

The New Portuguese Table: Exciting Flavors from Europe's Western Coast

David Leite

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In his introduction, David Leite describes his years of ambivalence with twenty-first-century Portugal, a country seemingly unhinged from his parent's romanticized image. Leite's travels in Lisbon, Porto, and afield, were always tainted by modernity, by a sense of lost innocence. Not until a boisterous dinner around a friend's kitchen table, eating an adapted Portuguese classic of partridge escabeche nuanced with Indian and Asian spices, did he have his *aha!* experience. "At that moment it was clear to me what I had to do: embrace this meal, this dining scene, this Portugal. Just because the Portuguese pantry and table had changed since my father left in 1958 didn't mean Portugal was any less authentic....I now, it seemed, had twice as much to learn, see, and eat. Discovering the similarities and differences between classic and contemporary dishes obsessed me."

A three-time James Beard Award-winner for his food writing, Leite opens with a chapter titled "Portugal Parsed," superbly describing each of the country's thirteen historical regions, including detail on the local foods and wines. His section on the Portuguese pantry provides a primer on the meats, cheeses, beans, seafood, vegetables, herbs, spices, and other ingredients unique to the nation's cooking. What can readers expect recipe-wise? A great many dishes surprising in their Portuguese distinctness. As a country bordering the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, Portugal brings something new to the table with an unpretentious satisfaction component sure to gain in popularity here in the United States.

MATT SUTHERLAND (July / August 2009)

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