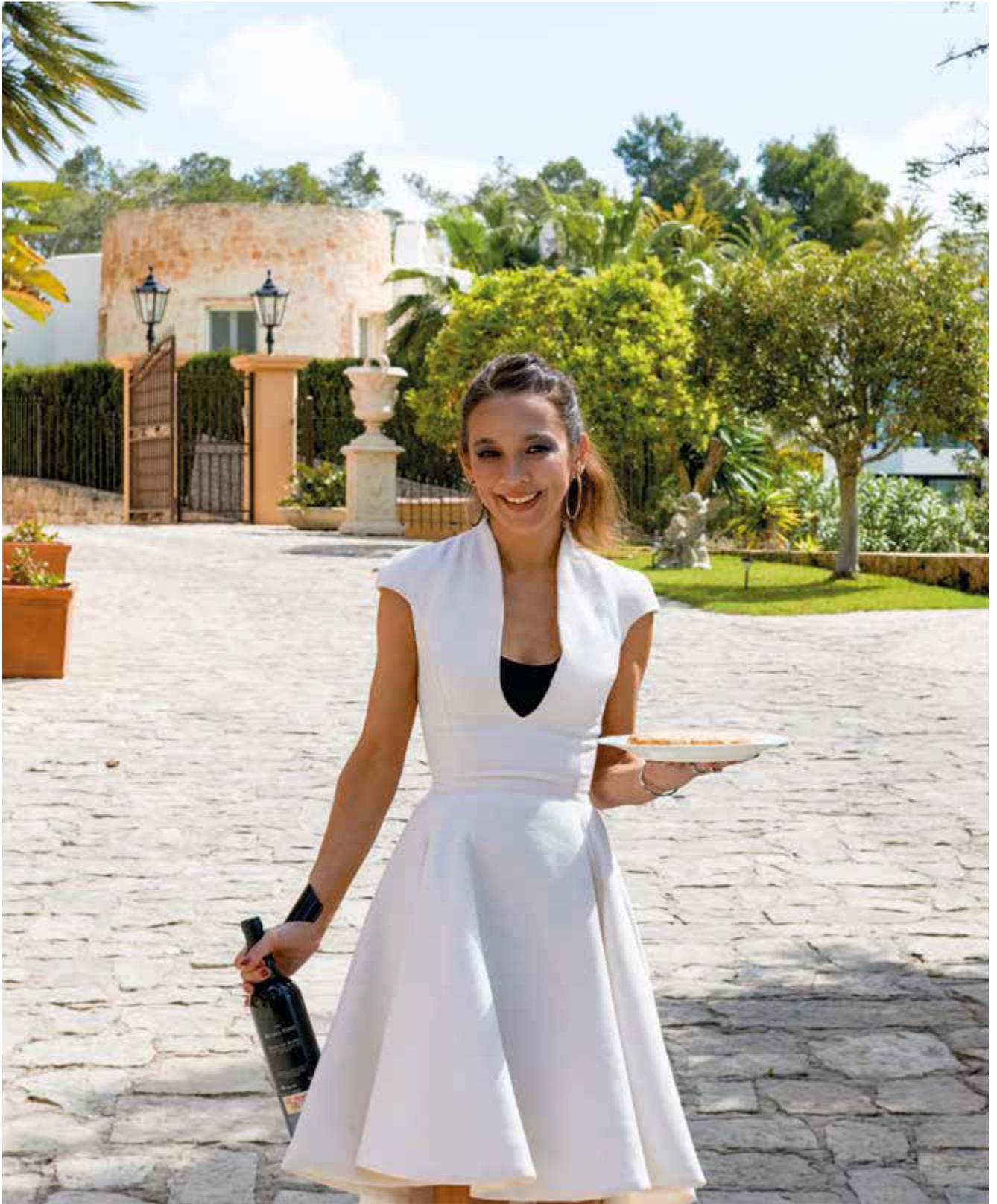


Sandra Alvarez

¡SABOR SABOR!
Sensational Spanish Flavors

Photography by Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman

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Introduction

Harry Mulisch, a famous Dutch author, once said that the soul travels on horseback. If that is the case, my soul is travelling somewhere between Santiago de Compostela and Ibiza and my soulless body is wandering the streets of Amsterdam.

