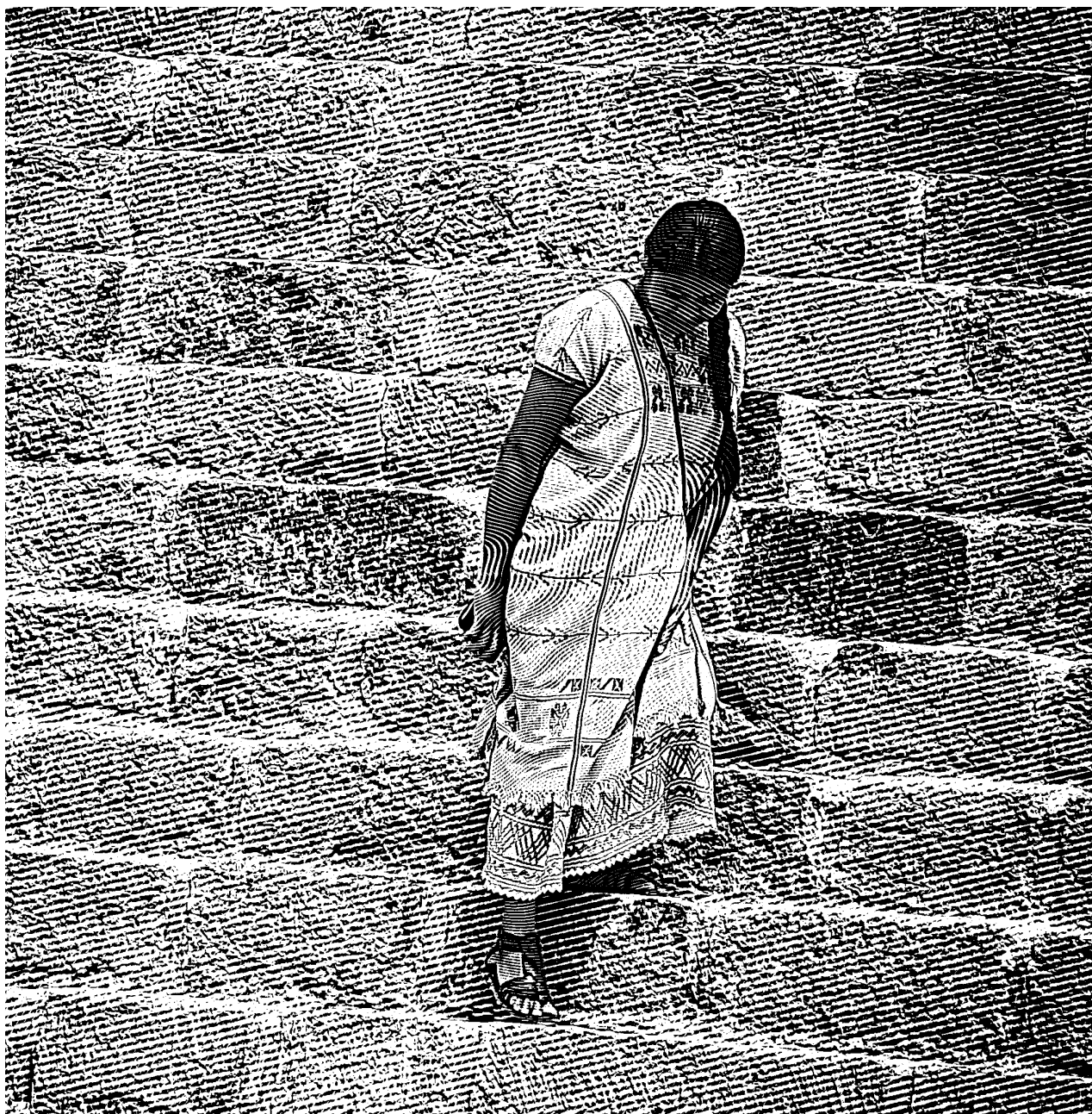


RANCHO GORDO-XOXOC PROJECT COOKING



A mutual friend thought we should meet. That day turned out to be one for the ages. Yunuen and Gabriel of Xoxoc split their time between Mexico City and an historic hacienda in Hidalgo. I was expecting nothing, maybe a nice meal, but the encounter changed the course of Rancho Gordo.

