



BASQUE-STYLE FISH *with*  
GREEN PEPPERS and MANILA CLAMS  
*recipe on pg. 56*

# Inside BASQUE Country

*Baker, cheesemaker, pepper farmer, curer of ancient hams:  
These are a few of the makers preserving the native tastes and character  
of this distinctive corner of southwestern France*



By Jane Sigal  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BETH GALTON  
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My friend Olivia's mother and aunt are preparing quintessential Basque dishes for dinner. There will be blistered padrón peppers, along with baked goods. For the moment, it's a squid cook-off, and the sisters eye each other's mise-en-place in the aunt's apartment kitchen in Biarritz, an elegant beach town wedged between the Pyrenees and the Atlantic Ocean. © When most people think of Basque country, they think of Spain, but the region is made up of seven provinces, three of which are in France.

The French portion, called *Iparralde* in the Basque language, has its own way of doing things. Dinner's at eight, not 10, and it's a full meal. While Olivia's mother and aunt squabble over just how much garlic is too much for their dishes—both end up lovely, though I prefer her aunt's intensely garlicky version—there's no debate on the subject of how to properly approach the ubiquitous *gâteau basque* that follows for dessert: no fork necessary. Eating the uniquely French Basque pastry, buttery and filled with dark cherry preserves, with your hands is part of the pleasure.

On an early spring tour of the Pays Basque, when the Atlantic is cold but surfers are out, suited up in neoprene, Olivia introduced me to some local characters who are keeping the region's wholly unique traditions alive while adding their own interpretations. Together, they compose a gastronomic cross-section of a region that maps and locals sometimes disagree on. "This is Basque country," as Olivia's cousin told me one night at the dinner table. "Not France."

## The Charcutier

With his right hand, Eric Ospital slides a probe into the thickest part of the *jambon de Bayonne* (Basque ham), then presses it to his nostrils and inhales deeply. The probe, called a *sonde*, is shaped like a digital thermometer but more elegant and much lower tech, carved as it is from horse bone.

Ospital is a judge at the annual Foire au Jambon, a ham fair held each spring in Bayonne since 1462. In tented stands along the Nive River, fairgoers noisily dig into ancient shepherd's snacks of griddled cornmeal flatbreads stuffed with bacon or sausage and dripping with cheese. But here in the ham competition, it's nearly silent, the mood serious. Ospital and his fellow judges, charcutiers dressed in matching neckerchiefs and black lab coats, make their way around tables of enormous haunches. Among them are red-robed, note-taking members of the Bayonne ham brotherhood, photographers, and a crowd of tense farmers. These farmstead hams are rubbed with red piment d'Espelette for color and arranged in folkloric displays. One re-creates an autumnal scene with moss, chestnuts in their spiky shells, and cèpe mushrooms. Another ham is accompanied by a cutout of the Bayonne skyline—all cathedral spires and arcaded houses—and other regional signifiers, like the handmade woven basket and leather ball of *pelote*, a popular jai alai-like game, and cocoa beans, a nod to the region's delicious chocolate.

By holding the *sonde* to his nostrils,



Ospital can tell if the meat is pleasantly savory—or musty. "We work with the nose," he says, at the same time prodding the ham leg with his left hand to feel if it is too hard (dried out), too soft (not aged long enough), or properly firm.

France recognizes *jambon de Bayonne*—raw, unsmoked, simply cured with salt and air-dried—as worthy of its own *indication géographique protégée* (IGP) label. Translation: Here is a ham so inherently special and inimitable that any attempts to duplicate it elsewhere or tweak its production should be prevented by law. Yet Ospital's father, Louis, felt, like judges from older generations, that the designation didn't go far enough to protect the quality and traditions of their hams. In the 1980s, they created their Ibaïama label, which uses only a specialized breed of pigs and a 20-month-average aging time. Even the source of the salt is indicated: Salies-de-Béarn, where a saltwater spring produces white pyramidal crystals that taste of violets.

Today, Eric Ospital is a recognized master of the ham-making arts. Thomas Keller and Daniel Boulud fly trainees to southwest France to study with him. In his late teens, Ospital apprenticed with charcutiers in Bayonne and did his military service in Berlin around the time the wall came down. After, Ospital worked at Paris's legendary food emporium Fauchon during the tenure of pastry visionary Pierre Hermé. He learned discipline and precision while preparing *oeufs en gelée* and foie gras terrines. It was around that time, in the 1990s, that food artisans began to appear on the menus of Paris's best restaurants.

