "It's the taste of moles, the smell of chiles that have been drying out. People will drop the peel from an orange on the ground, and it stays there to rot. It's in the air." The past keeps its hold on Mexico, even what you breathe.

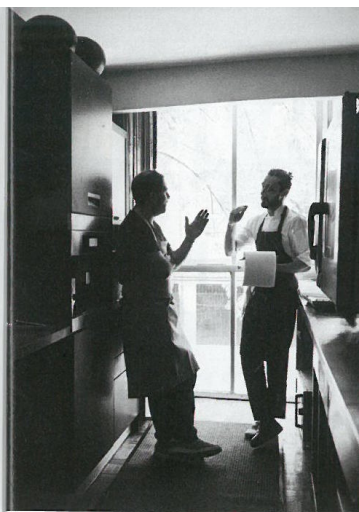
Olvera has delivered this discourse on rotten bananas in other interviews. As a boy, he was forced to eat them by his grandmother on his mom's side, who lived in Tabasco, in Mexico's far south. "I always thought we were poor, so we had to eat them," he says. "But we weren't that poor. As I grew up I understood she liked the flavor."

We get to the stall Olvera wants to show me, a taco stand overseen by a gentleman called Memo, in a white dress shirt, face molded by deep, soft wrinkles. He orders us each a taco—chicharrón in salsa roja. Pale, semitranslucent sheets of pork skin tinted deep orange overlap one another on a tortilla laid out on a wax paper square. The chicharrón's edges are gnarled, phantom crispness turning soft to frame a lush texture. It glows with the transformative power chefs live for.

In front of San Cosme, waiting for our Uber, I notice Olvera's tattoos. "This," he says, lifting his left sleeve, "is the arm of my family." There are symbols for his children, represented by their nicknames: Rábano (radish), Mosca (fly). A duck (Pato) for his wife, Allegra, and Mayan numbers—dots above thick horizontal bars—for the dates of his kids' birthdays, like a small, pre-Columbian codex needled on skin.

But his right arm, Olvera says, is his alone. He lifts the sleeve: There are lashing ink flames and some crazy grotesque symbol above parallel lines. "This arm is my idea," he mumbles as if reticent, like I just asked him to strip off his shirt. One by one, he points to his tattoos: "No beginning...no end...an equal sign...everything's the same...whatever."

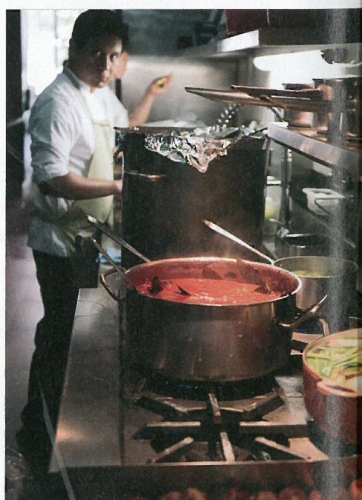
I felt like I could see the opposing lobes of Olvera's mind—history on one side, cosmic invention on the other. It's the



same dichotomy as Cosme: a nostalgic crawl through a disappearing Mexico, and a space walk into creation's void.

Early next morning, I head for more chicharrón, this time in salsa verde, at Olvera's beloved **Fonda Margarita** in Tlacoquemecatl del Valle. The place is a dream of urban Mexico, a 60-year-old *fonda*—the modest neighborhood restaurant equivalent of an Italian trattoria—that looks like a blown-up shed with rippled sheets of fiberglass roofing covering partially open walls. It's on a street where a car wash faces a white church, El Señor del Buen Despacho, Saint of the Good News. A local expression of no-nonsense faith, in bureaucrat-speak, if ever there was one.

FOOD STYLIST: SIMON ANDREWS; STYLE EDITOR: SUZIE MYERS



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A tweed-jacketed guy singing a bolero inside Fonda Margarita glimpses me through the glass of the metal door and slides it open. Folding myself into the skinny beer-hall table with a spangled turquoise top, I can just barely see the charcoal braziers in the back kitchen.

