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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ COOKING

Pintxos: Small Plates in the Basque Tradition

Gerald Hirigoyen
Lisa Weiss
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Spain is such a large, diverse, historic, and passionate country, no one should question why it continues to captivate the culinary world's imagination. Sandwiched between two bountiful seas, rippled with mountains, plains, and rivers drenched in ample amounts of life-giving sunlight, she is a splendidly talented landmass ideal for food production. Furthermore, her African, Middle Eastern, and European heritage assures a mixing pot of culinary influences resulting in homegrown chefs conversant in the broadest palate of skills.

Yes, we've seen our share of Spanish / tapas cookbooks over the past few years and perhaps someday we'll tire of them. But not if they continue to arrive from maestros like Gerald Hirigoyen, chef/owner of two stellar San Francisco restaurants, Piperade and Bocadillos.

Pintxos, pronounced "pinchos" in Spanish, is the Basque word for tapas. By definition, a single almond in a bowl qualifies, but the beauty of tapas lies in the one-or-two-bite factor. Otherwise tapas rules are limitless: a cube of manchego stuck with toothpick, a devilled egg spiked with anchovies, a green olive stuffed with wedge of fresh red pepper.

Hirigoyen offers ten versions of tapas divided into chapters ranging from A La Plancha (on the griddle) to Bocadillos (little sandwiches), Fritos (fried bites), Organos (innards), Ensaladas, Pinchos (skewers), and Sopas, to Montaditos (bites on bread). He also offers a list of recipes for pantry items to keep on hand. "Confit of Lemon," for example, "Fried Shallots, and Moscatel Vinegar Reduction," and "Ham Dust" (yes, exactly what you imagine it to be), amongst other flavor-ful accents and accompaniments.

Several Hirigoyen recipes in *Pintxos* demand comment. "Figs Marinated in Sherry with Aged Goat Cheese and Basil" is served as a small decadent sandwich, "Baby Beets, Cucum-bers, Olives, and Feta Skewers," and "Eggplant [roasted with garlic and served on toast] and Aged Goat Cheese." And because Basques will not under any circumstance discard with any part of an animal, we also find "Calf's Liver and Carmelized Shallot Brochettes," "Oxtail Empanadas," and "Braised Veal Sweetbreads in Madeira."

This is Hirigoyen's third book. Twice he has been named Best Chef in the Bay Area by *San Francisco Magazine*, a fantastic honor with heavyweights like Waters, Keller, and Danko to compete with.
MATT SUTHERLAND (February 13, 2009)

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