Rancho Gordo was a success out of the gate. We were like a slow simmering stew, steadily getting better and better, but it was when we teamed with Xoxoc to start the Rancho Gordo-Xoxoc Project that things really took off. We started with the concept of working with local growers in Mexico who have small lots of heirloom beans and exporting them to the United States at a fair price. The goal was always “everyone wins or no one can win.” The growers were leery at first but years of consistency, tact and diplomacy have won them over.

By consuming these products, we’re creating a market that actually encourages people to preserve their local traditions. From beans, we’ve branched out into other products as well. Vinegar, chocolate, salts, oreganos, and even pottery are all being imported on a small scale from Mexico. For us, creating a market for at-risk crops is the best way to save them.

This ebooklet features some of our favorite ways to enjoy Rancho Gordo-Xoxoc Project products, some traditional and some creative.

SOPA CAMPESINA

The hacienda that hosts much of the activities of our Rancho Gordo-Xoxoc Project was bustling with guests and meals during our last visit. For now, I have my photos, and this recipe for a very simple soup that seems much more indulgent than it actually is. It's delicious and easy and for me, nostalgic. Please don't try this with commodity beans. It won't work. A simple dish like this needs the best ingredients, like Rancho Gordo heirloom beans.

Serves 4

½ yellow onion, chopped medium

2 cloves minced garlic

1 tablespoon olive oil

½ pound Rancho Gordo Rebozero, Moro or Lila beans, cleaned and rinsed

Sea salt

3 corn tortillas, preferably a little stale, cut into very thin strips

Oil for frying

1 teaspoon Rancho Gordo Oregano Indio

Limes for garnish

In a large pot, over medium heat, saute the onion and garlic in the olive oil on medium heat until soft, 6 to 8 minutes. Add the beans and cover with about 2 inches of water. Turn the heat to high and bring to a full, rapid boil for 15 minutes. Turn the heat to low and allow the beans to gently simmer. Make sure the beans are always covered by about 2 inches of liquid, adding new water as needed. Cold water can seize the beans and slow down the cooking process, so it's best to have a tea kettle or a pan with hot water on hand to add as needed. After about an hour, the beans should begin to soften. Add a tablespoon of sea salt and allow the beans to continue cooking until done. Total time will be between an hour and a half and 3 hours. If it's taking too long, turn up the heat.

While the beans are cooking, heat the oil in a skillet and fry the tortilla strips in the hot oil until crisp. Allow them to drain on paper towels and salt generously.

When the beans are soft, correct the seasoning and add the Oregano Indio. Ladle into bowls and top with the tortilla strips. Serve with limes.

GUISADO DE LUPE

We all met in the dining room of the hacienda the morning after one of the tours had ended. I was going to the thermal baths nearby for a few days with Yunuen and Gabriel. Lupe and Chabela wanted to stay behind and get the hacienda in order, which was kind of silly. The place was spic and span and most everything had been put away. We were all happy but very burnt out.

Fatigue was not a good excuse for bad food, apparently. The women rearranged many of the leftovers from the tour and we had an incredible meal. The highlight for me was this tomato dish that Lupe made. She called it Minquiche and said she had learned to make it in Michoacan. I've seen recipes and they might have similarities but they seem like an altogether different dish. Just to be safe I always call it Lupe's Guisado.

My original notes were a little vague:
"Roasted tomatoes. Cazuela. Canela. Harina. Rajas. 15 minutes. Crema. Queso."

Coming home, I was just as confused as you might be, but I came up with this and I love it so much I make it weekly. I believe Lupe fried flour in the oil to make a roux but I don't think this is needed at all so I skipped this step. Long, slow cooking in a wide pot, like a cazuela (or even a Windsor pot) encourages evaporation and tastes better than a flour-thickened sauce.