At 7 a.m., Fonda Margarita is half-full of middle-aged *chilangos* (Mexico City residents) dressed for the office hunched over albóndigas (meatballs) and huevos rancheros. The chicharrón verde is a bowl of rough, browned hunks of pork skin submerged in thick tomatillo sauce. The rind turns beautifully gelatinous as it braises in the tart green sauce. Like the tacos at San Cosme market, it's a study in transformation, turning poverty into something lush and transcendent.

That's also true at **Restaurante Nicos**, a rambling family restaurant in Colonia Claveria, a couple of miles north of Polanco, full of older *chilangos* capping their lunches with elaborate, boozy coffees with whipped cream and aniline-red cherries. Nicos is the source of Olvera's favorite guacamole, the one listed at the bottom of Cosme's menu, footnote-style. Only at Nicos, the guacamole is a production—a server with a plastic name tag rolls a cart to your table and, in front of you, pounds ingredients in a black molcajete: coarse salt, olive oil from Baja, onion, chiles, tomato, cilantro, avocado—there isn't even a faint spritz of lime to distract from the avocado's subtle acidity.

Olvera's version at Cosme adds peas, veering further from the tangy guacamole pastes of US burrito joints, highlighting the grassy freshness of perfectly ripe avocado (p. 141).

There's that same surprising alliance of sweetness and vegetable intricacy in Cosme's most famous dish, the husk meringue. It's a broken meringue, slightly creamy inside like a pavlova, and it contains cornhusk ash, so it's a tenuous shade of taupe. The filling: pureed sweet corn with a little mascarpone folded in (p. 142). Carlos Salgado of Taco Maria in Costa Mesa, California (an F&W Best New Chef 2015), says Olvera's dessert made him very emotional the first time he tasted it—the charred-husk scent brought him back to the tamales his mom made in Orange County when he was a kid.

"You have those deep-roasted husks at the sides of the pot," Salgado says. They fuse with the masa so "you end up eating ash—my mom passed on to me a love of all things burnt and charred." Even for a Mexican-American like Salgado, memory and inspiration collide, leaving a plaster-dust wrack of smoky meringue.

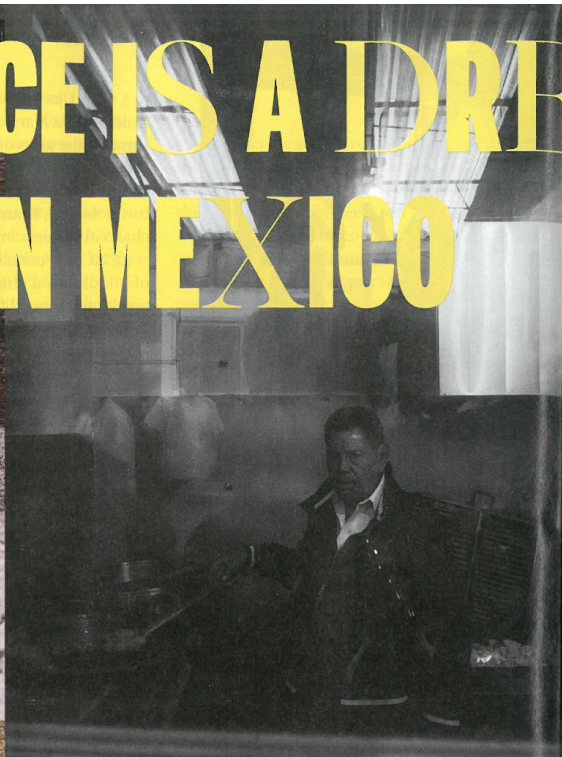
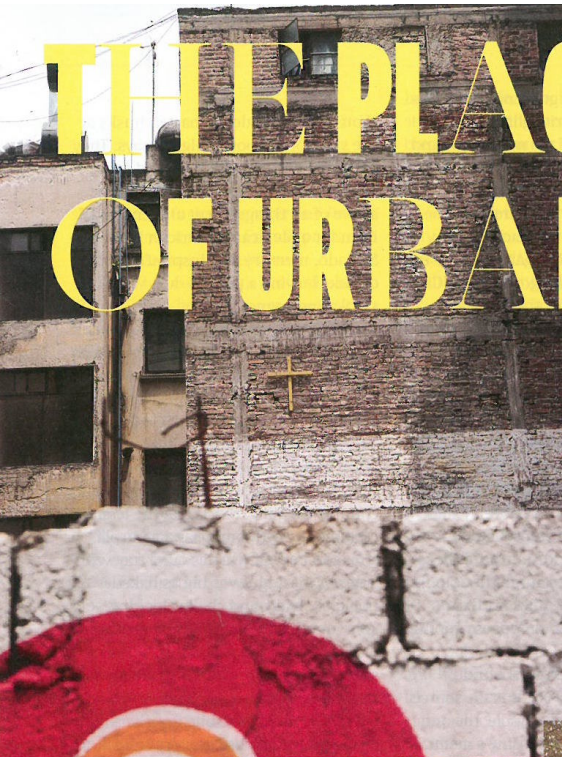
Olvera takes me to the source of this dessert, the Polanco outpost of **Pastelería La Gran Vía**, a 75-year-old pastry chain. It's afternoon, and the shop is empty, a lone purple-and-green molded gelatina sitting under fluorescent light in the refrigerated case. Somebody from Pujol must have called to say Olvera was coming. Giggling, red-faced, the teenage counter girl with braces and a purple streak in her hair carries out a tray with a dozen meringues as big as baked potatoes, white and chalky-looking, split and filled with whipped cream.