Ospital had found his mission: to rehabilitate the profession of charcutier. In the 1980s, as the French began to eat out more, charcuteries started focusing less on cured meat and more on takeaway meals, too often bought from industrial wholesalers. Ospital traveled to Italy to see how the finest hams were made. He modernized his father's recipe by using less salt and then took the nutty, sweet ham to Paris. Modern bistro pioneer Yves Camdeborde preferred the texture of Ospital's product to the fabled acorn-fed hams of Spain and introduced it to his clients. Eventually, Joël Robuchon and Thierry Marx came calling—though they served the ham in dainty slices, unlike in Basque country, where it's often cut into thick steaks, griddled, and served with eggs.

Ospital's hams are aged in an airy drying room next to the Ospital family charcuterie in Hasparren, 22 miles southeast of Biarritz. The space looks like the spotless attic of a particularly industrious Basque grandmother: Strings of Espe-

Top: Eric Ospital (left) and fellow fair judges assess the quality of a ham by its smell. Bottom: A string of piment d'Espelette chile peppers.



POTATO and PEPPER  
TORTILLA with HAM and CHEESE  
recipe on pg. 57  
CHICKEN BASQUAISE  
recipe on pg. 56



Rodolphe Bidart and his family grow, dry, and grind Espelette peppers, an indispensable spice to French Basque cuisine.

lette peppers dry under the steeply pitched roof, and hunks of ham dangle from heavy wood beams. Each is swaddled in muslin and wears a small blackboard with the name of a restaurant to which it's been promised; each is aged differently, according to the individual taste of its patron. Every year, Ospital produces only 1,000 hams. Some are destined for Paris, others for Japan and New York. The ham maker is pleased with his progress, though he notes, "If you have to have a Maserati, this is not the job for you."

## The Pepper Grower

The one homegrown chile of France is, like many things French, subtly complex. Piment d'Espelette has flavors of tomato and hay and a buzz that's gentle rather than incendiary.

"We never use black pepper at home," says Rodolphe Bidart, who grows the pepper on his farm near the spa town of Cambo-les-Bains. The mellow heat and warm familiarity of the peppers are enough for him.

Bidart used to lay tiles to make ends meet before he transitioned to farming full-time, a shift that's telling of piment d'Espelette's evolution: Once barely known beyond the Pyrenees, the vibrant dust of this brick red pepper has now spread as far and wide as San Francisco and Bangkok, where chefs sprinkle it on plates for added color.

Bidart's house, a converted barn with coppery stone walls and green shutters that's belonged to his family for four generations, is the perfect spot for storing hay. It's dry and sunny here, but a few miles west, outside Cambo-les-Bains, the climate is completely different and better suited to growing the slender 3- to 4-inch peppers. Warm moist air from the Bay of Biscay rises over the slopes, and it rains, often.

At his greenhouse near Cambo, Bidart shows off the 6-week-old shoots he's started from seeds saved from last year's harvest. In April, he plants the seedlings outside. In August, as the peppers ripen, everybody—wife, father,

## Chicken Basquaise

SERVES 6–8; Photo pg. 55

Active: 55 min. • Total: 1 hr. 5 min.

This recipe, adapted from chef Sébastien Gravé, is emblematic of the Basque region's affection for colorful, peppery stews. Though paprika can work in a pinch, it's the flakier, lightly spicy, more enigmatic Espelette pepper that's characteristic of the region.

- 3 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 small fresh chorizo sausages
- 4 skin-on, boneless chicken breasts (about 8 oz. each), halved crosswise
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 6 thyme sprigs
- 2 large garlic cloves, lightly crushed
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 yellow onion, halved and thinly sliced (2 cups)
- 1 shallot, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced (½ cup)
- 1 tomato, diced (¾ cup)
- 2 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 1½ cups chicken stock
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 10 jarred piquillo peppers, drained and halved lengthwise
- 12 boiled small new potatoes (1½ lb.)
- ¼ cup green apple, finely diced, for garnish
- 2 Tbsp. chopped flat-leaf parsley, for garnish
- 2 tsp. piment d'Espelette (ground Espelette pepper) or paprika

1 Preheat the oven to 450°. Meanwhile, in an 8-quart Dutch oven or large, high-sided cast-iron skillet, warm 1 tablespoon oil over medium heat. Add the sausages and cook, turning occasionally, until browned, about 8 minutes. Transfer the sausages to a large plate, cut into 3-inch pieces, and set aside. Add the remaining oil to the pot and raise the heat to high. Season the chicken all over with salt and pepper, then add skin side down to the pan. Tuck the thyme sprigs, garlic, and bay leaf between the pieces. Cook until the skin is browned, 5–7 minutes. Transfer the chicken, thyme,

garlic, and bay leaf to the plate with the sausages.