Serves 4

1 yellow onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1 28 ounce can whole peeled tomatoes, roughly chopped with juices
1 stick Rancho Gordo Canela (Soft Cinnamon)
1 tablespoon Rancho Gordo Oregano Indio
2 Poblano chile peppers, roasted, peeled and seeded, cut into strips
Salt
½ cup fresh mozzarella cheese, chopped
¼ cup heavy cream or creme fraiche

In a cazuela or other wide pot over medium heat, saute the onion and garlic in the olive oil until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, canela stick, and Oregano Indio and continue cooking for about 5 minutes. Add the poblano chiles and salt and cook another 15 minutes on low heat, stirring occasionally. Add the cheese and cream and stir thoroughly. Check for seasoning and add more salt if necessary. Remove the canela and discard.

Serve warm with rice, tortillas or as a salsa.

REQUESON

Rancho Gordo sells beans to some of the best and most innovative restaurants in the world but one of my favorite meals was with Mexican bean farmer Abel and his family after we'd made our first purchase of their beans for export. We ate the beans they grew with tortillas from corn they grew and salsa from chiles and tomatoes they grew. I don't know how a meal gets more romantic.

Tortillas and beans are perennial favorites but if you want to make the beans more indulgent, try this fried ricotta cheese mix. A spoonful turns your beans from ordinary to incredible.

If you can't find fresh epazote, I think it's better to leave it out. The dried just doesn't cut it. You might try a teaspoon full of Oregano Indio.

2 tablespoons olive oil
½ white onion, chopped fine
2 cups ricotta cheese
1 serrano chile, minced, seeds removed (optional)
2 sprigs fresh epazote, leaves removed and roughly chopped
Salt to taste

In a pan over medium heat, saute the onion in the oil until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the cheese, stirring to incorporate the oil and the onion. Keep cooking and stirring over medium-low heat for about 10 minutes. The sauce should get drier and drier.

Fold in the chile and epazote, test seasoning for salt and cook another minute or two. Traditionally this is somewhat dry, but it's just as delicious a little moister.

ZUCCHINI IN CHILE SAUCE

Araceli Lopez del Rosario leads a collective of women who produce our stoneground chocolate in Xochistlahuaca in Guerrero. Along with the chocolate, the women produce gorgeous textiles and of course, the meals I enjoyed there were memorable.

Often they would serve a simple dish of summer squash in a sauce made from a local chile. This is my version, more practical stateside, but obviously it would be easy to improvise something on your own.

Araceli served this with corn tortillas but I enjoy it with rice for an easy weeknight meal.

Serves 4 as a side dish

1 medium white or yellow onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
2 tablespoons olive oil or lard
4 ounces Rancho Gordo New Mexican Red Chile Powder
1 scant teaspoon cumin
1 teaspoon salt
Chicken stock (optional)
4 zucchini (summer squash), sliced

In a frying pan over medium heat, saute the onion and garlic in the oil or lard until soft, 5 to 7 minutes.

Add the chile powder, cumin and salt, and cook, stirring well, for about 2 minutes. The mixture will be very dry. Slowly add water or chicken stock, stirring constantly, until you have a thick sauce. Gently simmer for 15 to 20 minutes. Adjust the salt and thin with more water or stock if necessary.

Add the zucchini and simmer in the sauce until cooked, about 7 minutes.

WHITE BEAN, CELERY AND RADISH SALAD

On our Xoxoc bean tours, we eat very well. Our hosts are eager to show off all of their best dishes and the guests are eager to try everything. Courses seem to cascade with reckless abandon and sooner or later, you must cry “Uncle!” and take a break.

One night, Lupe was planning the meals and decided to make a salad with white beans, inspired by one of the recipes in my first book. A white bean salad is very un-Mexican but everyone loved it, even Lupe!