"Usually on the weekends," Olvera says, sitting at a tiny table, grabbing a meringue, "on a Sunday night, you would get one of these." We bite together—it's so big it hits my nose, the dry squeak of hardened meringue on my teeth and then a gush of sweet, vanilla-flavored cream. It's super-sugary and irresistible. Olvera smiles as he demolishes one, meringue crumbs clinging to his beard, momentarily lost to the ghosts.

John Birdsall is a writer and ex-cook living in Oakland, California. Follow him on Twitter @John_Birdsall.



THE PLACE IS A DREAM OF URBAN MEXICO

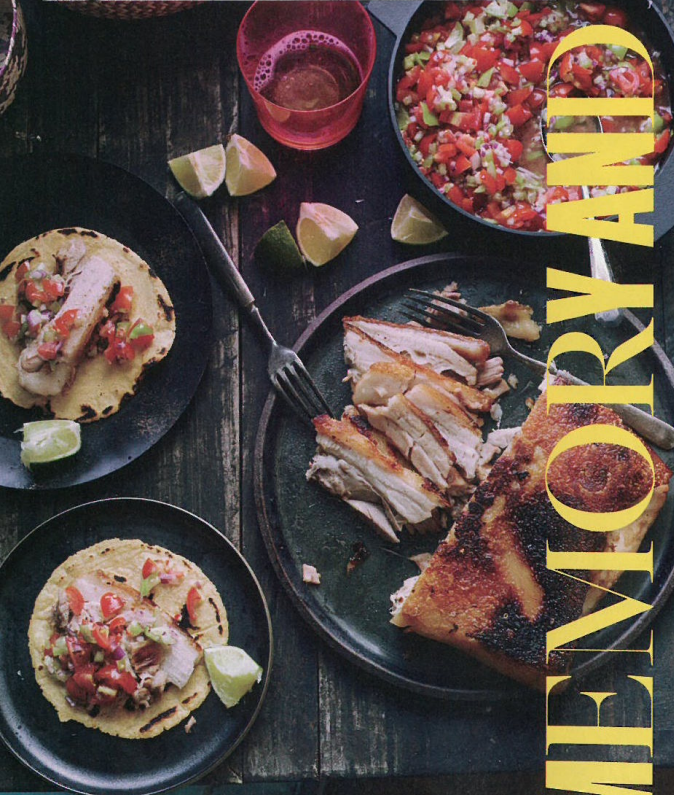


Fonda Margarita, BELOW RIGHT, a shack with a rippled fiberglass roof, has been run by the Castillo family since the 1950s; its current co-owner is María De Jesús, BELOW. Chicharrones in salsa verde, like other dishes, are cooked in giant pots. Olvera reinvents those chicharrones as a filling for tacos (p. 151), OPPOSITE.





At Los Panchos, cooks make carnitas the traditional way: by braising pork shoulder for hours. For his version, BELOW, Olvera confits pork belly to serve in tortillas with beer-spiked pico de gallo. OPPOSITE: His mushroom-and-cheese quesadilla is based on one from a stall at Mercado San Cosme, the market of his childhood.



