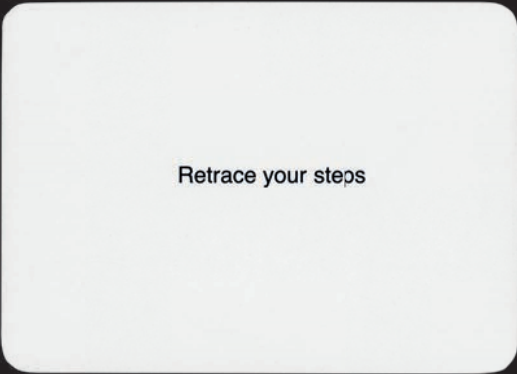




PARSING

A newsletter of interesting things mailed out once a month or until we're done.



Retrace your steps

Oblique Strategies is a card-based method for promoting creativity jointly created by Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, first published in 1975. Physically, it takes the form of a deck of 7-by-9-centimetre printed cards in a black box. Each card offers a challenging constraint intended to help artists break creative blocks by encouraging lateral thinking.

A couple of months ago, some friends decided spur-of-the-moment to make lechón (slow-roasted pork), which is not technically a spur-of-the-moment dish. When they face-timed to invite me over, I said "yes, ok, what time" because you say yes without hesitation to the prospect of lechón. After it slowly cooked in the oven for 5 hours, I snuck a piece of chicharrón (the thick but soft skin), and it felt like biting into a time machine, a crispy, fatty, little time machine. Suddenly I was back in my mom's kitchen in Miami. It was Nochebuena, and the kitchen was full. Full of kids screaming. Full of adults cooking, plating food and also screaming. Full of savory smells that made your mouth water. I would typically hover very conspicuously over the lechón to steal bits of chicharrón until someone slapped my hands away. But then the bite was over, and I was back in an apartment in Bedstuy surrounded by friends from Miami, all trying to relive small parts of their childhood. I've been thinking about that moment in my friend's kitchen a lot and the foods my mom made growing up. As a child of mixed cultures, Jewish and Puerto Rican, I often feel like a girl with no real culture. A diluted version of parents with rich backgrounds and languages and experiences. This month I wanted to explore my mom's culture a little bit in an attempt to enrich my life and maybe yours. Punctuating this issue is a story my dad wrote last year about my grandparent's dining table.

Buen Provecho,
Daniela Spector

06-07 RECIPE: TOSTONES

10-11 RECIPE: SOFRITO

16-29 THE PARABLE OF THE WOODEN

08-09 RECIPE: PERNIL

12-13 RECIPE: ARROZ CON GANDULES



01 — tostones

Tostones come from plantains (unripe green bananas), so they have less sugar and more starch. They're equivalent to french fries or other carby American sides, but it's unique in that it doubles as a vehicle for all the different parts of your meal. It's basically an edible spoon. The key to getting perfectly crispy tostones is frying them twice. The first time is to get the color, and the second is to get the crunch. If you want a healthier option, you can bake or air fry tostones. Just know that every time you do, a Puerto Rican abuelita loses her wings.

TIME: 15 minutes

YIELD: 2 servings

INGREDIENTS:

2 plantains
1 cup vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Pour vegetable oil into a large, heavy pot with a depth of at least an inch. Heat over medium-high heat, 7-8 minutes.
 2. Meanwhile, prep the plantains: trim off both ends of the plantain. Using the tip of the knife, score the skin of the plantain lengthwise down its ribs, rotating and repeating until you've scored it all the way around. Make sure your cut extends down to the flesh of the plantain, but try not to cut into the flesh itself. Peel plantain along the score marks, then cut into half-inch thick coins.
 3. Working in batches to avoid crowding, gently place the plantains into the pot and fry until golden, 2-3 minutes.
 4. Using tongs, transfer the plantain to a plate lined with a paper towel.
 5. While the plantains are hot, use a tostonera or your favorite can of beans lined with aluminum foil and press down firmly. The edges should split. (If it begins to fall apart at this stage, they're likely not cooked enough.)
 6. Working in batches, fry the flattened plantains until they are golden brown, 2-3 minutes. Transfer back to the plate lined with a paper towel and season with salt while they're hot.
-



As someone who waits until they're starving and near death to make food, any recipe that takes longer than 30 minutes is similar to torture, so slow roasting pork for 5 hours felt intimidating. But I mustered my courage (by courage, I mean my partner, who I guilted into helping me) and went to the butcher shop on an unseasonably warm Sunday. We came home with a 5lb bundle of joy. Specifically, a 5lb bundle of pork shoulder* that was definitely joyous. Despite the length of time you'll be devoting to this recipe, it's reasonably low maintenance. You could make this dish for a small gathering, or you could bless future-you with top-tier leftovers. Because we're slow-roasting the pork, the fat renders and transforms into liquid gold—perfect for roasting veggies. And the meat? Great in sandwiches, tacos, salads. The possibilities? Endless. After making this dish, my partner attempted to convince me that eating pork for nearly a week isn't good for you. Uncharacteristically, he is wrong, and I am right.

