

# THE STORY

## *Behind the*

# RECIPES

---

*Eight Cabo chefs  
open up their  
kitchens to share  
their favorite recipes.  
Part One of  
a two-part series.*

---

*~by Joan Tucker & Paul Papanek | photos by Paul Papanek~*

Chefs. We imagine them as little kids in their mother's kitchen, helping to prep, standing on step stools at the stove reaching way over a pot to stir lovely soups and stews, and trying to put the finished meal on a plate without spilling. They're absorbing their family recipes and are falling in love with cooking – all the great smells and the happiness and satisfaction of sharing food with the family. Their life's path is being formed before they learned how to read and write.

Convinced of this, we asked eight chefs in Los Cabos to come up with – and cook - a recipe that had a very personal meaning to them. Not that our fantasy was totally off base, but these chefs had a lot more to share with us. Many of the recipes they shared spoke to tradition, availability of local ingredients,

comfort, and family - the dish varying from household to household, influenced by the passage of time and interpretation. Others were formed through travel and learning about other cultures, and then fusing those new flavors with the food they grew up with. There's always a story behind the recipe.

---

*Continued on next page*

---







**Chef Alexis Palacios**  
Executive Chef - *Cocina del Mar*  
and *Esperanza Resort*

"I love to eat!" was the first thing Chef Alexis Palacios told us when we met him at *Cocina del Mar* at *Esperanza Resort*. Food and cooking were always part of his childhood. "My family – parents and grandparents" he continued, "are all good cooks and have a very traditional way to do things." Soups, sauces, and stews were the specialty.

Every Thursday, the family gathered, made a big pot of Guerrero-style pozole, and sat around the table gossiping, eating, and catching up. On Fridays, his father would take him to the local taqueria for tacos al pastor, and as soon as Alexis saw how the guy carved the big *trompo* of pastor, managed the fire, and delicately flicked the little piece of pineapple into the taco, he was hooked. "And oh, my God – the tacos were amazing!" he said. "At that age, I didn't know about chefs and restaurants, but I knew that I didn't want to be a policeman or firefighter. I just wanted to be a *taquero*!"

*"...The flavors are big and bright and deep..."*



That little boy's fantasy ultimately took him to culinary school in Mexico City and when he graduated, he was hired by the Four Seasons in Austin. He was later transferred to the Four Seasons Dubai and every chance he had, he would walk through the different neighborhoods eating in Pakistani, Indian, Lebanese, Iranian, and Emeriti restaurants and enjoyed curries, spices, and flavors that were new to him. "The way they cook," he said, "is similar to Mexican cooking - toasting and grinding the spices and stewing. The flavors are big and bright and deep. I wanted to expand my Mexican cooking by combining those techniques with what I already knew."

From wanna-be taquero to Executive Chef at *Esperanza Resort*, he's come a long way.

Were tacos al pastor on his mind for us today? Not even close. It's Cabo and it's seafood and it's his family's adobo sauce recipe. Chef Alexis brought out a gorgeous local King Kampachi fish and while telling us about his passion for music, his addiction to brightly colored sneakers and, once again, his love of eating, he slowly ground the spices, roasted chilis, tomatoes, and onions, and blended them to make the sauce. When the complex flavor was just right, he basted the fish and quickly cooked it in *Cocina del Mar*'s classic wood burning oven.

Happily, it was lunchtime. The three of us sat down with that beautifully plated fish, all the usual Mexican sides, and ate and laughed and drank until only the tail was remaining. Chef Alexis grabbed it, folded it into a fresh tortilla with some beans and rice, popped it into his mouth, grinned and said, "I did good, didn't I?"

*Continued on next page*



**Pescado Zarandeado**

Serves 4

**For the Adobo Sauce:**

4 dried guajillo peppers - seeds and stems removed

Olive oil

4 cups water

1/2 small onion – diced

2 garlic cloves – diced

2 medium tomatoes – diced

1 tbsp of oregano

1 tsp of cumin

Salt and pepper to taste

**For the Fish:**

2 lbs white fish fillets

1 jalapeño

1 oz lime juice

2 oz fresh herbs (basil, cilantro, thyme, parsley) washed and dried

4 garlic cloves

Olive oil

Salt & pepper to taste

**Make the Adobo Sauce:** Bring 4 cups of water to a boil. Heat a pan to medium and dry-toast the peppers for a few minutes on each side. Then place the toasted peppers in the boiling water for 15 minutes or until they soften up. Remove from water and set aside. Reserve a cup of the pepper water. Heat a pan, add the olive oil, and cook the onions until soft. Add the garlic and stir to combine. When fragrant, add the tomatoes, cumin, and oregano. Stir and put into a blender along with the peppers. Add a splash of the reserved water and blend. Add more water as needed to get a thick paste. Salt & pepper to taste.