2 In the same pot over medium-high heat, add the onion and shallot and cook, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Stir in the tomato and cook until the liquid evaporates, 3 minutes. Add the tomato paste and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Stir in ½ cup stock and ½ teaspoon salt, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Cook until the liquid is mostly evaporated, 5–8 minutes. Return the thyme, garlic, bay leaf, sausages, and chicken (skin side up) to the pot. Transfer to the oven and roast until the chicken is cooked through, about 10 minutes. Move the chicken and sausages to a platter.

3 Set the pot over medium-high heat. Add the wine, piquillo peppers, and remaining 1 cup stock and bring to a simmer; cook, stirring occasionally, until the liquid is reduced by half, about 10 minutes. Remove from the heat. Add back the chicken and sausages, and the potatoes if desired (or serve them on the side). Serve directly from the pot or on a platter, sprinkled with the apple, parsley, and piment d'Espelette.

## Basque-Style Fish with Green Peppers and Manila Clams

SERVES 4; Photo pg. 52

Active: 20 min. • Total: 25 min.

This riff on Basque *pipérade*, a classic dish of stewed peppers, incorporates seafood from the region. Hake is traditional, but mild, white-fleshed fish like striped bass or haddock make fine substitutes. Fresh clams offer a briny sweetness. Any assortment of mild peppers will work here.

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, finely minced (1 Tbsp.)
- 1 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 cups fish stock or clam broth
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt, or more to taste
- 1 lb. assorted mild green peppers (such as Anaheim, poblano, bell, or shishito), cut into ¼-inch strips

- (¾ cups)
- 1 medium Spanish onion, thinly sliced
- 2 Tbsp. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, plus more for garnish
- 2 lb. skin-on, boneless hake, striped bass, or haddock, cut into 8 equal fillets
- 12 Manila clams, scrubbed
- 1–2 tsp. piment d'Espelette (ground Espelette pepper, optional)

1 In a 12-inch skillet, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until just beginning to brown, 1 minute. Sprinkle the flour over the garlic and stir to combine. Add the wine and cook, stirring rapidly, until the mixture thickens and reduces slightly, about 2 minutes. Add the fish stock and kosher salt, then bring the mixture back to a boil. Add the peppers, onion, and parsley, and spread into an even layer on the bottom of the pan. Raise the heat to high, cover the pan, and simmer until the vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes.

2 Uncover the pan and place the fish pieces skin side up in a single layer atop the vegetables. Nestle the clams in between the fillets and season the fish with salt to taste. Cover and cook until the fillets are just opaque at the center and the clams have opened, 5–7 minutes. (Discard any clams that do not open.)

3 On a deep serving platter, scatter the vegetables, then place the fish and clams on top. Spoon the remaining broth over the fish and garnish with chopped parsley and Espelette pepper, if using; serve immediately.

## Potato and Pepper Tortilla with Ham and Cheese

SERVES 8–10; Photo pg. 55

Total: 50 min.

In Pays Basque, this egg-based tortilla is sometimes sliced through the middle like a sandwich roll and layered with cured ham and sheep's milk cheese. If cutting horizontally through the thin, delicate tortilla seems too troublesome,

the ham and cheese are just as delicious served on the side.

- ¾ cup plus 2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium yellow onions, quartered and thinly sliced
- 1½ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 lb. large Yukon Gold potatoes (about 6 large potatoes), peeled and sliced ½ inch thick
- 2 large red bell peppers, thinly sliced (¾ cups)
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 10 large eggs
- 8–10 thin slices firm sheep's milk cheese, such as Ossau-Iraty or Manchego (optional)
- 8–10 thin slices jambon de Bayonne, serrano ham, or prosciutto (optional)

1 In a large ovenproof nonstick or cast-iron skillet, warm ½ cup oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and ¼ teaspoon salt; cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 4 minutes. Add the potatoes, bell peppers, another ¼ cup oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and the black pepper and cook until the oil begins to simmer. Lower the heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are tender and lightly browned in places, about 20 minutes.