TIME: 8 hours

YIELD: 2 servings + solid leftovers

INGREDIENTS:

5lbs pork shoulder
 1 lime
 1 cup white vinegar
 1 tbspo adobo (*Louisa* brand)
 cooking spray

FOR THE MARINADE:

2 garlic bulbs
 ½ cup olive oil
 5 tsp salt
 1 tsp pepper
 1 tbspo dried oregano

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Clean pernil with lime and white vinegar, then rinse with water and pat dry with a paper towel.
2. Using a paring knife, pierce holes throughout the meat, especially right under the skin. Do not pierce the skin itself.
3. Peel all of the garlic. Take one garlic bulb's worth of cloves and place them within the piercings in the pork.
4. Create the marinade by mincing the remaining garlic and mixing it with the salt, pepper, and dried oregano. Slowly add in the olive oil until you get the consistency of a thick paste.
5. Rub the marinade well into the pork, getting it into every nook and cranny.
6. Place the marinated pork into a glass or ceramic container, cover, and refrigerate overnight. (Note from my sister: "Never store in aluminum or metal. This was a big rule of Mami's." She gave me no further information, but we always abide by Ma's rules in this house.)
7. The next day, remove the pork from the refrigerator and let it rest for 30 minutes to get to room temperature.
8. Preheat the oven to 250°F.
9. Pat the skin of the pork dry with a paper towel and season with adobo.
10. Spray a deep pan with nonstick cooking spray. Place the pork into the pan, skin side up, and cover with aluminum foil, making sure the foil doesn't touch the pork's skin.
11. Turn and baste the pork every hour for five hours.
12. Take the pork out of the oven, remove the aluminum foil, and increase the oven temperature to 400°F. Place the pork back in the oven and cook for 90 minutes. The skin should turn crispy and have the slightest char.
13. Remove the pork from the oven and let it sit for 20 minutes.
14. Cut off the chicharrón and chop into bite-size pieces. Carve, shred, or pull apart the pork and garnish with the crispy bits of chicharrón.

*Pernil is slow roasted pork shoulder vs. lechón which is a general term for slow roasted pork.



When I first moved to New York, we lived a 15 minute walk away from the nearest Key Foods. Sure, 15 minutes doesn't sound far, but time has no meaning when it's your first New York winter and your idea of snowshoes are high-top converse. Grocery shopping became an endurance sport, loading my body up with shopping bags (not dissimilar to that of a mule) and shuffling back to our apartment. When grocery deliveries became a socially and financially acceptable option, I swore off grocery stores like a bad habit. I became the unofficial (and unpaid) spokesperson for Fresh Direct. Once at an event, I found out someone worked at Fresh Direct and spent an uncomfortable (for them, not me) amount of time fangirling and asking them questions about the company. All that to say, most of the following ingredients were not on my trusty grocery app, so I had to venture into the real world and interact with real humans again (horrifying). Sofrito is the secret sauce in many Puerto Rican dishes, so creating it from scratch with fresh produce from your local Latin market will make all the difference.

TIME: 15 minutes

YIELD: 2-ish cups

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 garlic bulbs
- 1 medium onion
- ½ lb aji dulces peppers
- 1 cubanelle pepper
- 1 red pepper
- 1 bunch of culantro*
- ½ cup olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Peel garlic.
 2. Roughly chop the onion.
 3. Remove the stems and seeds of all of the peppers and roughly chop.
 4. Add all ingredients into a food processor, blend at a low speed, and slowly add olive oil.
 5. Transfer to an airtight glass container and store in the refrigerator until needed.
-

**Culantro is an herb that has a similar aroma and flavor to cilantro, but they are not the same plant. It has long, serrated leaves and looks a bit like long-leaved lettuce. Culantro has a stronger flavor than cilantro and is therefore used in smaller amounts. Unlike cilantro, it can be added during cooking rather than afterward.*



04 —

arroz con gandules

Most of my childhood memories of homecooked dinners typically include rice. (Unless my dad was making dinner, in which case it was his world-famous spaghetti. A title attributed by my dad and no one else.) If my mom was making a quick dinner for the family after work, it almost always included simple white rice. But if we had company, she would spice it up and make arroz con gandules (rice and pigeon peas).

After some minor harassment, my sister was kind enough to send me these recipes. The only caveat is that she's accustomed to making meals for a small but ravenous army (my nephews and brother-in-law). So I had to size down a bit to accommodate my household: myself and a boy who, even at gunpoint, couldn't tell you what's currently in our refrigerator. My math may not be completely accurate. But that's my favorite thing about recipes like these, they're forgiving, and you can add your personal touches without it deviating too far from the original.