**Make the Fish:** Preheat oven to 375. On a plate, salt and pepper the fillets. Squeeze the lime juice over the fish and let rest for 5 minutes. Brush the fish with olive oil, then generously marinate with the adobo and let it rest for at least one hour (longer is better!). Place half of the washed and dried herbs on a non-stick baking sheet, put the marinated fish on top of the herbs, and bake for 15 minutes (time will vary according to the thickness of the fillets). Put the remaining herbs on a platter and gently place the fillets on top. Serve with tortillas, salsas, roasted vegetables, and rice and beans.





**Chef Yvan Mucharraz**  
Executive Chef – Comal and  
Chileno Bay Resort

While cooking at a resort on the Riviera Maya, Chef Yvan Mucharraz had the experience that dreams are made of – and it changed his life. Thomas Keller, chef and owner of the famous The French Laundry in Napa Valley came into the restaurant and Chef Yvan volunteered to prepare dinner for him and his fiancé on two successive nights.

After the second evening, he was summoned to the table. Keller saw something in him – his confidence, his talent, and his ability to think on his feet when he unwittingly served two dishes that Keller’s fiancé was allergic to and quickly came up with delicious alternatives. Keller asked him if he’d like to come cook at The French Laundry and that led to just shy of three years in the most demanding kitchen he’d ever known. He flourished under Keller’s mantra: discipline, organization, passion, and focus - the very

ideals that were instilled in him by his father, an admiral in the Mexican Navy.

Chef Yvan grew up along the coast of mainland Mexico. Because of his father’s naval career, the family was always moving from base to base. He spent so much time in and on the water, he told us “If this was some other kind of universe, I’d be an underwater creature.”

After high school and several less than enthusiastic career attempts – two years in the Naval Academy – nope; actuarial school – nope – he needed another option. While home, he spent a lot of time with his mother helping her decide what to eat, watching how she cooked, and accompanying her to the markets. Determined to learn more, he enrolled in culinary school in Mexico City. “The first time I entered the professional kitchen everything just made sense.” he told us. The kitchen is a place where discipline and comradery were key. He fit right in. Instead of being daunted by the pressure, he told us that he just wanted more. “It was fun,” he said, “not work.”

Cooking in the kitchens of Michelin-starred restaurants throughout Europe gave him an even deeper understanding of different tastes, and techniques that he has brought with him to Chileno Bay.

Chef Yvan loves being back by the water and the pace of life in Cabo suits him just fine. It’s peaceful and beautiful, and the abundance and diversity of local ingredients gives him the freedom to imagine and picture the flavors he wants to present to his guests. The menus he designs embrace the Mexican culture that he loves, and the dish of fresh mussels in a chorizo and mezcal sauce that he made for us was a perfect example. It’s a twist that’s fun, lively, and seriously delicious.

*Continued on next page*



**Mussels in Chorizo & Mezcal Broth**

Serves 2

**Ingredients**

- 24 mussels - cleaned
- 6 oz semi dry chorizo
- 4 garlic cloves – minced
- 6 cherry tomatoes – halved
- 6 oz tomato sauce
- 7 tbsp mezcal
- 8 tbsp lemon juice
- 10 tbsp unsalted butter - cut in cubes
- 1/2 bunch cilantro - chopped
- 1/2 tsp Mexican red chili powder
- 1 tbsp cooking oil
- Salt to taste

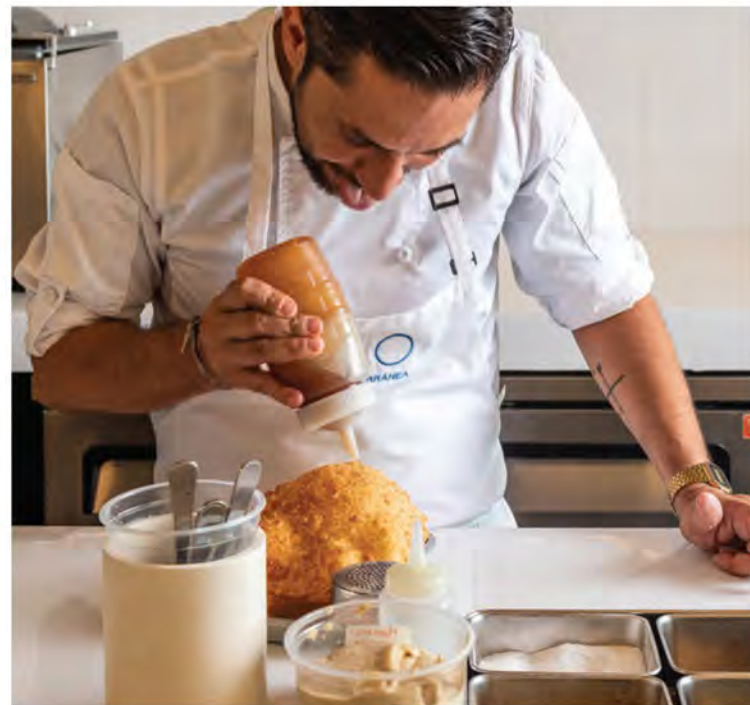
**Process:** Heat the oil in a large heavy skillet over medium-high for 2 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Then add the chorizo and cook until lightly browned. Add the mussels and mezcal and stir

until the mezcal evaporates completely. Add the cherry tomatoes and tomato sauce and cook until all the mussels are open. Add butter.

