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PROFILE



Roberto Santibañez established his career in the U.S. with a stint at Fonda San Miguel in Austin before opening the similarly named Fonda in New York City. He and Fonda owner Tom Gilliland are still close to this day. CONTRIBUTED BY THE HISPANIC ALLIANCE

Why chef Santibañez envies his former boss at Fonda San Miguel

By Addie Broyles
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Last weekend, one of the most noted chefs to have worked in Austin kitchens returned to the city that helped shape him to helm the Authentic Mexico gala at the Long Center.

Mexico City native Roberto Santibañez was the head chef at Fonda San Miguel from 1997 to 2001 before opening several restaurants in New York and writing a number of cookbooks. He returned to town as the featured chef at Sunday's annual fundraiser for the Hispanic Alliance and its community projects, Emprendedor U, Austin Soundwaves and Oleh.

Each year, Authentic Mexico showcases a different state of Mexico at its event tied to Diez y Seis, Mexican Independence Day. This year, it was the North Central state of Zacatecas. Even though Santibañez grew up a few states away, he knows that one of the most popular dishes in Zacatecas is asado de bodas, a wedding stew of braised meat

served in a sweet, simple mole. "This mole is particular to Zacatecas," he says. "They don't have the availability of ingredients as southern and central Mexicans, so they used two kinds of dried chilies and a few spices, which is all it takes to make a mole."

We've come a long way in how Americans and Austinites understand Mexican cuisine, he says. Santibañez trained at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and operated several high-end restaurants in Mexico City, but he knew he wanted to work in the U.S. In 1997, he took over Fonda San Miguel, where he learned lessons he still uses today.

"Fonda was where I truly jumped up and dived into it all," he says. He watched founder Tom Gilliland work the front of house and run the back of house, finding a balance between operating a business that speaks to his soul and one that his customers demand.

"One of the wonderful things about Tom is that, almost seamlessly, he's continuously making

Fonda continued on D9



Crema Bakery & Cafe has been a frequent host of Austin Bakes bake sales, which often take place after a major international, national or local disaster. The organization's Harvey fundraiser will be Sept. 16 at nine sites around the Austin area. CONTRIBUTED BY AUSTIN BAKES

Citywide bake sale will benefit Harvey relief efforts

Addie Broyles
Relish Austin

The citywide bake sale organization Austin Bakes has hosted numerous fundraising events since it launched after the tsunami in Japan in 2011. Its upcoming sale from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sept. 16 is looking to be its largest yet.

Organizers have already confirmed nine sale sites — Stiles Switch, Crema Bakery & Cafe, Springdale Farm, Whole Foods Bee Caves and at the Domain, Jo's Coffee downtown and on South Congress, Whole Foods 365 in Cedar Park and Nate's in Buda — and more than 100 bakers have

signed up to contribute baked goods. You'll find both sweet and savory treats at all the locations, and all proceeds will go to AmeriCares. You can find out more at austinbakes.com.

If you can't be here on Sept. 16, you can support the organization's fundraising efforts through buying merchandise, including shirts and tote bags. Each bake sale site also will collect emergency supplies for local relief organizations.

Jessica Forkner, one of the organizers and the owner of Crema Bakery & Cafe, shared a few of the recipes for treats she'll be donating for the sale this weekend.

RECIPES ON D3

AUSTIN360COOKS



To make chilaquiles, you start with tortillas but can end up with an infinite number of dishes, including this one with salsa de chili poblano and beef milanese from Chilakillers in Mexico City.

Migas are great, but they aren't chilaquiles

By Claudia Alarcón
Special to the American-Statesman

Comfort foods speak a universal language. They remind us of home when we are far away, bring us solace when we are sad and help us feel a little better when we are sick.

Depending on where you're from, your comfort foods may be chicken noodle soup, a slice of pizza, a Midwestern hotdish, Frito pie or a steaming bowl of pho. Having grown up in Mexico City, I have a whole set of dishes that bring me comfort when I need it, but my all-purpose go-to favorite is definitely chilaquiles.