My soul always wants to be in Spain. I was not born there but I am half Spanish and half Chinese. As a child, I spent every summer with my relatives in Spain, either in Santiago de Compostela or in Ibiza. These were endless summers during which I enjoyed life to the fullest with family and friends.

Every time I returned to the Netherlands, I missed the people but also the aromas and flavors of Spain. The smell of melting asphalt, the smell from the metro vents, the scent of Ducados cigarettes combined with Puig Agua Brava after-shave but above all the scent of pine trees and the taste of unrequited love, pan Bimbo and roasted garlic.

Maybe this longing is the reason I love to cook Spanish food. My soul is wandering around Spain. How can I long so much for a country even though I did not grow up there? Blame it on the blood. This is the source of my passion for everything Spanish.

I always want to feel, smell and taste Spain. Even during my MasterChef Holland adventure, I took every opportunity to prepare the flavors of Spain with love and passion.

I decided to write down and share my beloved Spanish recipes so that everyone, on any budget can prepare them. The tasteful photographs that accompany the recipes make even the most simple dish look like a masterpiece and will make you feel like you are in Spain.

These are classical Spanish dishes, but some have a surprising twist. In many recipes I tried to use less sugar, gave vegetables a more central role and added a vegetarian variation. The simple ingredients and easy to prepare recipes are typical of Spanish cuisine.

Join me on a culinary journey from Santiago de Compostela to Ibiza and get inspired to cook Spanish food.

Enjoy the flavors of Spain with **iSabor Sabor!**

Sandra



Indispensable for Spanish cooking

Invite the flavors of Spain into your pantry with these specialty ingredients:

- anise liqueur
- black garlic
- Brandy (Spanish Cognac)
- Cava (Spanish Champagne)
- chorizo
- extra virgin olive oil
pure, cold-pressed olive oil; the best you can get. Spanish extra virgin olive oil is used in savory but also in sweet dishes.
- paella rice (short grain rice)
the best paella rice is 'arroz bomba'; this is the king of rice because it absorbs a lot of liquid and therefore all the flavors of the stock in which it has been cooked.
- Manchego cheese
- Pedro Ximénez
a sweet Sherry dessert wine, named for the Pedro Ximénez grape, also known as PX. It might be the sweetest wine in the world. Velvety and syrupy with the aromas of honey, dried fruits, coffee and dark chocolate, with just enough acidity to soften the extreme sweetness and the alcohol.
- pimentón
smoked paprika which comes in two varieties, sweet and spicy. Its smoky aroma with earthy undertones gives any dish a Spanish touch. Pimentón de la Vera is the best brand since it is smoked very slowly.
- saffron
a spice derived from the saffron crocus. It is used in savory and sweet dishes for its beautiful orange-yellow color but also for its rich warm flavor and aroma which is subtle and strong at the same time. Although it's not cheap, you only need a small quantity.
- Serrano ham or Iberian ham
- Sherry
- Sherry vinegar
a strong vinegar with a nutty flavor made of the finest Sherry which has aged for 6 years. very good for vinaigrette, soups and sauces
- squid ink
- wine (red and white)



The following ingredients are not specific to Spanish cuisine, but I do use them for the recipes in this book:

- aniseed
- black pepper
- chickpeas (canned)
- cinnamon
- coarse sea salt or Maldon salt
- dark chocolate
- dried chili peppers
- eggs
- espelette pepper (Basque chili pepper)
- flat-leaf parsley (fresh)
- flour
- garlic
- garlic powder
- heavy cream
- honey
- bay leaves
- lemons
- milk
- onion
- oregano (dried or fresh)
- potatoes
- regular olive oil
- roasted peppers (from a jar)
- smoked salt
- smoked olive oil
- rosemary (dried or fresh)
- star anise
- Sichuan pepper
a spice named for the Sichuan province in China. Because of my Chinese roots, I like to add a little Chinese twist to my Spanish cooking. Sichuan pepper has a light citrusy flavor which goes very well with savory as well as sweet Spanish dishes. This 'pepper' is actually not a real pepper but belongs to Rutaceae genus, the same plant family as citrus fruits. The peppercorns are actually the dried peels of tiny fruits. Sichuan pepper can give you a tingling feeling on your tongue and lips which makes for a very special eating sensation.
- sugar
- sunflower oil
- table salt
- thyme (dried or fresh)
- tomatoes
- tuna (canned)
- turmeric
- vanilla
- white lima beans (canned)
- white pepper



¡Pan de tinta de calamar!