Season with salt, chili and lime, and top with cilantro. Serve with toasted bread.







**Chef Alex Branch**  
*Chef / Owner - Nao Cabo*

Chef Alex Branch would love a romantic story of how he grew up making tortillas with his grandmother. He would love to say how he would wake up and smell the roasting chilies on the fire and the tortillas on the *comal*.

But he can't. That's not his story. He was never interested in food or cooking while growing up.

After graduating from high school and taking a couple of gap years which included being a dishwasher and busboy in Mexico City and a bartender and drink ticket tout in Playa del Carmen, he decided to get serious about his future and enrolled in hotel management school. His first internship placed him in the kitchen at Hotel Nikko in Mexico City where he fell in love with the energy, the hustle and bustle, the juggling,

the screaming and shouting, the excitement, and the immediate gratification of getting a meal out to the patrons and having them like it. The head chef was so impressed with him that he hired him while he was still studying.

By 2020, he had been cooking throughout the world, but it was the Middle East and the Mediterranean that had a profound effect on him. After finishing a project in Dubai and already thinking about how he would blend the spices and techniques of the region for a new project in Mexico – the pandemic hit and he – along with his wife and children – found themselves locked down, unable to leave. They forged a close friendship with their Lebanese neighbor, Lara.

When they were finally cleared to travel home, Lara gave Chef Alex her family's hummus recipe to make for his children so they would never forget her. Hummus,

like Mexican mole, is comfort food and varies from family to family, from generation to generation. It's always different and it's always the same.

We met Chef Alex early in the morning at his new restaurant, Nao Cabo - a sophisticated modern white on white space flooded with light and excitement.

He made Lara's hummus, adapting the recipe slightly. "And the Mexican part" he says, "is making the pita from scratch, substituting a quarter of the flour with masa, then frying it so it puffs up like a *buñuelo*." He drizzles honey on top, finishing it with a sprinkle of za'atar powder.

The hummus was perfection; his crispy pita "*buñuelo*" kicked it to another level. We couldn't stop eating it and Chef Alex enjoyed every bite we took.

*Continued on next page*

**Lara's Hummus with "Buñuelo" Pita** Serves 4

- 4 oz dry chickpeas
- 2 tbsp garlic confit (see below)
- 8 oz grapeseed oil
- 3 1/2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil and more to finish
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 1/2 tbsp lemon juice
- Kosher salt
- 1/2 bunch parsley - chopped
- 2 tbsp roasted pine nuts plus more to finish
- 1/2 tsp sumac powder
- 2 tbsp za'atar
- 4 garlic cloves – peeled

**Process:** In a large bowl, cover the chickpeas with plenty of water and a pinch of salt and the peeled garlic and soak for 12 hours. While they're soaking, make the garlic confit by cutting 2 heads of garlic in half horizontally. Place them in a small saucepan, cut side down, and add 1 cup of grapeseed oil. Bring to a gentle simmer and reduce heat to low, cooking for 1 hour. The cloves should be golden-brown, soft, and gelatinous. Remove from oil, drain on a paper towel, and gently squeeze the garlic into a glass jar. Set aside.

Drain chickpeas and peeled garlic and

put into a pot with double the volume of water, the bay leaf, and a pinch of salt. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 6 hours or until the chickpeas have popped open and are just short of disintegrating. Add more water while cooking if needed.

In a food processor, puree the chickpeas (minus the peeled garlic), pines nuts, garlic confit, lemon juice and olive oil until smooth and creamy.

Spoon the hummus into a bowl making the center lower than the sides. Sprinkle with za'atar and sumac, liberally drizzle olive oil, and top with pine nuts.







**Edith Jimenez**  
 Owner - Edith's and the Edith Group

When we wrote to Edith Jimenez, owner of six of the most beloved restaurants in Cabo, to coax her back into the kitchen, she immediately told us that she would cook *mole pipian* – a recipe that's been on every family's table – including her own – for generations.

"Growing up in a small community in the mountains near Acapulco," she told us, "we stuck close to our mothers and grandmothers and learned to help with everything - going to the river to wash the nixtamal (corn), grinding it in the mill and making tortillas, putting the beans on to boil, cutting herbs, removing the feathers from the chickens, and cutting them into pieces, and of course, cooking. Organic flavors and vegetables were present in my life since I was very young."