New Texans might get chilaquiles and migas confused, but they are as different from each other as a hamburger is from a meatloaf. Though the breakfast staple dishes share common ingredients, they are distinct and reflect many years of culinary history in both Texas and Mexico.

Migas consist of scrambled eggs cooked with chopped onion, tomato and fresh chili jalapeño or serrano, with a handful of fried tortilla pieces and shredded cheese tossed in at the end. Although widely popular in restaurant menus throughout the state, the roots of this humble dish are no doubt in the kitchens of Mexican-American families.

In Mexico we call this dish huevos a la mexicana con tortilla and don't add cheese. Where I come from, migas is a soup made from stale bolillo slices soaked in chicken broth seasoned with garlic, chorizo and epazote, similar to Spain's garlic soup.

Chilaquiles, on the other hand,



Chilaquiles, unlike migas, aren't scrambled with eggs. Instead, you fry the tortilla strips in freshly made salsa and then top with desired cheese, meats or a fried egg. PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY CLAUDIA ALARCÓN

are purely Mexican. (Don't forget: Texas was once part of the Republic of Mexico, so this dish has been enjoyed here for generations, too.)

The dish — crispy-fried pieces of corn tortilla simmered in a broth, tomato- or tomatillo-based sauce seasoned with onion, garlic, epazote and different chilies depending on the region — has long been a warming, nourishing staple, ubiquitous in cafeteria and neighborhood fondas (neighborhood restaurants that serve simple home-style dishes) for breakfast or supper. They are usually garnished with crumbled cheese, fresh onion slices and Mexican crema. They can be upgraded to a fuller meal with the addition of a fried egg, shredded poached chicken or a thin skirt steak. Some cooks like to use melting cheese

such as queso Chihuahua and broil until bubbly.

Chilaquiles are the ultimate in frugal, home-cooked meals, a simple dish that takes 15 minutes to whip up from ingredients already in the fridge or the pantry. But for me, chilaquiles represent something more, and I'm reminded of that each time I travel home to take care of my mother, who taught me how to make them in the first place.

I grew up in a lower-middle-class family, and both my parents worked. My dad was the sales manager at his cousin's tile factory, while my mom, despite having a degree in pharmacology, ended up with a variety of odd jobs.

When my dad lost his job to

Chilaquiles continued on D7

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COLLECTIC home



At Chilakillers, a brunch spot in Mexico City, you'll find a whole menu of memorable chilaquiles, including this one with salsa borracha and a spicy beef tinga.

Chilaquiles

continued from D1

a general strike at the factory, we had to tighten our belts to make ends meet. These were hard times, to say the least. However, my mom did her best to shield me and my brother from the reality of our situation, and this especially came through at the table. She was a fabulous, resourceful cook who could make dinner out of anything and would waste absolutely nothing.

She would mix leftover rice with a beaten egg and shredded cheese and fry patties that would float in a simple tomato broth. Milk went sour? No problem, we'll make chipotle boursin! And stale tortillas were carefully cut, sun-dried and stored. Perhaps this came from her French grandmother, but she would use pink-ing shears to cut them into fancy triangles for chilaquiles and strips for tortilla soup.

None of these frugal resources went past me, especially because when mamá was away for work, I had to cook for my brother and father, starting at around 11 years old. This scenario was obviously not unique to my family, and thousands had it much worse, but these simple dishes speak to me in the language of the heart. The memories of making chilaquiles for my family as a young woman tug at my heart as I make them again for my mom, who still needs my help in the kitchen, perhaps more than ever.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claudia Alarcón is an Austin-based writer and University of Texas graduate who loves soccer, travel and rosé. She presents lectures and workshops on topics related to the foodways of Mexico, both locally and internationally, and leads culinary tours of her hometown, Mexico City. She is the latest in a series of Austin360Cooks writers who are sharing stories from inside their Central Texas kitchens. Interesting in contributing? Post an Instagram photo of what you're cooking up with the #Austin360Cooks hashtag. We often share reader photos and cooking tips in the food section.

