

Michael's Paella

A savory Spanish treat prepared to be shared

BY DAVID CAMPICHE

This was a proud moment, watching my son, Michael, a fine and disciplined chef, take over our small home kitchen and hammer out one of the best dinners, a classic Spanish paella. This is a backbone dish of Spanish cuisine.

For several years, Michael was an executive chef in a Spanish restaurant in Portland. Small plates, called tapas, were the restaurant's specialty, and on Mondays, the restaurant served paella. This was a bit of an engineering trick, involving a fortune in paella pans and the timing of a dedicated chef and staff.

Paella is about seafood, accompanied by Arborio rice. Like most great dishes, it begs homemade stock, in this case a fish and shrimp stock, sofrito, a pepper and vegetable addition, and a Spanish sausage like chorizo (Bilbao sausage), a sausage with a touch of heat.

In Madrid, Spain, locals eat late, sometimes at 10 or 11 p.m. after a long afternoon nap, and dozens of restaurants roll out huge pans of paella to the delight of hungry folks. This includes plenty of tourists, including, years ago, my wife, Laurie, and me. I may not always remember where I laid my car keys but I do have a vivid memory of the sublime taste of this dish.

Ingredients

- Three to four Bilbao sausages, 8 inch links, sliced thinly
- 10 cups of stock, made from shrimp shells, fish scraps and veggies
- 5 cups of Arborio rice
- 1 1/2 pounds of shrimp
- 1 1/2 pounds of calamari
- 2 pounds of chicken pieces
- 2 pounds of butter clams (little necks)
- 2 cups of peas
- 4 cups of sofrito
- One lemon
- 1/4 cup olive oil for the sauté
- 1/4 teaspoon saffron, in a half cup of water until it blooms
- 1 cup of white wine
- Salt to taste



LEFT: Simmering a Spanish paella. **RIGHT:** Sublime and picturesque ingredients make up a delicious paella.

Photos by David Campiche

Preparation

A large, flat paella pan is important but not necessary. Arborio rice is mandatory. This is a large recipe, designed for a gathering of friends or some very hungry athletes.

Michael lightly browns shucked shrimp shells in olive oil and adds 1 cup of white wine and non-oily fish pieces (bones, heads and tails, with halibut being a favorite) plus celery, onions, black peppercorns and bay leaves to three of quarts of water. Slowly simmer into a stock for a couple of hours.

Three or four 8 inch sausage links are sliced less than a quarter of an inch across and sautéed separately until brown. Pour off

the oil and hold. To make sofrito, combine one red, green and yellow pepper, one red onion and four tablespoons of minced garlic. Chop and sauté all in 1 cup of olive oil. Add five grated tomatoes, toss the skins and cook until the mixture is reduced to a paste.

In another large flat pan, preferably a paella pan, saute chicken pieces in olive oil and add in the rice when half cooked. Stir for several minutes, add in the sausage, the sofrito and then the stock. Add the saffron. After the mixture starts to boil, set a timer for 15 minutes. At 10 minutes, add the clams. Still in their shells and push the clams down into the rice. After five more minutes, lay on the

shrimp and calamari, placing them carefully across the top of the rice.

As the paella cooks down, shake the pan to keep the rice from sticking. Lower the heat and finally scatter the peas across the top. After 15 minutes place the pan in an oven at 450 degrees Fahrenheit for five minutes.

Take out the pan, squeeze in the lemon juice and cover all with saran wrap for at least five minutes. Prepare for the sublime.

David Campiche is a potter, poet, writer and lifelong resident of the Long Beach Peninsula with a keen interest in adventure, fine and culinary arts. Find more about his work at davidcampiche.com.