

THE COMEBACK

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INTERVIEWS WITH CELEBRITIES, CHEFS AND NEW FACES, FEATURING RECIPES AND MOVIE REVIEWS.

BY NICOLE RUSSIN / CHEFS & FOODIES / 18 DECEMBER 2014

ALEJANDRO MUGUERZA ON COOKING FOR THE OBAMAS, CLINTONS AND OTHER BOLD TEXT NAMES



With his exceptional catering company, Le Basque, Alejandro Muguerza operates the only source of authentic Basque cuisine in the southern United States. He has cooked for the Obamas, the Clintons, royals, the Dalai Lama, executives from Michael Kors and Balenziaga and many more.





MY GREAT GRANDMOTHER'S ANCESTRY IS FROM THE BASQUE REGION. BUT I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH BASQUE FOOD. IS TODAY'S BASQUE FOOD ANYTHING LIKE WHAT SHE WOULD HAVE EATEN?

The region is recognised as a culinary mecca (between Spain and France). San Sebastian has the most Michelin noted restaurants per capita in the world, and people go on pilgrimages to the gastronomical temples: Arzak, Akelarre, Martin Berasategui, Eneko, Atxa, Mugaritz and Zuberoa. Before this resurgence in the past 70 years, the Basque region was based on Spanish products, using the variety of wild game and fish. Of course, this style of cooking was reflected in homes and 20th century works of Nicolasa Prareda, Marquesa de Parabere... recipes like merluza en salsa verde, Bacalao a la bizcaina, Bacalao al pil pil, Pisto a la Bilbaína, angulas (eels), and more, all in the same manner. We should not forget that the Basque resurgence gave way to the importance of the product and the homemade; combined with this, the region became the summer holiday spot for the royals and Spanish court during several reigns. Thus, bringing into San Sebastian, Biarritz, Zarauz, San Juan de Luz and Lequeitio the entire aristocracy with their respective French chefs who taught their wonderful techniques, art and elaborate detail to the numerous chefs who worked under their guidance.



BECAUSE YOU STUDIED IN FLORENCE, ITALY, I MUST ASK ABOUT PIZZA. I LOVE PIZZA. IS IT TRUE THAT NEW YORK PIZZA IS DIFFERENT THAN THAT OF ROME (OR FLORENCE)? IS IT THE SAME SKINNY PIZZA?

There aren't many differences between pizza in Rome or Florence. The difference is how it is made. Pizza Taglio style is thick, in a rectangular shape and made in front of the customer. And pizza al forno is classic, thicker or normal thickness. La estirata is really skinny, much finer in thickness than the pizza served in New York that is rubbery and chewy. Not to mention, the tomato sauce in Italy isn't spicy. At most, we used basil and fresh mozzarella, usually buffalo cheese. The pizzas are either red pizza or white pizza, depending on if you use any tomato sauce.



WHEN YOU LEARNED THE KING OF SPAIN WAS COMING, WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO DO? IS THIS LIKE WHEN PEOPLE COOK FOR QUEEN ELIZABETH II?

Le Basque Catering and Productions is a catering company dedicated to events of every aspect: the decor, the menu and the entertainment. We've organised very crowded protocol dinners and cocktails for various heads of crowns, including the King of Spain, Don Juan Carlos and Dona Sofia de BorBon, as well as our current Don Felipe de Borbon y Grecia when he was the Prince of Asturias. The process is through intermediaries who are responsible for protocol and security, as well as those in charge of logistics working for the royal family.



WHAT ABOUT WITH THE DALAI LAMA? ISN'T HE A VEGETARIAN? DID YOU GIVE HIM A SPECIAL LUNCH?

His lunch was made on site by a monk from his entourage. I cooked for all of the invitees.



WHAT IS THE MOST POPULAR DISH?

Langosta (lobster), con extractor de Ragaliz, Eneldo y Orzo al Aniz y Azafran.

HOW DO MIAMI RESIDENTS FEEL ABOUT YOUR TRADITIONAL ITEMS?

We're traditional, but we change with the times. We make not only Basque cuisine but food from everywhere, very cosmopolitan cuisine, without falling trap to local clichés. All someone needs to do is visit our website to see how well our cuisine has been received in Miami. Anyone who enjoys great food likes the food of Le Basque.

