

Taste of Tucson: Sonoran-Style Recipes Inspired by the Rich Culture of Southern Arizona

Jackie Alpers

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Taste of Tucson is creative in exploring the vibrant culture of the Arizona food capital. Designated as the first American City of Gastronomy by UNESCO in 2015, Tucson's freewheeling blend of Native American, Spanish, and Mexican classics with more contemporary street foods is unique. Jackie Alpers describes the city's cuisine from the assembly of authentic ingredients to finished plates.

Central to understanding Tucson's recipes are their ingredients. Alpers demystifies the differences between Chile varieties and all those seemingly similar soft white Mexican cheeses. There are photographs, descriptions, and homemade recipes for pantry staples including Asada seasoning, Carne Seca, and green and red enchilada sauces. There are also tips for sourcing Tucson's special gifts from the desert, items that are described with love and that include mesquite flour, nopales, and tiny Chiltepin chiles.

Having worked and dined in many of Tucson's most popular restaurants, Alpers wheedled many signature recipes from local restaurateurs, including the El Charro Cafe's Oven-Roasted Salsa and Chef Janos Wilder's Calabacitas con Queso, a medley of corn, squash, and tomatoes bathed in cheese. Alpers contributes her own takes on Tucson favorites that reflect her culinary background and inventiveness, including Matzalbondigas Soup (with matzo balls instead of the traditional tiny meatballs), a rainbow of tangy frozen desserts, and decadent Dark Chocolate and Coffee Figgy Pudding Cakes.

Visually appealing color photographs combine with illustrated borders and design accents to make the work pop. The recipes, while they don't involve complicated techniques or equipment, sometimes involve lengthy cooking times and the advance preparation of different sauces and other ingredients. Ingredients show up in photographs that are not reflected in the recipes; there are some descriptions of dishes as vegetarian appropriate, though they contain meat stock.

Taste of Tucson is an inordinately fun and accessible guide to a distinctive regional American cuisine.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (May / June 2020)

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