

QUÉ PASA?

*I'll tell you what's happening
– Latin American cuisines!*

PART ONE – THE ASSIGNMENT

A few months ago, I along with Chef Eamon was tasked with exploring the most current food trends in America. You might be saying to yourself, “That’s a tough assignment!” Actually it was somewhat of an easy assignment. The answer is ethnic – especially Latin American – cuisines.

Latin American cuisine refers to the typical foods and cooking styles common to the countries and cultures in Latin America. The cuisine varies from nation to nation and even within regions. Latin cuisine begins in Mexico and can be found in the roots of the Old World (European) cuisine in Central America, South America and the Greater and Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean. Latin American cuisine has a mixed cultural background, just as its name suggests. It combines the foods and preparations of indigenous peoples with influences and culinary traditions of the Old World. The spices are generally what give the Latin American cuisine its distinct flavor; each country uses different key spices, and countries that may share a spice use them in different proportions.





ACAPULCO COD ON SOFT GREENS WITH PEPPER CHUTNEY

YIELD: 1 Serving

PART TWO – THE TOUGH ASSIGNMENT

We quickly reported to our senior management that Latin American cuisine is by far the hottest and most current food trend across America. Project completed!

Wrong! There was more to it: Develop a Latin American cuisine concept that we can introduce to our customers; make it authentic, professional, and easy to communicate; it needs to be appropriate for our customers and show them the value of introducing this cuisine at their restaurant. This was much more difficult than Part One!

We knew that Latin American cuisine is ideally suited to today's evolving consumer preferences and demands. But the vastness of the subject was somewhat daunting. So I decided to start with Mexico, then move to Central and South America, and finish the journey in the Greater and Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean.



Mexico

Mexican food is interesting and complex because of its deep roots in Mesoamerican civilization.

Later, the cuisine was influenced by the Spanish as well as the French. Mexican cuisine actually comprises six strong regional cuisines. Today's Mexican cuisine is, like all cuisines of the world, constantly evolving. Dozens of chile varieties provide the base of many Mexican foods. These peppers are used not so much for heat as for their flavors. Other staples of the cuisine are corn and beans, specifically pinto, black, and kidney beans. Corn is used primarily in the making of tortillas. Foods that we are accustomed to such as tacos and enchiladas are simple street foods in Mexico, similar to the American hot-dog. Much of the remaining cuisine consists of long, slow-simmered dishes that produce real flavor depth when finished.

COD

009551	1 ea. Cod fillet, 6 oz.
370868	1 oz. Olive oil, extra virgin
340620	Salt - to taste
345631	Black pepper, café - to taste

SOFT GREENS

370868	1 Tbl. Olive oil, extra virgin
097502	1 oz. Onion, yellow, minced
097210	1 ea. Garlic, clove, minced
345226	¼ tsp. Ground cumin
097155	6 oz. Fresh chard, cleaned and stemmed (do not dry)
097149	½ tsp. Fresh Cilantro leaves, minced
340620	Salt - to taste
345631	Black pepper, café - to taste
096208	Lime wedge - as needed

PEPPER CHUTNEY

As needed: See Recipe on page 17.

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Heat olive oil in an ovenproof sauté pan on high heat. Season cod with salt and pepper and place in sauté pan. Cook cod on 1 side until bottom is golden brown, approximately 5 minutes.
2. Transfer pan to oven and roast until fish is opaque, approximately 4-5 minutes.
3. Heat oil in large sauté pan. Add onions, sauté until partially softened. Then add garlic and cumin and continue to cook until onions soften fully. Add wet greens, cover and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally until greens completely wilt, but are still bright green. Uncover, add cilantro, salt and pepper and continue cooking until liquid evaporates. Squeeze fresh lime over before serving
4. To serve place sautéed greens on serving plate and stack fish, crisp side up. Garnish with pepper chutney.