Lupe made hers with Ayocote Blanco, and you can use those or Cassoulet or even Royal Coronas. Lupe also cut her radishes paper thin and it was very pretty. I would imagine the best technique would be to use a mandoline for cutting the radishes but I used a vegetable peeler. It wasn't fast but I still have all my fingers intact.

Serves 4

½ red onion, sliced thin
1 celery stalk, cut in half lengthwise and then into ¼-inch slices
¼ cup chopped flat leaf parsley
1 cucumber, thinly sliced
1 bunch of radishes, cleaned and trimmed, then thinly sliced
2 ½ cups cooked Ayocote Blanco, Royal Corona, Cassoulet, or other big white bean, strained
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 teaspoons vinegar (Lupe used Pineapple Vinegar)
Salt and pepper to taste

Add all the ingredients to a large salad bowl and gently toss. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve at room temperature.

WILD RICE AND XOCONOSTLE SALAD

I'm really nuts for wild rice, and even though it is native to the United States, we seem to save it for special occasions instead of eating it as an everyday grain. It does take a while to cook, but you can use a rice cooker or you can make extra, as it reheats well.

I want you to say xoconostle really fast, seven times, please. The pronunciation varies throughout Mexico but for the most part, you'll be safe with show-ko-nost-lay. Or you can just say sour prickly pear, which is what it is.

Serves 4 to 6

4 green onions
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
1 cup dried Rancho Gordo Wild Rice
2 cups plus 2 tablespoons water
¼ cup Xoxoc dried xoconostle “Orejones Dulces”
¼ cup Xoxoc dried xoconostle “Xoconostle Dulce”
2 tablespoons Rancho Gordo banana vinegar (or other light, fruity vinegar)
½ cup pepitas (pumpkin seeds), toasted

Thinly slice the green onions, keeping the white and green parts separate.

In a saucepan, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the white parts of the green onions and cook, stirring often, until soft, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Add the wild rice and the 2 cups water and bring to a rapid boil. Let the water boil for a full 5 minutes, then reduce the heat to very low, cover, and cook for 50 minutes. The liquid should be absorbed and the rice should be tender.

Meanwhile, using kitchen scissors, cut both types of xoconostle into small bite-size pieces. In a small saucepan, combine the xoconostle, vinegar, and the remaining 2 tablespoons water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat to low and simmer until the vinegar is almost absorbed, about 3 minutes.

Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and add the wild rice, the green parts of the green onion, and the pepitas. Stir well to combine and season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Note: If you only have one variety of sweet, dried xoconostle, use 1/2 cup of it.

BLUE CORN PINOLE FRENCH TOAST

Rebecca in our San Francisco store was struck by inspiration and created Blue Corn Pinole French Toast. It's not often I'm jealous but dang! I wish I'd thought of this!

I preferred the version without the extra vanilla but I think it depends on your bread and your audience. Our Blue Corn Pinole has canela (cinnamon) and piloncillo (evaporated cane juice) in it. If you want to emphasize those flavors, by all means add more.

Serves 3 or 4

½ cup Rancho Gordo Blue Corn Pinole
3 large eggs
¾ cup milk
2 tablespoons cinnamon (optional)
Generous amount of vanilla extract (optional)
Sugar to taste
Vegetable oil for frying
6 to 8 thick slices of bread (“Make sure to use bread slices with some density to them like Texas toast, or whole loaf bread cut into thick slices. Pre-sliced bread will work too, I just like my pieces thick if you know what I mean.” -Rebecca)

Combine the pinole, eggs, milk, cinnamon and vanilla (if using), and sugar in a bowl.

In a frying pan, heat the oil over medium heat. Stir the batter with a whisk before dipping in each piece of bread. Dip the bread into the batter and fry until both sides are golden brown.

Top with fresh fruit or orange mascarpone or syrup and powdered sugar.