— ADDIE BROYLES

I found a kindred spirit in fellow Mexico City expat Marisela Godínez. The chef/owner of El Mesón shares a similar experience, with fond memories of her late mom fixing the dish especially for her. "I prefer them very crispy; the rest of my family liked them soggy, so my mom would take my portion out of the pan first and cook the rest a little longer for everyone else," she tells me.

At her South Lamar restaurant, she serves the traditional green and red ver-

CHILAQUILES VERDES

- 1½ pounds tomatillos, husked and washed
- 3 chilies serranos (or more if you like things spicy)
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 large stems of fresh epazote
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 10 stale corn tortillas, cut into eighths
- ½ small white onion, thinly sliced
- Crema Mexicana or creme fraiche
- Crumbled queso fresco or cotija

Place tomatillos and chilies in a small saucepan, add enough water to cover and bring to a boil.

Simmer for 8 to 10 minutes or until the tomatillos are soft. Strain into a blender, add garlic and puree. Add the epazote and blend.

Heat the oil in a medium pan and fry the tortilla triangles a few at a time until golden brown and



This simple chilaquiles verdes is cooked in a tomatillo sauce. PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY CLAUDIA ALARCÓN

crispy. Drain on paper towels. Pour the salsa into the pan and cook for about 10 minutes. Add about a cup of water, season with salt and cook for 5 more minutes. Add the tortilla chips, stirring them until

completely coated with the sauce. If you want them crispy, serve immediately topped with the crema, some of the cheese and sliced onions. If you prefer them soggy, turn the fire off, cover and let them soak

in the sauce for 5 minutes before serving. Optional: Top with shredded poached chicken breast, a fried egg or a thin steak. Serves 4.

— Claudia Alarcón

MARISELA'S CHILAQUILES EN GUAJILLO

- 16 chilies guajillos
- 5 dried chilies de árbol
- 3 large tomatillos, husked and washed
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled
- ¼ medium white onion, cut into slices
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ½ cup oil
- 10 stale corn tortillas, cut into eighths
- ¼ medium white onion, thinly sliced
- Crema Mexicana or creme fraiche
- Crumbled queso fresco or cotija

Rinse the chilies and dry them well. Split the guajillos in half lengthwise and take out seeds. Toast all chilies lightly on a comal or frying pan, then place in a bowl and cover with warm water. Let them soak for a few minutes. Meanwhile, in the same comal or pan, roast the tomatillos, garlic and half of the onion, turning frequently until they start to char and



No matter which kind of sauce or salsa you use, you have to use tortilla chips or staled tortillas, or else you aren't making chilaquiles.

soften. Add the vegetables and chilies to the blender with the soaking water and puree. Add seasonings and blend well.

Heat the oil in a medium pan over medium-high heat and fry the tortilla triangles a few at a time until golden

brown and crispy. Drain on paper towels. Pour the salsa into the pan and cook for about 10 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the tortilla chips, stirring them until completely coated with the sauce. If you want them crispy, serve immediately

topped with the crema, some of the cheese and remaining thinly sliced onions. If you prefer them soggy, turn the fire off, cover and let them soak in the sauce for 5 minutes before serving. Serves 4.

— Marisela Godínez

sions for breakfast on Saturdays, and she makes a special recipe for the popular Sunday brunch buffet. "My mom made chilaquiles rojos with a chili guajillo sauce instead of tomato-based," says the chef. Guajillo is a dry chili with a mild, fruity, earthy taste that lends the dish an extra rustic quality.

A few years ago, after a night of revelry, my brother took me to brunch at a spot near our family's apartment, aptly called Chilakillers. The funky hole in the wall calls itself a "lounge," a play on words that combines lounge and lonchería – Mexican for neighborhood diner.

Amid kitschy decor blend-

ing iconic Mexican imagery with American pop culture, diners enjoy creative takes that elevate chilaquiles to the sublime. In addition to the traditional red and green, Chilakillers boasts mole, black bean, avocado and extra spicy versions with a variety of meat and veggie toppings.

Out-of-the-box weekend specials may include spicy mango sauce with smoked pork chop, chili poblano sauce and beef milanese or three-cheese sauce with a picadillo and queso fresco-stuffed chili relleno. Add an ice-cold michelada and you can feel your soul return to its body.



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