

Traditional Basque dishes are his specialty

Food Page

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By KAREN PETERSON
Raymond Coscarat pulled out a stack of post cards and began to talk about the people and customs of north-Atlantic Spain and southwestern France.

The cards, showing picturesque towns, houses and festivals, illustrated the lives of the Basques, a people who now live in this region but whose origins are still a mystery to scholars.

Coscarat described the favorite Basque sport, pelot, a hand ball game similar to jai alai, and talked of the cross-cultural ties between the Basques and the French and Spanish. But his focus was on what he knows best — the food of these shepherds, fishermen and farmers, supposed descendants of the ancient Iberians.

Coscarat and his wife Eugenie are owners of Le Chalet Basque in San Rafael.

Two dozen Basque families live in Marin, but by far the greatest number of Basques live in the North Beach area and the avenues of San Francisco, said Coscarat, and remain in close contact through the local Basque social club.

Recently, Coscarat helped organize a night of Basque games and food at the Elks Club in San Rafael, where the only item missing was the traditional basic of Basque cuisine, Jambon de Bayonne, a dried, lightly smoked ham.

Each Christmas, said Coscarat, European Basque families slaughtered a pig or two and smoked the meat in the fireplace in the kitchen. "We used to cook everything in the fireplace," said Coscarat who came to this country in 1956. "They're still using wood stoves in the rural areas."

The ham is missing from the 30 or so

recipes on the Chalet's menu. "It cannot be imported to the United States, he explained, "because it contains the bone and is only lightly cured." (By law, all imported hams have to be boneless and canned.)

He has cured the hams here in a similar fashion, keeping them in a salt brine for approximately 20 days, but not often.

Another truly Basque item is the semi-soft Roquefort cheese, carried by Basque shepherds to age in cellars in the southern French city of Roquefort. (The Roquefort name is limited by government regulation to describe blue cheese made with sheep's milk.)

The shepherds themselves prepare a type of Roquefort for their months spent tending sheep in the Pyrenees Mountains. Curd from the sheep's milk is barbecued lightly and removed from the fire when brown spots appear, said Coscarat. The cheese, with a covering of dry skin, is aged for weeks in the mountains, then eaten with bread. The taste, he said, is similar to dry Monterey Jack, "but better."

Both the ham and cheese are the stars of the twice yearly festival in the French-Atlantic town of St. Jean Pied de Port. The shepherds bring their cheese from the mountains and the farmers sell their very lightly smoked ham in the market place, a festival still celebrated and attended by people from all over Europe," said Coscarat.

And of course the national drink is wine, said Coscarat, a red or white wine drunk from the goatskin flasks or botas, on the Spanish side, or Chabakus on the French.

Although his restaurant is French Basque in character, the menu is "more European," said Coscarat. The



BASQUE DISH — Raymond Coscarat smiles as chef Pierre Glavina as he displays a dish of Basque-style chicken. (Photo by Alfred M. Arns)

following recipes provided by Coscarat are, however, traditional Basque fare:

Basque Tripe
6 lbs. blanched beef tripe (honey-

comb)

1 pig's foot (blanched)

1 tsp. olive oil

1 onion cut in large dice

2 bell peppers diced in large pieces (remove the seeds)

1 clove garlic, chopped

1 carrot sliced

1 bay leaf

1 pinch thyme

8 oz. diced tomato in puree

3 tablespoon tomato puree

3 cups dry white wine

water

salt - pepper

Cut tripe in squares of about one inch or more. Place olive oil in a pot, warm up and saute lightly the onion and bell pepper. Add the diced tomato, garlic and carrots. Bring to a boil, then add the tripe, the tomato puree, and the seasoning (salt, pepper, bay leaf, thyme). Simmer and mix for one to two minutes.

Pour the wine and add enough water to cover about one-half inch over the tripe, and place the pig's foot in the pot. Cover and bring to a boil. Place the pot in a moderate oven for three to four hours (longer if not blanched enough).

Remove from oven and remove the grease from the top. Remove the pig's foot, remove the bone. Cut meat into small pieces and mix it with the tripe. If not enough juice in the tripe add a touch of white wine, taste and add salt if necessary. Serves six to eight.

POULET A LA BASQUAISE

1 chicken

6 tomatoes, peeled and cut in pieces

2 bell peppers, cut in small pieces

2 slices half-inch bacon cut in squares (or cured ham preferred)

4 large mushrooms, sliced, 1 onion

3/4 cup white wine

Cut chicken in four pieces, then each leg and wing in two pieces. Salt and pepper, and brown in a pan. Add the white wine.

In another pan brown the chopped onion, and the bell peppers, the ham, the mushrooms, add the tomatoes and cook for 15 minutes. Then add the chicken, cover and let cook for 30 minutes.

BASQUE CAKE

1 1/4 cup sugar

7 oz. batter

1 3/4 cups flour

4 eggs

1 teaspoon baking powder

2 teaspoon rum or vanilla

Beat eggs and sugar with beater for 10 minutes, add melted butter and flour gradually, then baking powder and rum (or vanilla).

PUDDING FOR CAKE

1 1/2 cups milk

1/2 cup sugar

2 egg yolks

2 tablespoon flour

vanilla

Beat in a pot the sugar, the egg yolk and the flour, add the cold milk. Then stirring constantly bring to a slow fire, remove it in the first boiling. Let pudding stand until cool.

Use a 10 by 2 inch cake pan. Grease and flour the pan. Pour half cake batter in pan. Level off with spoon. Pour the pudding on batter. Add remaining batter over top of pudding. Bake 40 minutes at 400 degrees.

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