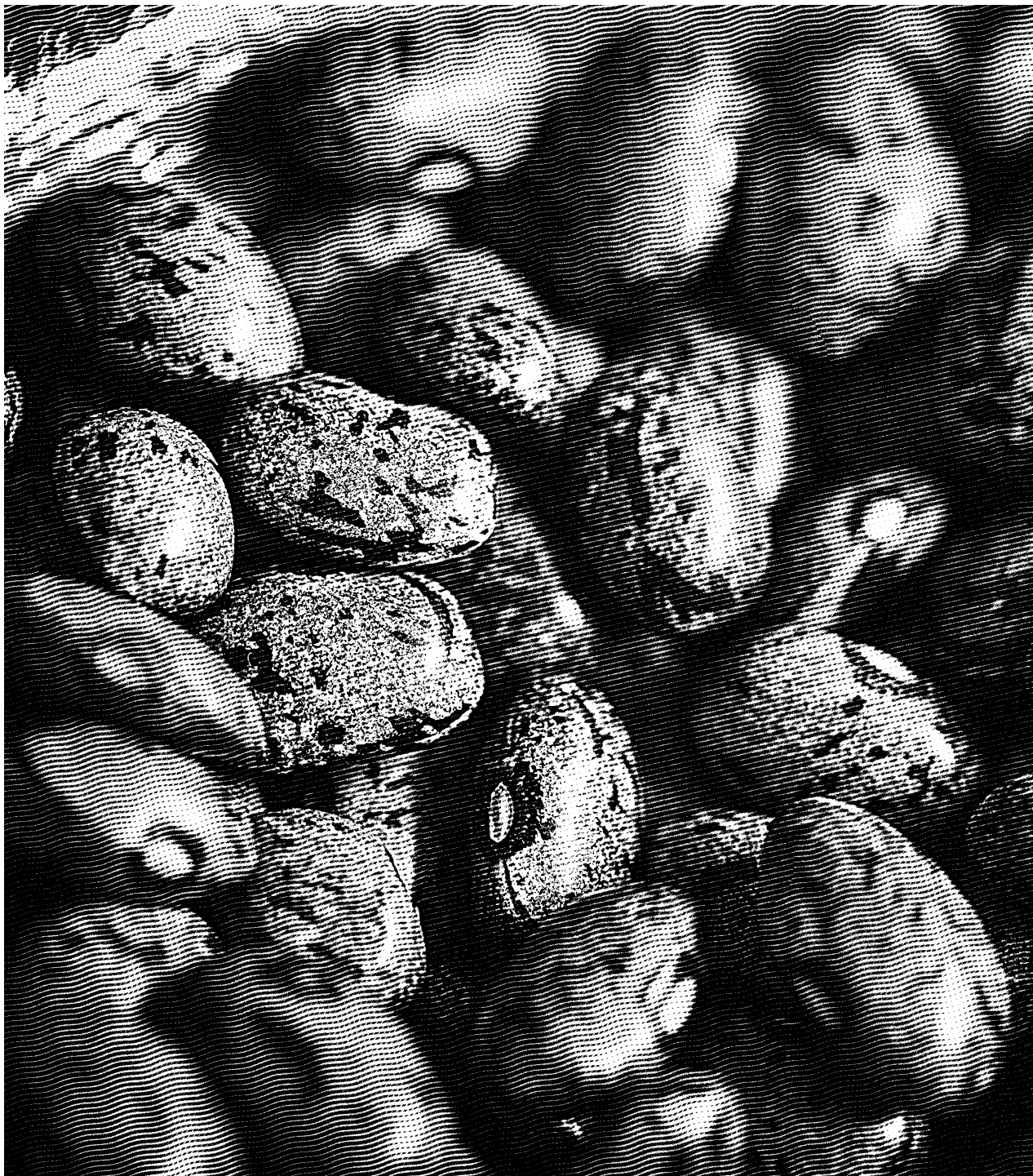
SALSA ARRIERA

It sounds oddly simple, and it is. It sounds incredibly hot, and it is. This ended up being a constant last summer with the abundance of serrano chiles.