2 Transfer the vegetables to a large bowl and let cool slightly. Meanwhile, rinse out the skillet; dry and place back on the stove.

3 Preheat the oven to 450°. In a large bowl, beat the eggs until foamy; season with ¼ teaspoon kosher salt. Add the beaten eggs to the vegetables and stir gently to combine.

4 In the skillet, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium heat. Add the egg-vegetable mixture and cook, stirring a little at first to let more of the egg touch the surface of the pan, until the eggs begin to set on the bottom, about 2 minutes. Spread the vegetables into an even layer at the top, and reduce the heat to medium. Cook the tortilla, shaking the skillet occasionally to prevent the eggs from sticking, until the eggs are halfway cooked, about 5 minutes. Transfer the skillet to the oven and cook until the top of tortilla

brother, brother-in-law—is pressed into harvesting duty. It's done by hand, an AOP regulation. The chiles are air-dried (but not smoked like pimentón in Spain) on racks, first in the greenhouse for two weeks, then for two days in a dehydrator. When all the moisture is coaxed out, the peppers are ground. Dried, they're the same oxblood color as the exposed timbers in the storybook farmhouses of the region.

Before they had dehydrators, farmers strung up the peppers on south-facing façades, and you still see them, red braids on whitewashed walls, in the pepper's namesake capital of Espelette, near the Spanish border. Harking back to this custom, pepper growers save the prettiest chiles to sew into garlands, and locals dry them at home or buy them dried, then crush or chop them as needed.

While Bidart can rattle off that it takes 7-plus kilograms of fresh peppers to make 1 kilogram of the spice, he can't tell me much about what to do with it in the kitchen. Instead, he drives me northwest along the scenic, winding Route Impériale des Cimes to Bayonne, where his school friend Sébastien Gravé operates La Table de Pottoka, named after a native pony believed to have Paleolithic origins.

Gravé trained with the celebrated chefs Joël Robuchon and Christian Constant. He works with the freshest ingre-



As a kid, Raphaël Eliceche learned how to make cheese from his mother. He uses the same methods today, with a few modern tweaks.

dients and a broad Basque humor. Bidart and Gravé chat in fits of laughter, while the chef prepares his take on chicken basquaise, breasts sautéed until golden brown, then quickly braised in white wine and stock. With piquillos replacing bell peppers, spicy sausages instead of ham and a hit of diced green apple, this iteration provides a new conception of the Basque standard and a pointer on piment d'Espelette: You don't cook it. Sprinkle it on just before serving, Gravé says. Unlike its Spanish relative pimentón, whose smokiness practically blooms in the pot, the French chile's delicate flavor can't take the heat.

## The Baker

Mickaël Sansoucy tosses boulangerie-size heaps of sugar, butter, eggs, and flour into a mixer for the *pâte sablée* in his *gâteau basque*. Asked if the dough might be too tough, he looks amused. “You don’t have to worry,” the baker says with a massively dimpled smile. “There is so much butter in this pastry.”

A six-minute ride from Cambo-les-Bains, the town where the emblematic Basque dessert was invented, the baker from Brittany makes a prizewinning version of the cookie-like double-crust tart with a filling of either vanilla pastry cream or dark cherry preserves. Since Sansoucy arrived in Larressore in 2010, the community has embraced him with a big warm hug. His customers even nominated his bakery, Axola Gabe—a Basque translation of his family name that means “carefree”—as a contender for the *Top Chef*-like reality cooking show *La Meilleure Boulangerie de France*.

Mickaël and his brother, Sylvain, who takes care of sales and promotion, left their home of coastal Brittany in search of an environment that would welcome their unusual ideas, like gluten-free baking. “Being Breton, I absolutely wanted sea and mountains,” Mickaël says. “And Basques and Bretons have their own languages and many of the same cultural codes. Basques are more accepting of newcomers and innovation though.”

In some ways, the Sansoucy brothers have taken a step back in time. In their small artisanal shop, they bake baguettes and country loaves, plus rustic croissants, cakes, and pastries. They sell at roving markets and make individual deliveries to people who can’t get out. But their delivery trucks are 100 percent electric powered. And riding the trend of resurrected ancient grains, Mickaël uses stoneground wheat and flours made from einkorn, buckwheat, rye, and kamut.