TIME: 40 minutes

YIELD: 2-ish servings

INGREDIENTS:

¾ cup medium grain rice
1 cup water
½ can gandules (pigeon peas)
2 oz salted pork
½ tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp sofrito
½ tbsp tomato paste
½ tbsp sazón (*Louisa* brand)
5 salad olives
¼ tbsp cumin
salt to taste

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Rinse and drain the rice. Set aside to dry.
2. Add the olive oil into a large aluminum pot and heat on medium.
3. Once the olive oil has warmed, add sofrito and cook for 2-3 minutes.
4. While the sofrito is sauteeing, drain the gandules but reserve the water.
5. Add the drained gandules, olives, sazón, cumin, and a pinch of salt to the sofrito, occasionally stirring for 5 minutes.
6. Incorporate the rice and pork into the sauce and let it cook for 2-3 minutes, continually stirring, so the rice doesn't burn.
7. Pour in water and the reserved water from the gandules to the rice.
8. Turn the heat up to high and let rice come to a boil.
9. Once water is boiling, and water has evaporated a little below the rice line, turn the heat to low and cover.
10. Cook for 20 minutes, stirring halfway through.
11. Fluff rice and keep covered until
12. ready to serve.

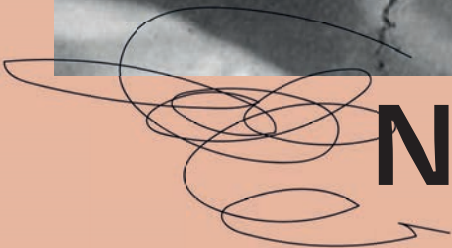
THE

OF



WRITTEN BY DANIEL SPECTOR

WOODEN



PARABLE



THE

TABLE



My grandfather (left), *The Man with the Newspaper*, was known for falling asleep at the dining table while reading the newspaper, snoring softly with his head dangling precariously over the back of his chair. My grandmother (right), *The Woman with the Red Pencil*, was known to edit manuscripts in a large, black binder at the dining table.

The Wooden Table awoke slowly, as if from a long, deep sleep. It felt achy and stiff, but not tired, even though it dreamed of a journey. In the dream's beginning, the Wooden Table was cool and bathed in light from the Sun and shadows from trees and leaves. It saw sky above and earth below and heard birds and snakes and lizards and toads and ants and bees. Their music was melodious. But the serenity was broken by screaming saws and screaming birds and ants; the Wooden Table screamed, too, and the sky disappeared. Then came a place of loud noises, of saws – more saws – that sliced, screws that bored, planes that scraped. The Wooden Table screamed again, but this time it screamed alone.

All was dark, quiet.

“What am I?” it called to the dark.

“You are of me,” the Mother answered. “I raised the pine trees that give you form. I birthed the metals that hold your form together.”

The Wooden Table remembered the sky, the birds, the screams. It was not a dream, it was a memory of a time before.

“Who am I?”

“You are the Wooden Table.” “Where am I?”

“The People brought you here where they live, a place they call Home.” “Who are the People and why am I here?”

“You will learn.”

The Wooden Table paused. This was a lot of information to consider after a long, deep sleep.

As it was considering this information, the Sun rose. The Wooden Table couldn't see the Sun, but its light felt familiar. Everything else was...not familiar. The Wooden Table was in a space enclosed on all sides and above and below by flat, hard surfaces. The Sun's light came through two holes in one of the surfaces. The Wooden Table did not understand this concept of space with boundaries; in the time before, it knew only the soft earth.

A man and a woman entered the space. The Wooden Table recognized what they were because it remembered, in the time before, seeing men and women walking on a path between the trees, or sitting with their eyes closed and their backs against a tree. The man and woman placed plates and cups on the Wooden Table, sat down, and ate from the plates and drank from the cups. They talked while they ate, sometimes making a sound like a burbling stream. Then they left with the plates and cups. They returned when the Sun's light was waning and ate and talked and burbled. Sometimes they held hands. As before, they left with the plates and cups. But this time they returned. The woman spread papers in front of her and made marks on them with a red pencil and the man put his legs up on the Wooden Table and opened a newspaper. After a while, which included a little bit of talking and an occasional burble, they left.

“What are the sounds the woman and the man make, like a burbling stream?” the Wooden Table asked the Mother when it was alone.

“Those are the sounds they make when they feel Happy,” the Mother replied.

“What does Happy feel like?”

“It is not for you to know, only for you to remember.”

Days passed, and months, and years. Sometimes other men and women came to the Wooden Table and talked and ate and burbled, but they left before the Sun's light disappeared. The Woman with the Red Pencil and the Man with the Newspaper stayed. The Wooden Table thought, these are the People.