20 whole serrano peppers
2 tablespoons chopped white onion
1 clove garlic, chopped
4 tablespoons water, cold
Salt, to taste

Toast the chiles on a medium-hot comal or griddle, turning them from time to time until they are blistered and charred.

While they are still hot, grind them with the rest of the ingredients to a rough paste in a molcajete or in a blender.



PINEAPPLE VINEGAR VINAIGRETTE WITH STONEGROUND MEXICAN CHOCOLATE

This sounds very strange but it was a winner. I was reading a recent *Bon Appetit* magazine article about Modern Mexico and I was prepared for a lot of silliness but instead it was a really smart article by Nils Bernstein.

One of the dishes was a salad made with a vinaigrette with instant coffee. At first, like you, I thought, why bother? Then I tried it. It was very good. Then I thought, if coffee is good, wouldn't chocolate be better? Guess what? It was.

The original recipe called for sherry vinegar and while that's nice, in fact, very nice, I decided to try it with our pineapple vinegar. Friends, I don't have to do anything clever for a good long time. This was great and it's time for a victory lap and a long rest on my laurels.

If it tastes overtly like pineapples or chocolate, you've used too much. It's a new taste and lovely. You can experiment with different vinegars but don't mess with the chocolate. Artisan chocolate from Mexico is the only way to go.

3 tablespoons Rancho Gordo Pineapple Vinegar
1 teaspoon honey
3 tablespoons Rancho Gordo Stoneground Mexican Chocolate, finely grated
¼ cup olive oil
salt and pepper

Whisk together the vinegar, honey, chocolate, salt and pepper until the chocolate is incorporated.

Slowly whisk in the olive oil until the dressing has emulsified. Serve room temperature over salad greens.

MEXICAN HOT CHOCOLATE

There are commercial brands of Mexican hot chocolate, and they were fine until I had chocolate from Oaxaca and then later, Guerrero. What a difference something made by hand makes. I met our producer, Araceli, and fell in love with her and her product. She hand toasts the cacao on a wood-fired clay comal and then grinds it with just piloncillo (evaporated cane juice) and canela (soft cinnamon). The result is rich, smoky and 70-percent chocolate (whereas I would guess the commercial brands are about 70 percent sugar).

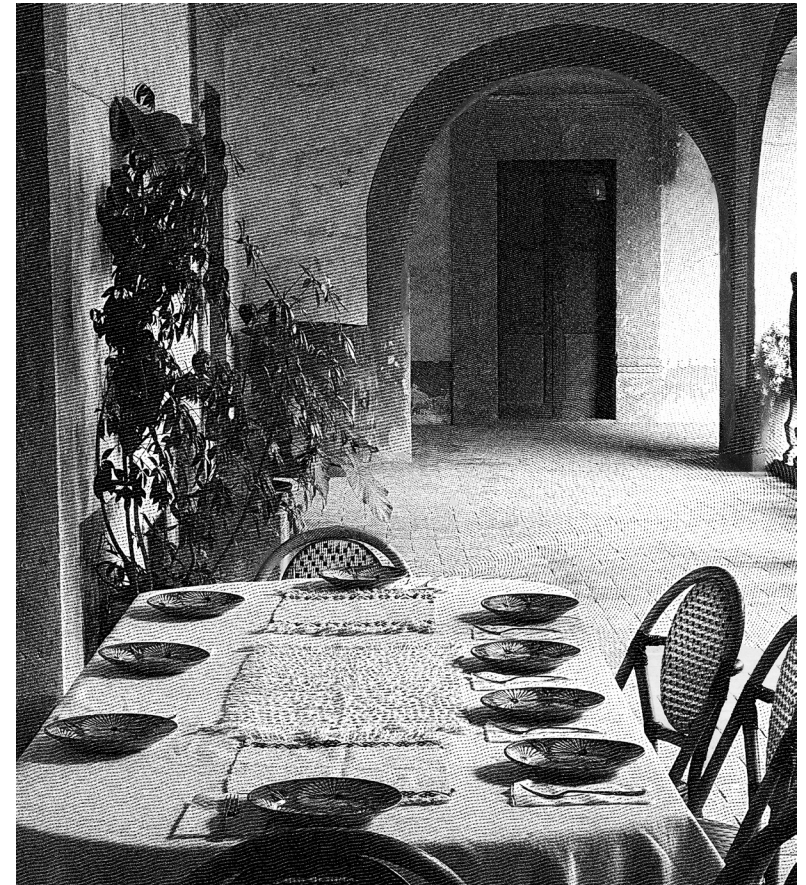
The best technique is to use scalded milk and then add the chocolate and whip with a wooden molinillo. You can find this handy tool in any Mexican grocery store, and kids love to help out and make their own drinks. A blender works, too.