MEMORY AND INSPIRATION COLLIDE

Crispy Pork Belly Tacos with Pico de Gallo

Active 1 hr; Total 4 hr
Serves 4

BRAISED PORK BELLY

One 2-lb. piece of meaty pork belly

- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup melted lard or shortening
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 white onion, coarsely chopped
- 2 morita chiles (see Note) or dried chipotle chiles
- 2 tsp. kosher salt

PICO DE GALLO

- ½ lb. cherry tomatoes, finely chopped
- 4 oz. tomatillos—husked, rinsed and finely chopped (about ¾ cup)
- ½ small red onion, finely chopped
- 1 chile de árbol, crumbled
- ¼ cup Mexican beer, such as Corona
- ¼ cup fresh lime juice
- Kosher salt

TACOS

- 1 Tbsp. canola oil
- Twelve 5-inch Corn Tortillas (p. 150) or fresh corn tortillas, warm
- Lime wedges, for serving

- 1. Braise the pork belly** Preheat the oven to 250°. In a large ovenproof saucepan, combine all of the ingredients and bring to a simmer over moderate heat. Cover, transfer to the oven and braise the pork until very tender, about 3 hours. Transfer the pork to a plate to cool slightly; discard the braising liquid.
- 2. Make the pico de gallo** In a bowl, combine all of the ingredients except the salt. Season with salt and mix well.
- 3. Make the tacos** In a large cast-iron skillet, heat the canola oil. Add the pork belly, skin side down, and weigh it down with another heavy skillet. Cook over moderately low heat until golden and crisp, about 10 minutes. Transfer the pork, skin

side up, to a cutting board and let cool slightly. Slice across the grain ¼ inch thick, then halve the slices crosswise. Top each tortilla with a few pieces of pork belly and a little pico de gallo and serve warm.

NOTE Morita chiles are small, dried smoked chiles; they're a little spicier than chipotles.

MAKE AHEAD The braised pork belly can be refrigerated overnight; return to room temperature before frying. The pico de gallo can be refrigerated for 6 hours.

BEER Nothing will ever go as well with tacos as an ice-cold Mexican lager. Serve these perfect pork belly ones with bottles of Bohemia or Negra Modelo.

Mixed Mushroom-and-Cheese Quesadillas

Total 45 min; Makes 6

These simple, superb quesadillas can be filled with almost any sautéed mushrooms—a mix of different types gives the stuffing layers of texture. If store-bought tortillas are too small to fold, buy double the amount and use two to make a sandwich.

- ¼ cup corn oil
- ½ cup finely chopped white onion
- 3 large garlic cloves, minced
- 1 red jalapeño or Fresno chile, minced
- 12 oz. mixed oyster and white mushrooms, trimmed and very coarsely chopped
- Salt
- 2 Tbsp. finely chopped epazote or 1 tsp. chopped oregano
- Six 8-inch Corn Tortillas (p. 150) or 12 fresh corn tortillas
- 9 oz. Oaxaca or Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (3 cups)

1. In a large skillet, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the onion, garlic and chile and cook over moderately high heat, stirring, until just softened, about 2 minutes. Add the mushrooms

and a generous pinch of salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender and browned, about 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the epazote. Season with salt.

2. Heat a large cast-iron griddle over moderately high heat. Add 3 tortillas to the griddle and top each one with ½ cup of the cheese and ½ cup of the mushrooms. Cook until the cheese just starts to melt, about 2 minutes. Using a spatula, fold the tortillas in half, pressing lightly to form quesadillas. Cook, flipping once, until the tortillas are browned in spots and the cheese is melted, 2 to 3 minutes longer. Transfer to a work surface. Repeat with the remaining tortillas, cheese and mushrooms. Cut the quesadillas into wedges and serve.

SERVE WITH Red salsa (homemade or store-bought) or Salsa Verde (p. 151).

BEER Toasty, malty beers are a great match for earthy mushrooms. Try an amber ale like the Dos Equis Amber from Mexico or the Anderson Valley Boont Amber from California.