(CONTINUED ON PG. 75)



Baker Mickaël Sansoucy making his *gâteau basque*—classically buttery with a crunch—that locals have showered with praise.

is just set, 3–4 minutes. Turn the heat to broil and cook until the top is beginning to lightly brown in places and the tortilla seems fully set when the pan is shaken, 2–4 minutes. Remove the skillet and quickly place a large ovenproof plate over the top. Carefully invert or slide the tortilla onto the plate and either enjoy immediately with the ham and cheese on the side, or let cool slightly in order to stuff the tortilla.

**5** If stuffing, use a long serrated knife to slice the cooled tortilla horizontally in half. Gently and carefully pull back half of the top piece, then cover the bottom half of the tortilla with a layer of cheese, followed by a layer of ham. Sandwich the ham and cheese with the top half of the tortilla. Repeat on the remaining side. Cut into wedges and serve.

### Cherry Gâteau Basque MAKES ONE 9-INCH CAKE; Photo at right

Active: 35 min. • Total: 1 hr.  
5 min. (plus cooling)

The signature dessert of the region, *gâteau basque* is made by sandwiching a layer of jam or sweet pastry cream between two shortbread-like rounds. Cherry preserves are a classic filling—choosing a good-quality jam makes all the difference—and the dough itself resembles a cookie dough, with additional eggs lending a cakier texture. It can also be baked in a 9-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom; just be sure to grease the sides with butter before assembling.

**2** cups all-purpose flour  
**1** $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. baking powder  
**1** $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. kosher salt  
**10** Tbsp. (5 oz.) unsalted butter, softened  
**1** $\frac{1}{2}$  cup plus 2 Tbsp. sugar  
**2** large eggs, divided  
**1** large egg yolk  
**1** $\frac{1}{2}$  cup plus 2 Tbsp. cherry preserves

**1** In a medium bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, and salt; stir briefly to mix.

**2** In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, add the butter and sugar; beat on medium-high speed until light and airy,

about 3 minutes. Scrape down the bowl and add 1 egg plus 1 egg yolk; beat on medium-low speed to combine. Add the flour mixture in two batches, beating on low speed until just incorporated each time.

**3** Remove the bowl and form the dough into two equal balls using your hands (do not over-handle). Place one ball between two large sheets of parchment paper, and roll out the round to about 11 inches in diameter; place on a baking sheet (do not remove the paper). Repeat the process with the other ball of dough, rolling it out to about 9 inches in diameter. Stack the dough disks on the baking sheet and refrigerate until firm but still flexible, 30 minutes to an hour.

**4** Set a rack in the top third of the oven and preheat to 375°. Grease a 9-inch round cake pan with butter. Add a parchment round to cover just the bottom of the cake pan.

**5** Retrieve the dough rounds and let rest at room temperature for about 5 minutes. Carefully peel away the paper around the larger round of dough. Place the dough in the prepared pan and press it gently into the corners; trim so that the dough reaches halfway up the sides. Add the cherry preserves to the center of the dough, and spread with the back of the spoon to coat evenly, leaving a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch border around the edges. Remove the paper around the smaller round of dough, then place it atop the cake pan. Trim the edges so that the dough just fits inside but still touches the sides of the pan. Using fingers, press down around the edges, tucking the dough ends in and fusing the two doughs together.

**6** In a small bowl, beat the remaining egg with a few drops water. Brush the top of the dough generously with the egg wash. Then, using a small, sharp knife, create a pattern of crisscrossed lines.

**7** Bake until the top is golden, 30–35 minutes. Remove to a rack and let cool 5 minutes. Use a paring knife to dislodge the cake’s edges from the pan. Gently invert onto a flat plate or stand. Let cool completely. Slice into wedges and serve.



CHERRY GÂTEAU BASQUE  
recipe on pg. 58

(CONTINUED FROM PG. 58)

The brothers can't keep up with demand; they're building a new bakery.

You could say Mickaël has become more Basque than the Basques themselves. He studies Euskara, their ancient language, and is a member of Eguzkia, the *gâteau basque*'s defending authority. In fact, his by-the-book version of the pastry has placed three times in Cambo-les-Bains's annual *gâteau basque* contest. He's also introduced a version of Brittany's buttery *kouign amann* pastry with a very Basque touch: It's layered with a bite of piment d'Espelette-spiked chocolate.