— Bread with squid ink —

The special ingredient for this mysterious black bread is squid ink. When I am cooking a Spanish dinner for family or friends, I always prepare this bread and everyone loves it. The flavor is surprisingly mild and subtle and the deep color is a sight to behold.

Serves 8

1 ¼cup/300 ml whole milk
6 packets of squid ink (4 g each)
1 packet dry yeast (7g)
1 tsp salt
1 tsp sugar or honey
4 cups/500 g all-purpose flour

Heat the milk over low heat (do not let it boil) and add the ink. Mix well. Remove from heat and first add the yeast followed by the salt and the sugar or honey.

Bit by bit add the flour and knead the dough for a few minutes until smooth and elastic. Let the dough rise for 1-2 hours in a warm, dry place until it has doubled in size. Preheat the oven to 400°F/200°C. Knead the dough for a few minutes to release the air. Grease a baking tin and bake the bread for 25-30 minutes until done.

 A dry Rueda Verdejo.



¡Buñuelos de bacalao!

— Salted cod fritters —

Maria Antonia was a seamstress who used to come to my Spanish grandmother's house once a week to mend clothes. This was customary in my family in those days. Every summer Maria Antonia would take my measurements and make me a smocked dress, a classic embroidered dress that I was not ever going to wear to high school in Amsterdam.

Because the dress was a present, I accepted the gift every year.

Maria Antonia had a special scent. 'She smells like cod' is what I was told, 'because she wears a corset'. Not knowing what a corset was, this explanation was a complete mystery to me, but it did keep me from eating cod-fish for years. Half a century later, I spotted something with 'bacalao' on the menu of a restaurant in Barcelona. I decided to order what turned out to be a type of fritter served with 'miel de caña' (molasses). Maria Antonia's corset was instantly wiped from my memory.

Serves 4

5 oz/150 g salted cod
1 garlic clove
3 spring onions
1 tbsp flat-leaf parsley
1 egg
½ tsp dry yeast
2/3 cup/ 75 g all-purpose flour
2/3 cup/150 ml lukewarm water
olive oil

Soak the salted cod according to the instructions on the packaging. This process can take hours. Rinse the fish under running water. Puree the fish with the garlic, the spring onions and the parsley in a food processor. Beat the egg and mix it into the fish with a fork. Combine the flour, the yeast and the water in a bowl and mix into a batter. Bit by bit, spoon the batter into the cod mixture and stir until creamy. Let this rest for a few minutes. In the meantime, heat a generous amount of olive oil in a frying pan. (The fritters should be covered while frying). Test the temperature of the oil by tossing in a bit of bread. When it instantly turns golden brown, the oil is at the right temperature. Take one tablespoon batter at the time and fry the fritters for about 2 minutes on each side over medium-high heat until they puff up and are golden brown and crunchy. Let them drain on paper towel.

Serving suggestion: Drizzle with molasses, honey or aioli with saffron (see recipe on page 166)

 A dry Rueda Verdejo.



¡Croquetas cremosas españolas!

— Creamy Spanish croquettes —

The croquette was invented by one of the chefs of King Louis XIV. This dish became popular all over the world including Spain, where you can find it in almost any tapas bar. Spanish croquettes have a soft, creamy bechamel filling which melts in your mouth. They are usually round or oval and not too big. A perfect tapa!

When I was little, we used to have a whole leg of Serrano ham sitting on the kitchen counter. This big ham definitely spiced up our suburban kitchen.

The croquettes we used to make at home were delicious because of the bechamel sauce. My father would saw off a bit of the ham bone and we would add this to the milk while it was cooking. The bechamel sauce would have this wonderful, intense ham flavor. More like an explosion of flavors in your mouth which no store-bought sauce could ever top.

It's not hard to make Spanish croquettes, if you are not in a hurry.

I usually prepare many different varieties at a time and freeze the extras to surprise unexpected guests. Homemade croquettes are always a big hit at my house.