COVER RECIPE

Spicy Pea Guacamole

Total 20 min; Serves 4

Green peas add lovely sweetness to Olvera's guacamole. He doesn't use lime juice—he likes to show off the subtle acidity of the avocado—but you can add a squeeze if you prefer.

- 1 serrano chile, chopped
- ½ cup chopped cilantro
- ½ cup thawed frozen peas
- 2 medium Haas avocados—peeled, pitted and chopped
- Kosher salt
- Tortilla chips, for serving

In a mortar, mash the chile with the cilantro. Add the peas and avocados and mash until well blended but still chunky. Season with salt and serve with chips.





At Olvera's New York City restaurant, Cosme, the most famous dish is the Husk Meringue: a broken meringue flavored with cornhusk ash and filled with a sweet corn cream. **OPPOSITE.** Its inspiration: the giant, whipped-cream-filled meringues from a 75-year-old pastry shop Olvera has been visiting since childhood, Pastelería La Gran Vía.



Plate by Miro Made This.

Cornhusk Meringues with Corn Mousse

Active **1 hr**; Total **2 hr plus cooling**; Serves **4**

The recipe for this much-Instagrammed dessert—meringues flavored with charred cornhusk powder and filled with sweet corn cream—is in Olvera's new cookbook, *Mexico from the Inside Out*.

MERINGUES

- 4 dried cornhusks (½ oz.)**
- 2 large egg whites**
- ½ cup sugar**

MOUSSE

- 1½ cups fresh corn kernels (from 3 ears)**
- 1 Tbsp. sugar**

- ⅓ tsp. kosher salt**
- 1 cup heavy cream**
- ¼ cup mascarpone**

- 1. Make the meringues** Preheat the oven to 450°. Spread the husks on a large baking sheet; bake for 8 to 10 minutes, until lightly browned. Reduce the oven temperature to 200°.
- 2.** Break the husks into small pieces. Transfer to a spice grinder in batches and grind to a powder. Sift the husk powder through a fine sieve.
- 3.** In a stand mixer fitted with the whisk, beat the egg whites until soft peaks form. With the mixer on, gradually beat in the sugar until medium peaks

form. Add 2½ tablespoons of the husk powder; beat at medium-high speed until stiff.

- 4.** Transfer the meringue to a pastry bag fitted with a ¾-inch round tip. Pipe four 3-inch rounds of meringue onto a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Bake for about 1 hour and 10 minutes, until the meringues are set and sound hollow when lightly tapped on the bottom. Let cool completely, at least 2 hours.
- 5. Meanwhile, make the mousse** In a skillet, combine the corn, sugar, salt and ¼ cup of the cream and bring just to a boil. Simmer over moderate heat, stirring, until the corn is tender, 5 minutes. Transfer to a

blender and puree until smooth. Strain the puree through a fine sieve, pressing on the solids.

- Let cool completely, then whisk in the mascarpone.
- 6.** In a bowl, beat the remaining ¼ cup of cream until stiff. Fold into the corn mixture until no streaks remain.
 - 7.** Transfer the meringues to plates and gently crack open with a table knife. Spoon the corn mousse into the meringues and sprinkle with the remaining husk powder. Serve right away.
- MAKE AHEAD** The meringues can be stored in an airtight container overnight. The mousse can be prepared through Step 5 and refrigerated overnight.

OLVERA'S LOCAL FAVORITES

MODERN NEW RESTAURANTS & BARS

Pujol Olvera's Mexican flagship serves dishes like his signature aged mole madre paired with fresh mole. *Calle Francisco Petrarca 254; pujol.com.mx.*

Maximo Bistrot Local Chef Eduardo (Lalo) García, an alum of Pujol and New York City's Le Bernardin, cooks exclusively with ingredients that arrive in his kitchen within a day. Says Olvera, "Lalo is just a great chef." *Tonalá 133; maximobistrot.com.mx.*

Quintonil Chef Jorge Vallejo celebrates native Mexican foods like an amaranth tamal in salsa verde with Mexican herbs. *Newton 55; quintonil.com.*

Restaurante Carlota This new restaurant inside the Carlota hotel, from rising-star chefs Joaquin Cardoso and Sofia Cortina, serves deceptively simple-sounding dishes like chilled pea soup with coconut and lemon verbena. *Rio Amazonas 73; hotelcarlota.com.*