## The Cheesemaker

Raphaël Eliceche—up to his right elbow in warm milk curds and wearing a beret—whistles as he stirs. It's a plaintive tune. When I ask the 49-year-old cheesemaker what it is, he grins as if he's been caught.

"It's an old folk song," he says. "We have a shepherd who sings it, and it's gotten stuck in my head."

Although Bidarray, the nearest village to Eliceche's farm, is only 40 minutes southeast of Biarritz where we are staying, we didn't allow for the twisty one-lane road into the Pyrenees foothills. Fortunately, there are hand-stenciled FROMAGE signs at every turn. When we arrive, it's past nine. Meanwhile, Eliceche has already milked his 400 ewes and combined the morning's milk with yesterday's in a stainless-steel vat the size of a Jacuzzi.

While we wait for the milk to warm in the steamy dairy, he tells us about his background. Like their neighbors, his parents grew a little corn and some grapevines and kept a few pigs and sheep. Like all farmwives, his mother, Jeanne, made cheese, and Eliceche, before attending ag school, learned from her. She taught him to milk the animals by hand and heat the milk in a copper cauldron in the fireplace. At age 26, he began to pursue cheesemaking seriously. But he probably wouldn't be a full-time shepherd and cheesemaker today if a young intern hadn't suggested posting those charming signs that led us in. Sales jumped. Ten years ago, he modernized the operation. "I have new equipment,"

he says. "I don't milk the animals by hand anymore, but I kept the same recipe."

When the milk has almost reached body temperature, Eliceche adds rennet. In the half hour of downtime it takes to curdle the milk, he talks about his *ardi gasna*, Basque sheep cheese, which he named Irubela after a nearby mountain. His version is made more or less in accordance with the local AOP rules for Ossau-Iraty cheese. His sheep come only from the approved breeds: Basco-Béarnaise, Manech tête rousse, and Manech tête noire. His Irubela is uncooked. It's pressed into a cylinder that's briefly bathed in brine and aged for at least two months. But it doesn't carry the official seal of approval. Why forgo the prestigious appellation? "My recipe is the old one, by taste," he says.

Once the curd forms, it's finely cut to help expel the whey. To judge its readiness for draining, Eliceche first removes his beret so it doesn't fall into the vat, then reaches in to ensure that the pieces are the size of corn kernels. "Now the real work begins," he says. Joined by his wife, Sylvie Beaussant, the two quickly transfer the curds to 53 muslin-lined perforated molds, kneading and packing them with their knuckles.

The molds filled and stacked for pressing, we gather around his mother's kitchen table to taste a fully aged cheese. Jeanne sets out homemade cherry preserves, but Eliceche demurs. "It denatures the flavor," he says. "It tastes good, but then it's dessert." This still supple 10-month-old is ivory with a straw-colored rind. It's entirely different from a cheese like Idiazabal that you might find in Spain, partly because they use different sheep and it's unsmoked. The flavor, nutty and pungent with a whiff of the barnyard, must be what *ardi gasna* has tasted like since the Basques first smuggled contraband across the Pyrenees. Now I understand why Eliceche decided to go off-piste.

I ask about the Irubela label, adorned with two green stars reminiscent of the Basque cross, but not an actual one. For Eliceche, making a literal representation would smack of trading on his identity. "My cheese is for sale," he explains. "Not the Pays Basque." ■



15 Minute Preparation • Enjoy 90 Minutes Later!

## ROASTED PORK LOIN & CREAMY GOAT MILK SAUCE!

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- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 3 lbs. pork loin roast, trimmed, rolled & tied
- 2¾ cups Meyenberg Goat Milk - divide
- ½ cup finely chopped shallots
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 3 bay leaves
- 4 sprigs fresh Italian parsley
- 4 sprigs fresh oregano
- 4 sprigs fresh sage
- 3 tbsp all-purpose flour

In heavy pan, (w/cover), large enough to hold roast (divided roast if necessary), heat oil & brown roast on all sides. Add 2-1/2 cups goat milk, shallots, salt, pepper and bay leaves.

Tie parsley, oregano & sage into a bundle with string, and submerge in milk. Bring milk to a boil, lower heat, partially cover & simmer for 90 minutes, turning meat occasionally.

Remove meat, cover & keep warm. Remove bay leaves & herbs. In a small bowl, combine remaining 1/4 cup of goat milk with flour. Add to herb scented milk remaining in the cooking pan, stirring to combine, and heat all to thicken.

Slice pork loin & serve with sauce. Delicious!

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