Moving alone to a quiet Cabo when she was only 15 years old, she got a job as a waitress. At the end of her shifts, she would always go into the kitchen and help with whatever the chef needed. She wanted to learn something new – something that would keep her connected to the memories of being in the kitchen with her mother.

By the time she was in her 20's, she was cooking at a restaurant on Medano Beach called The Sinaloa. They only had three things on the menu – catch of the day, a hamburger, and a chicken burrito. Seeing the future of Cabo unfolding in front of her and the possibilities it could offer a young and curious chef, she bought the place in 1988, changing the name to The Office – her first restaurant. She expanded the menu but kept two of those three original dishes, swapping out the chicken burrito for a fish machaca burrito.

There was another restaurant close by that had been named, at various times, Estella's By the Sea, The Donkey, and Paradise. In 1993, it became Edith's – her second restaurant. This is where she was finally able to recreate and modernize the food she grew up with and now refers to her cuisine as Aca- (Acapulco) - Choyera (slang for those born in Baja Sur).

She personally knows all her suppliers – local organic farmers and sustainable fishermen and ranchers – so her food is always made with the freshest ingredients. Of equal importance is the love she conveys not only with the food she serves, but with how she makes her guests feel – always pampered and well taken care of.

Mole pipian sits prominently on her menu. Her special addition – with the help of her executive chef Bennie - is the wonderful, layered tamale that quietly hides under the chicken adding just that little Edith secret touch.



**Molè Pipian with Layered Bean Tamales**

Serves 4

**For the Pipian Sauce:**

- 1 packed cup of ground hulled and toasted pipian (pumpkin) seeds (see recipe)
- 2 quarts of chicken broth (see recipe)
- 4 green tomatillos peeled
- 1 bunch of epazote
- 1 bunch of cilantro
- 1/2 cup of spinach leaves
- 1 serrano chili
- 2 jalapenos
- 4 garlic cloves - peeled
- 1/2 onion - quartered
- 1/4 onion sliced for frying
- 3 3/4 tbsp Butter
- Salt and pepper to taste

**For the Chicken Broth:**

- 4 quarts of water
- 4 chicken breasts
- 4 celery stalks
- 2 heads of garlic
- 1/2 onion - halved

**For the Bean Tamales:**

- 16 oz can of either whole cooked beans or refried beans
- 9 oz masa
- 3 1/2 oz of vegetable shortening

- 4 banana leaves
- Salt and pepper to taste

*Continued on next page*





### ***Make the Chicken Broth:***

In a large pot, bring the water to a boil. Add chicken breasts, the celery, garlic, and onion. Simmer until chicken reaches an internal temperature of 165 degrees. Turn off the heat, remove chicken from the pot, and set aside.

### ***Make the Pipian Sauce:***

Put the toasted pumpkin seeds in a spice grinder and grind to a powder. Do this in small batches until you have 1 packed cup of fine powder. Blend the pumpkin seed powder with two cups of chicken broth to make a thin paste. Set aside. Put the tomatillos, the chiles, the garlic, the onion, 1/2 bunch of cilantro, 1/2 bunch of epazote, 1/2 cup of spinach into a blender and blend until obtaining a smooth sauce. Melt the butter in the frying pan and fry the onions. Do not burn. Remove the onion and discard (we're just flavoring the butter). Add the pumpkin seed mixture to the pan and stir. Add the green sauce from the blender to the pan and stir. Cook over low heat for 20 minutes. After 10 minutes, add 1/2 bunch of cilantro and 1/2 bunch of epazote to sauce that will be removed before serving. Add salt and pepper to taste.



### ***Make the Bean Tamales:***

If using whole cooked beans, drain and run through a food processor to make a paste. Set aside. Place the banana leaves on a hot griddle or dry pan for 30-seconds until pliable. Make the masa dough as per direction on the package. Roll into log approx 1 1/2 " thick and divide into 4 equal pieces. Form each into a ball. Place a piece of waxed paper on a flat surface and roll out the first ball into a very thin tortilla until it's

about 8" in diameter. Spread a thin layer of bean paste onto tortilla. On another piece of waxed paper, roll out another thin tortilla, and invert it and put it on top of the first tortilla, carefully peeling the wax paper off. Cover with bean paste. Repeat this until you have 4 layers (the top layer will just be a tortilla). Cut into 4 or 6 squares, trimming off the rounded edges. Wrap each tamale in a banana leaf, place them in a covered steamer, and steam for 1 hour.

***To Assemble:*** Ladle pipian sauce onto center of the plate. Unwrap a tamale and place it in the middle of the sauce. Place a chicken breast on top of the tamale and spoon sauce on the top. Garnish with toasted pumpkin seeds. ***El Fin!***

*See the remaining four chefs in Part Two of this feature, in the Winter 2023 issue!*