Maison Artemisia The specialty at this cocktail bar is absinthe, including a blend that's custom-made in France for the lounge's owners. *Tonalá 23; maisonartemisia.com.*

Eno At Olvera's white-walled café, breads and pastries are made in-house; the breakfast menu includes eggs with avocado leaves or cactus. *Multiple locations including Francisco Petrarca 258; eno.com.mx.*

TRADITIONAL COOKING

Mercado San Cosme A Mexican market frequented by locals, with a notable *comida corrida*—street-food hub. *San Rafael (no phone or website).*

Los Panchos This 70-year-old place serves all the classics: quesadillas, enchiladas, caldos (soups). Olvera goes for the carnitas tacos. *Calle Tolstoi 9; lospanchos.mx.*

Restaurante Nicos A neighborhood restaurant where waiters wheel carts around the dining room loaded with ingredients for mixing guacamole tableside. *Avenida Cuicuilco 3102; nicosmexico.mx.*

Fonda Margarita Anthony Bourdain called out this shack for its stellar breakfasts. It's also a favorite of Olvera's for chicharrón tacos in salsa verde. *Adolfo Prieto 1364; fondamargarita.com.*

Pastelería La Gran Vía This pastry shop makes meringues that inspired Olvera's much-talked-about charred-cornhusk version. *Horacio 135; pastelerialagranvia.com.*



Jicama Salad

PAGE 127

Total 30 min; Serves 6

To keep the jicama crisp in this simple, refreshing salad, start with a very firm root and cut the julienne a bit thicker.

- One 1½-lb. jicama, peeled and julienned**
- 2 celery ribs, thinly sliced**
- 1 Fresno chile, thinly sliced**
- ⅓ cup fresh lime juice**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- ½ cup torn basil leaves**
- Salt**

Combine all of the ingredients in a large bowl and let stand for 15 minutes; serve. —Tom Colicchio

Spaghetti with Crab

Total 45 min; Serves 4

When she can, Nina Compton of The Old No. 77 swaps in local Louisiana shrimp for the crabmeat in this otherwise Italian pasta.

- 12 oz. spaghetti**
- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ cup pine nuts**
- ½ cup panko**
- Salt**
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced, plus more for garnish**
- 5 garlic cloves, thinly sliced**
- ½ tsp. crushed red pepper**
- 1½ cups clam juice or fish stock**
- ½ cup finely chopped parsley**
- 2 tsp. finely grated lemon zest**
- ½ lb. jumbo lump crabmeat, picked over**

- 1.** In a large saucepan of salted boiling water, cook the spaghetti until al dente. Drain the pasta well, then toss with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Wipe out the saucepan.
- 2.** Meanwhile, in a small skillet, toast the pine nuts over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a work surface and chop.

3. In the same skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Add the panko and cook over moderately high heat, stirring frequently, until golden, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer to a small bowl and season with salt.

4. In the large saucepan, heat ¼ cup of the olive oil. Add the 6 sliced scallions, the garlic and crushed red pepper and cook over moderate heat, stirring, until the garlic is softened, about 3 minutes. Add the clam juice and bring to a boil. Add the spaghetti and cook over moderately high heat, tossing, until most of the clam juice has been absorbed, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the parsley, lemon zest, pine nuts and remaining ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons of olive oil and season with salt. Toss well. Gently fold in the crabmeat. Transfer the pasta to shallow bowls and garnish with the panko and scallions.

WINE Muscadet, from the Loire's west coast, has a salty, lemony edge that makes it a wonderful match for seafood dishes like this crab pasta. Try the 2013 Pierre-Henri Gadais Saint-Fiacre or the 2014 Domaine de la Pépière Muscadet Sèvre et Maine.

Country-Style Pork Ribs with Tomato Salad and Garlic Toast

Active 40 min; Total 1 hr 10 min
Serves 4 to 6

Inspired by humble early-1900s cooking, Andrea Reusing of The Durham Hotel uses flavorful pork ribs for this weeknight dish. She's "almost wary" of telling people to cook the inexpensive cut, for fear it will become too popular and pricey.

