

Tapas is the perfect marriage of wine and food

What is tapas? Simply described, tapas is a form of miniature cuisine. Originating in Spain, the popularity of tapas bars has spread to many other countries including Canada.

Tapas originates from the word "tapa", which means lid, because quite literally, tapas began as a slice of bread to cover your glass of wine so no flies could get in. The nature of tapas has expanded somewhat from a slice of bread to much, much more!

At the simplest level, tapas are tidbits or hors d'oeuvres eaten with drinks at a bar before proceeding somewhere to have a full meal. Tapas is also a term used to describe the Spanish tradition of going out before lunch or dinner to mingle with

Lori Gysel & Gerry Kentner



friends while drinking an aperitif and sharpening the appetite for the main meal ahead by choosing from the myriad of tempting appetizers offered in the bars.

Moving from bar to bar is the perfect way to enjoy tapas. Tapas may even take the place of dinner because the varieties of foods are so abundant.

The art of tapas represents the perfect marriage of food and drink because it is not the wine, which lubricates the ingestion of good food, but quite the contrary; it is the food, which really acts as an accompaniment to the series of sips of good wine. Movement is an integral part of your tapas experience— either moving from tapas bar to tapas bar or remaining in one location; but standing and mingling— not sitting.

I was introduced to my first and second tapas experience in the same month— just last year. While on a holiday, Dave and I shared a tapas plate as a prelude to dinner and loved it. The plate consisted of carrot salad, prosciutto with dried figs, potato tortilla, thyme-scented green olives, honey roasted almonds, manchego cheese and anise flavoured beet salad. I have recently duplicated a couple of these items with great results.

Shortly after this experience, a local chef Deborah Palmer, invited a few other chefs over for a tapas evening. The drinks were in hand, as we

engaged in witty conversation, some shop talk, and wandered to and from the artfully set table of Mediterranean delicacies. I delighted in some unfamiliar flavours to my palate: savoury spiced almonds, white beans with sage, lemon and garlic, pitas and crackers, grilled vegetables, hummus with roasted red peppers, dolmades (grape leaves stuffed with garlicky dilled rice), olive assortment, yogurt dip and a scrumptious chicken dish that was fabulous, but I can't remember all the ingredients— it was truly a delicious experience.

Cutlery has no place in the art of tapas, simply eaten with the fingers; possibly the use of a fork, but only to spear the bite-size morsels.

So try something new. Have some friends in, stand around and do what we like to do best— eat and drink!

Have fun and keep cooking!

(Lori and Gerry Kentner can be reached at whatscookin@independentfreepress.com)

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Basque Mushroom Toasts

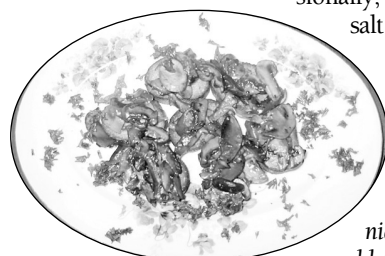
Ingredients

- 3 tsp olive oil plus more for bread
- 1 lb mushrooms, thinly sliced (mixture of shitake, cremini, oyster and white)
- 4 large garlic cloves
- 1 tsp all purpose flour
- 2 tsp dry sherry
- 1 tsp chili pepper flakes
- 1/4 cup beef broth
- 1/4 cup chicken broth
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 6 1" French stick slices

Method

Heat olive oil in a heavy skillet over medium

heat. Add mushrooms, cook until tender, stirring occasionally, for approximately 10 minutes. Add garlic and cook for another minute or two. Add flour, stir one minute. Mix in sherry, chili flakes and broth. Cook until mixture thickens slightly, stirring occasionally, about five minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Mix in parsley.



Meanwhile, preheat broiler. Brush bread with olive oil. Broil until golden. Arrange toast slices on platter, spoon mushroom mixture over top. Serve.

Cook's Note: This recipe is quite nice with 1 tsp of chili flakes, but it could tolerate up to 1 tsp, depending on

how hot you like it.

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