Serves 1

1 cup whole milk or almond milk
½ tablet Rancho Gordo Stoneground Mexican Chocolate, broken into pieces

In a deep pan, gently bring the milk to a boil over medium heat. (I've been told the best hot chocolate is made from milk that has been allowed to boil three times.)

Pour the hot milk into the jar of a blender and add the chocolate, making sure not to go above the jar's hot liquid mark. Blend until smooth and pour into a mug. If you have a molinillo, you can use that instead of a blender.



COOKING BEANS

Normally on a bean cooking day (which frankly is everyday at Rancho Gordo), we put the beans to soak in the morning, after rinsing in lots of cool water and checking for small debris. We cover the beans by about an inch or so. If you haven't soaked, don't fret. Go ahead and cook them, knowing it will take a bit longer.

Heirloom and heritage varieties don't need a lot of fussing if they are used fresh, which I'd define as within two years. You can use a ham bone, chicken stock or as I prefer, simply a few savory vegetables. A classic mirepoix is a mix of onion, celery and carrot diced fine and sautéed in some kind of fat, often olive oil. A crushed clove of garlic doesn't hurt. If I'm cooking Mexican or Southwestern, I will sauté just onion and garlic in mild bacon drippings or even freshly rendered lard.

Add the beans and their soaking water to a large pot. You have been told before to change the water and rinse the beans. The thinking now is that vitamins and flavor can leech out of the beans into the soaking water you are throwing down the sink. There is conflicting scientific evidence that changing the water cuts down on the gas. If you want to, do it. If it seems unnecessary, don't.

If you've soaked them, the beans will have expanded, so make sure they are still covered by at least an inch, maybe a bit more. Add the sautéed vegetables and give a good stir. Raise your heat to medium high and bring to a hard boil. Keep the beans at a boil for about ten to fifteen minutes. After so many years, I think this is the moment that really matters. You have to give them a good hard boil to let them know you're the boss and then reduce them to a gentle simmer, before covering. I like to see how low I can go and still get the occasional simmering bubble. Open and close the lid, or keep it ajar to help control the heat and allow evaporation. The bean broth will be superior if it's had a chance to breathe and evaporate a little.

When the beans are almost ready, the aroma will be heady. They won't smell so much like the vegetables you've cooked but the beans themselves. At this point, I'd go ahead and salt them. Go easy as it takes awhile for the beans to absorb the salt. If you want to add tomatoes or acids like lime or vinegar, wait until the beans are cooked through.

If the bean water starts to get low, always add hot water from a tea kettle. Many believe that cold water added to cooking beans will harden them. At the very least, it will make the cooking take that much longer to bring them back to a simmer. We don't recommend using hot tap water, straight from a water heater. Better to heat the tap water in a tea kettle or pan first.

Once you've mastered this method, go ahead and try some different techniques. Your bean friends will swear by this or that method and you should take their advice, keeping in mind there are few absolutes when it comes to cooking beans, only that it's very hard work to mess up a pot of beans.

Rancho Gordo-Xoxoc Project Cooking

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*Produced by Steve Sando and Julia Newberry with
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and of course to Lupe and Chabela.*

*For more information and recipes, please visit
www.ranchogordo.com*