- 2 lbs. country-style boneless pork ribs (about 4 ribs)**
- 1½ tsp. celery seeds**
- Kosher salt and pepper**
- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for brushing**
- Three 1-inch-thick slices of country bread, halved crosswise**
- 2 garlic cloves, 1 halved and 1 minced**
- 1 small Fresno or red jalapeño chile, stemmed and minced**
- 1 lb. tomatoes, cut into 1-inch pieces**
- 8 light-green celery ribs with leaves, thinly sliced on the diagonal (2 cups)**

- 1.** Season the pork with the celery seeds, salt and pepper. Let stand for 30 minutes.
- 2.** Light a grill or preheat a grill pan and brush with oil. Grill the pork over moderately high heat, turning occasionally, until lightly charred all over and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part registers 140°, about 12 minutes. Transfer to a work surface and let rest for 5 minutes, then slice the meat against the grain.

3. Meanwhile, brush the bread with oil and season with salt and pepper. Grill over moderately high heat, turning, until lightly charred on both sides, about 2 minutes. Rub with the halved garlic clove.

4. In a large bowl, whisk the ¼ cup of oil with the chile and minced garlic. Add the tomatoes and sliced celery and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper.

5. Transfer the toasts to plates, top with the tomato salad and sliced pork and serve.

WINE Vibrant and medium-bodied Chianti Classico is an easy match for flavorful, rustic dishes like these pork ribs. Try the 2012 Isole e Olena or the 2012 Volpaia.

Casarecce with Sausage, Pickled Cherries and Pistachios

Total 35 min; Serves 6

- 2 Tbsp. plus 2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil**
- ½ cup unsalted pistachios**
- Kosher salt and black pepper**
- 1 lb. casarecce pasta**
- ½ lb. sweet Italian sausage, casings removed**
- 1 Tbsp. thyme leaves, chopped**
- 1 garlic clove, thinly sliced**
- 1 tsp. Aleppo pepper**
- ¾ cup pitted and chopped Pickled Cherries (p. 146)**
- Shredded Pecorino Romano cheese, for serving**

1. In a small skillet, heat 1 teaspoon of the olive oil. Add the pistachios and toast over moderate heat, tossing occasionally, until lightly browned, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and let cool, then coarsely chop.

2. In a large saucepan of salted boiling water, cook the pasta until al dente. Drain, reserving 1 cup of the cooking water. Toss the pasta with 1 teaspoon of the olive oil.

3. In the same saucepan, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil. Add the sausage and cook over moderate heat, breaking up the meat with a wooden spoon, until just cooked through, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in the thyme, garlic and Aleppo pepper and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the pasta and reserved cooking water and cook, stirring, until the pasta is hot and coated in a light sauce, about 3 minutes. Stir in the pickled cherries and toasted pistachios and season with salt and black pepper. Transfer to shallow bowls, top with cheese and serve. —TC

WINE Tart, cherry-scented Austrian red, like Zweigelt: Try the 2013 Berger or the 2013 Sattler.

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Pickled Cherries

Total **10 min plus overnight pickling**
Makes **about 2 cups**

Make a double batch of these pickled cherries from Tom Colicchio—you'll want to put them on everything. Serve alongside pâté, tossed into a salad or on crostini smeared with fresh ricotta.

- 2 cups sherry vinegar**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 1 lb. sweet cherries**

In a medium saucepan, combine the vinegar, sugar and ½ cup of water and bring to a boil over high heat. Add the cherries and return to a boil, then simmer over moderately high heat for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool completely. Transfer the cherries and brine to a 1-quart container and refrigerate overnight. Drain and pit before serving.

MAKE AHEAD The pickled cherries can be refrigerated for up to 2 weeks.

Loaded Sweet Potatoes with Chorizo and Pomegranate

Active **40 min**; Total **1 hr 15 min**
Serves **4**

At Central Standard in the South Congress Hotel, Michael Paley twists steakhouse conventions by topping a baked sweet potato with spicy chorizo and fresh pomegranate seeds.