On days when others came, the People brought more plates and cups and much more food and drink, and the Wooden Table bore it all. The space was filled with even more burbling, like many streams running side by side.

Is this why I am here, it wondered, to bear the weight of the food?





One day, the People came with a baby to the Wooden Table. And then a short time later with another baby. And then another. Each time they brought a baby, the People also brought others, and everyone talked and burred louder than usual. Each time a baby grew a little bigger, the People gathered with others around the Wooden Table. When the babies became men and women, some of them had babies, and the talking and burbling increased in intensity and frequency.

The Wooden Table did not understand what it was about the babies growing that caused the People to burble louder than usual, just as it did not understand why the People burred that way even when they stopped growing, just as it did not understand why the People burred when they brought others to it. But it remembered each time the People burred.

“The People are now many and they often feel Happy,” the Wooden Table reported to the Mother.

But not always. The Wooden Table began to notice sounds that were not like a burbling stream. Once, when the light of the Sun was waning and the People gathered to eat and drink, they interrupted their talking with brittle sounds, sounds with edges. Soon the People were making only brittle sounds, until one of the People left quickly and the space became silent.

“What are the brittle sounds the People make?” the Wooden Table asked the Mother when it was alone. “Those are the sounds they make when they feel Angry,” the Mother said.

“What does Angry feel like?”

“It is not for you to know.”

“But for me to remember?” “Yes.”

The Wooden Table did not understand what caused the People to make brittle sounds, and sometimes stop burbling and make brittle sounds, and even sometimes make brittle sounds and then burble. But it remembered each time the People made brittle sounds.

Days passed, and months, and years, and still the Wooden Table did not know why it was.

One day the Old Man with the Newspaper didn't come back. The Wooden Table waited. And waited. Then the People gathered around the Wooden Table and made sounds. The Wooden Table didn't understand these sounds, which rose and fell and rose again, and shattered into other sounds that spun around each other and fused briefly before flying apart. The sounds lingered, even when the People paused before making more such sounds.

After the People went away, the Wooden Table asked the Mother, “Why didn't the Old Man with the Newspaper come back to me?”

“Because,” said the Mother, “he came back to me.” “What does that mean?”

“All the People come back to me, and from me they will come.” “Will I come back to you?”

“Yes.”

The Wooden Table considered this information. “What are those sounds the People make?”

“Those are the sounds they make when they feel Sad.” “And I suppose it is not for me to know, but to remember.” “Yes.”

“Will I ever feel Happy or Angry or Sad?” “Perhaps you will feel Content.”

“What does Content feel like?”

“That is for you to know.”

The Wooden Table was to hear those sounds again over the coming years. When a young man didn't come back, when the Old Woman with the Red Pencil didn't come back, when a young woman didn't come back, the People gathered around the Wooden Table and made those sounds.







The Wooden Table didn't understand why the Old Man with the Newspaper and the others decided to come back to the Mother. But it remembered each time the People made those sounds.

Days passed, and months, and years, and still the Wooden Table did not know why it was. The Wooden Table's joints now groaned when they moved - wood against wood, metal against metal - and its legs were wobbly. So many People, so many others, so many elbows and plates of food, so much sound.

One night when the Wooden Table was alone, it said to the Mother, "You see where a child carved its name into my leg? It hurt, but not as bad as the screws from the time before. And here, on my crossbars, where the People rested their feet, you see the scuffs and the missing pieces? The People were comfortable. And here, on my top, look at these scratches and worn areas, where so many plates and elbows and babies and the legs of the Old Man with the Newspaper came to rest. They came to rest on me. The People came back to me."

"Why?" asked the Mother.

The Wooden Table did not expect this question. "I don't understand."
"Why do the People come back to you?"

The Wooden Table understood this was an important question, and not one that should be answered hastily. So it thought back to all that it had witnessed since it awoke from the long, deep sleep - the first time the Woman with the Red Pencil and the Man with the Newspaper held hands, the first time they burred, the first baby, the tenth baby, the day the Old Man with the Newspaper did not come back.

"I remember! I remember everything," the Wooden Table said, more to itself than to the Mother. "The Happy times, the Angry times, the Sad times, the just-talking times, the quiet times. The babies who grew up, the men and women who grew old. The People who came back to you. The others, so many others, who gathered with the People."

"I am filled with memories, and the People need those memories because the People are the memories they keep," it said, almost out of breath, "and when the People gather, I remind them of who they are."

The Wooden Table paused. "I am Home." "You have learned," said the Mother.

The Wooden Table felt Content, and as it gathered the memories in its embrace, it quietly repeated to itself, "I am Home. I am Home." Then, for the first time since the dream of the journey, the Wooden Table slept.









Please send thoughts, recommendations, submissions,



and spelling corrections to hi@danielaspector.com !

FEBRUARY 2021