By Chef Jake Hizny

The Veracruz region cuisine was especially influenced by Spanish immigrants. It is a light cuisine utilizing fish, olives, capers and olive oil. The most famous foods of Mexico come from the central region and are based on molés. These sauces can vary from a pale green to a jet black in color. Southern Mexico also relies on heavy molés and dark sauces. You will also find lamb and other meats incorporated with herbs and spices. The Yucatan specializes in BBQ meats, such as cochinita pibil.



Central and South America

The lust for cuisines from other Latin American regions is proving that Americans are looking for hot and spicy foods. Their popularity is exploding and I believe we are just seeing the tip of the iceberg. Peruvian, Brazilian, and Argentinian cooking is very strong in urban restaurants. Churrasco is a popular Brazilian meat fest where waiters bring skewers of meats to the tables and diners choose their favorites. Salads that complement include beans, yams, sweet potatoes, and squash. Argentine beef barbecue is that country's national food. But many chefs are incorporating starches, beans, and vegetables to add a new, modern dimension to the cuisine. Guatemala reigns when it comes to stews and stew-like soups that use a lot of spices, but not necessarily "hot" spices.

The cuisines of Central and South America are rich and varied enough to fill several books on each regional specialty. Many chefs today are taking the culinary influences from these countries and putting their own twists on them. They may take a traditional Latin pork dish and serve it with a traditional American sweet potato, mashed or au gratin. Many of the dishes popular in the U.S. can be considered Latin comfort foods.

Today's Mexican cuisine is, like all cuisines of the world, constantly evolving.



The Greater and Lesser Antilles

The cuisine from the Caribbean is a fusion of African, European, East Indian, and Chinese influences along with styles created by the local population. Traditional dishes are the backbone of this cuisine. From goat stew to the delicious rum cake of the Cayman Islands, the cuisine of the Antilles, in my opinion, is second to none. The Greater Antilles feature delicacies from Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico. The Lesser Antilles feature treats from St. Martin, St. Bart, Antigua, Guadeloupe, and the Dominican Republic. I'm very partial to Cuban cuisine, which to me typifies the

Caribbean style of eating: a fusion of Spanish, African, and Caribbean influences. Cuban recipes share the ingredients and techniques of Spanish and African cooking, with Caribbean touches of spice and flavor. The result is a captivating and flavorful blend of the different cultural influences.





Chef Jake Hizny

PEPPER CHUTNEY

YIELD: 10 Servings

380150	7 c. Brown sugar, light, packed
305605	7 c. Cider Vinegar
097552	20 ea. Green bell pepper, medium dice
097574	10 ea. Jalapeño pepper, small dice
097502	6 ea. Onion, yellow, medium dice
340620	5 tsp. Salt

PART THREE – THE LAUNCH

We put together multiple lists of ingredients for each region: the must haves, the special orders, and in-stock items. Then we started with recipes. There were some challenges along the way, but in the end I believe we have a good variety of recipes, approximately 100, that touch every region that we explored. Some of these simple, elegant, cost-friendly, easy to prepare and wonderfully flavorful recipes appear in this issue of Essence. We believe these dishes will be well received by your customers and most definitely add to your bottom line.

We are planning a three-phase introduction for our remaining Latin American recipe collection, starting with our Mexican lineup at the Maines Food Show on May 15 – 16. Chef Eamon and I will be more than glad to show you our Mexican creations and discuss the benefits your restaurant and bottom line will experience by introducing them.

We'll then roll out our Central and South American recipes sometime during July, and we'll focus on the Greater and Lesser Antilles starting in October. We have a great collection of recipes that you can introduce to your customers from now until the end of the year – so stay tuned!

*Muchas gracias,
Chef Jake*



DIRECTIONS

1. In a large saucepan combine all ingredients and bring to a boil. Then reduce heat to a simmer.
2. Simmer for 1 to 1 ½ hours until desired thickness is reached.
3. Remove from heat and pour into storage bowl. Cover and refrigerate until service.
4. Take desired amount of chutney and heat slightly. Pour over fish as garnish.