- Four 12-oz. sweet potatoes, scrubbed**
- 3 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling**
- Maldon salt**
- ½ lb. fresh chorizo, casings removed**
- 3 cipollini onions, thinly sliced (½ cup)**
- 1 Fresno chile, thinly sliced**
- 1 Tbsp. minced garlic**
- ¼ cup pure pomegranate juice**
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro, plus leaves for garnish**
- Kosher salt and pepper**
- Crème fraîche, sliced avocado, pomegranate seeds and finely grated lime zest, for topping**
- Lime wedges, for serving**

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Set each sweet potato on a sheet of foil. Drizzle with olive oil and season with Maldon salt. Wrap the potatoes in the foil and transfer to a baking sheet. Bake until tender, about 1 hour.

2. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, heat the 3 tablespoons of olive oil until shimmering. Add the chorizo and cook over moderately high heat, breaking up the meat with a wooden spoon, until nearly cooked through, about 5 minutes. Add the onions, chile and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until the chorizo is cooked through and the onions are softened, 3 to 5 minutes longer. Add the pomegranate juice and cook until nearly absorbed, 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in the chopped cilantro and season with kosher salt and pepper.

3. Unwrap the sweet potatoes and arrange on a platter. Cut a lengthwise slit in the top of each one and fluff the insides with a fork. Season with kosher salt and pepper and fill with the chorizo mixture. Top each sweet potato with crème fraîche, sliced avocado, pomegranate seeds, grated lime zest and cilantro leaves. Serve right away with lime wedges.

Poached Chicken, Lentil and Watercress Salad

Active **45 min**; Total **1 hr 15 min**
Serves **4**

Baccarat Hotel chef Shea Gallante loves how the anise notes of dill work with the French flavors of this chicken dish.

CHICKEN

- ¼ cup dry white wine**
- 1 quart chicken stock or low-sodium broth**
- 1 Tbsp. white peppercorns**
- 1 bay leaf**
- 1 garlic clove**
- Salt**
- Two 8-oz. skinless, boneless chicken breast halves**

LENTILS

- 2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 yellow onion, quartered**
- 1 carrot, cut into large pieces**
- 1 celery rib, cut into large pieces**
- 2 slices of bacon, finely chopped**
- ½ cup green lentils, picked over**
- Salt and pepper**

SALAD

- 1 small shallot, minced**
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice**
- 2 Tbsp. Champagne vinegar**
- 1 Tbsp. Dijon mustard**
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- Salt and pepper**

4 oz. watercress, thick stems discarded (8 cups)

- ⅓ cup sliced almonds, toasted**
- 2 Tbsp. chopped dill**

1. Poach the chicken In a medium saucepan, bring the wine to a simmer and cook over moderate heat until reduced by half, about 3 minutes. Add the stock, peppercorns, bay leaf, garlic and a generous pinch of salt and return to a simmer. Add the chicken and cook over moderately low heat, turning the meat occasionally, until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part registers 160°, about 25 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a work surface and let cool completely before returning to the cooled poaching liquid.

2. Meanwhile, cook the lentils In a medium saucepan, heat the olive oil. Add the onion, carrot and celery and cook over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables start to soften, about 5 minutes. Add the bacon and cook, stirring, until the fat is rendered but the bacon is not crisp, 3 to 5 minutes. Add 2½ cups of water and bring to a boil. Stir in the lentils and season generously with salt and pepper. Simmer over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until the lentils are just tender, about 20 minutes. Let the lentils cool in the liquid; drain. Using tongs, remove the onion, carrot and celery and discard.

3. Make the salad In a small bowl, whisk the shallot with the lemon juice and vinegar and let stand for 5 minutes. Whisk in the mustard. Slowly drizzle in the olive oil and whisk until incorporated. Season the vinaigrette with salt and pepper. In a large bowl, toss the watercress with the almonds, dill and ¼ cup of the vinaigrette.

4. In a bowl, toss the lentils with ¼ cup of the vinaigrette and season with salt and pepper. Remove the chicken from the poaching liquid and transfer to a work surface. Slice the chicken, arrange on plates and drizzle with the remaining vinaigrette. Serve the lentils and watercress alongside.

MAKE AHEAD The poached chicken and lentils can be refrigerated in their cooking liquids overnight. Return to room temperature before serving.

WINE This hearty salad calls for a full-bodied white with good acidity, like Chablis. Try the 2013 Domaine Laroche Saint Martin or the 2013 Domaine Vocoret.