Makes 10

- Croquetas de jamón ibérico o serrano -
 ¼ cup/30 g onion
 2 tbsp/30 g butter
 3-4 oz/80-100 g Iberian or Serrano ham
 1¼ cup/ 300 ml whole milk
 ¼ cup/30 g all-purpose flour (for the
 bechamel)
 salt
 black pepper
 nutmeg
 1 cup/130 g all-purpose flour (for the
 crust)
 1 cup/150 g breadcrumbs
 1 egg
 1¼ cup/300 ml olive oil

Chop the onion finely and sauté for about 4 minutes in butter over a medium-high heat until translucent. Cut the ham into small pieces, add to the pan and sauté for another minute. Heat the milk until it is lukewarm and set aside.

Croquetas de jamón ibérico o serrano - Iberian or Serrano ham croquettes

Add the flour to the pan with onion and ham and stir with a wooden spoon for 3-4 minutes over medium-high heat until a paste forms which separates from the pan and just starts to brown. Pour in the lukewarm milk bit by bit while stirring continuously. Wait each time until the milk has been absorbed before adding more. During this process the bechamel should cook slowly over medium-high heat. After about 5 minutes the bechamel should thicken. Using your wooden spoon, make a line through the middle of the bechamel, if this flows back slowly, it is thick enough.

Season with salt, pepper and a pinch of nutmeg. Do not over-salt, remember the ham is salty. Pour the bechamel in large dish, cover with foil and let it set in the refrigerator for at least two hours. Once it is set, cut the bechamel into 10 pieces of equal size. Pour the flour and the breadcrumbs into two separate, shallow bowls. Beat the egg. Rub some olive oil on your hands and shape the bechamel into oval croquettes. Roll these in the flour, then dip them in the egg and finally coat them with the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil in a deep frying pan until it reaches a temperature of 350°F/180°C and fry the croquettes, 5 at a time, for about 3 minutes over medium-high heat until golden brown. (Test the temperature of the oil by tossing in a bit of bread. When it instantly turns golden brown, the oil is at the right temperature.)

Serving suggestion: Delicious with aioli. (see recipe on page 166)

Variation to add extra flavor to the bechamel: Bring the milk to a boil with 1 fl. oz of heavy cream and add a piece of Serrano ham bone. Cover and cook over low heat for about 20 minutes.



- Croquetas de gambas -

3-4 oz/80-90 g (frozen) shrimp
½ garlic clove
1¼ cup/ 300 ml whole milk
1 fl oz/30 ml olive oil
¼ cup/30 g all-purpose flour
salt
white pepper
nutmeg
1 cup/130 g all-purpose flour
1 cup/150 g breadcrumbs
1 egg
1¼ cup/300 ml olive oil

- Croquetas vegetarianas -

3 oz/80 g kale or spinach
3 oz/80 g Manchego cheese
1¼ cup/ 300 ml whole milk
2 tbsp/30 g butter
salt
black pepper
nutmeg
1 cup/130 g all-purpose flour
(for the crust)
1 cup/150 g breadcrumbs
1 egg
1¼ cup/300 ml olive oil

Croquetas de gambas - shrimp croquettes

If needed, defrost the shrimp and chop finely. Crush the garlic. Heat the olive oil in a skillet and sauté the shrimp with the garlic, salt and pepper for about 1-2 minutes over medium-high heat. Continue to prepare just like the ham croquettes.

Serving suggestion: Serve with squid ink aioli or orange and honey aioli (recipes on page 166)

Variation: Add a few drops of smoked olive oil and a packet of squid ink to the bechamel.

Croquetas vegetarianas - vegetarian croquettes

Finely chop the kale or spinach. Grate the Manchego cheese. Heat the milk and keep it lukewarm. Heat the butter in a skillet and sauté the kale or spinach (with a pinch of salt and pepper) for 5 minutes over low to medium-high heat. Continue to prepare as the ham croquettes but add the Manchego cheese once the bechamel is done.

Serving suggestion: Delicious with aioli and pear (see recipe on page 166)

Variations:

- Substitute the kale or spinach with ¼ cup chopped onions.
- Try to make round croquettes instead of oval ones.



A young red Tempranillo or a Spanish beer.