BRUNCH THE SPANISH WAY

Both Spaniards and Americans are welcoming a different take on the hybrid breakfast-lunch meal – one that opts for patatas bravas and cava over home fries and Champagne cocktails.

SCROLL DOWN

IT'S LATE AFTERNOON ON A SUNDAY in New York's SoHo neighborhood, and the brunch service at Boqueria tapas bar is still going strong. Diners sit shoulder to shoulder on raised leather banquettes facing high-top tables crowded with flutes of cava and pitchers of sangria as well as plates of smoky chorizo, patatas bravas drizzled in creamy aioli and pan con tomate stacked askew. A background of Spanish pop helps set the mood.

"Brunch is 100 percent not a Spanish tradition, but our brunch business is crazy," says Yann de Rochefort, who in 2006 opened the first of eight Boqueria restaurants across New York City; Washington, D.C.; Chicago; and now Nashville. "We do more business in two days of brunch than we do in five days of lunch."

In Spain, where the days are filled with a seemingly endless string of meals, small and large, and one could easily argue that food is everything, brunch is a new concept. On weekends, in the country's metropolises like Madrid, Barcelona and Seville, particularly at hotel restaurants, it has been gaining traction. #Brunchelona has even emerged as a social media hashtag.

It's no surprise to Rochefort, who says the casual experience of tapas – the sharing of small plates, the energy level – is well suited for brunch.

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> Founder of Boqueria restaurant

Conservas are foods preserved in tins, cans or jars – a tradition in Spain that utilizes high-quality ingredients to produce.

IT'S ALL ABOUT RESPECTING THE INGREDIENTS - HOW TO PICK THE BEST ONES

HOME COOKS CAN MAKE THEIR SPANISH brunch dreams come true by sourcing quality ingredients from Spanish specialty goods shops and grocery stores. Despaña Fine Foods and Tapas Cafe in Lower Manhattan, for example, greets customers with a wall of shelves neatly stacked with hundreds of colorful specialty foods: sacks of bomba rice; bottles of sherry vinegars and olive oil; jars of preserved vegetables and legumes; and a large selection of conservas, or tins of cooked seafood, like pickled fried mussels, scallops in parsley salsa or buttery white tuna belly.

> **"There's this huge respect for the ingredients in Spain."**
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> **Phil Gonzalez**
> Restaurateur, Tomiño Taberna Gallega

"There's this huge respect for the ingredients [in Spain]," says the restaurateur Phil Gonzalez, who runs Tomiño Taberna Gallega in New York. He remembers late breakfasts in his father's hometown of Tomiño, a coastal community in Galicia in northwest Spain, consisting of fried empanadillas filled with tuna and sofrito, followed by fresh tortillas (traditional egg-and-potato omelets), a big salad with "the best lettuce, tomato and onions you can taste anywhere" and perhaps baked fish with french fries made from local potatoes.

Simplicity is key when it comes to Spanish brunches, which is why knowing which Spanish regions produce the best ingredients is vital. Under the European Union, Spain has a robust Protected Designations of Origin program, which certifies that certain agricultural or food products have been produced entirely in a particular territory with special environmental characteristics, using specified ingredients, local expertise, and craft.

Celebrated as a national dish by Spaniards, Tortilla de Patatas is a Spanish omelet that combines eggs, potatoes, onions and olive oil.

Mahón-Menorca PDO cheese, for instance, is produced on the island of Menorca (named a Biosphere Reserve by Unesco) and is pressed, brined, and aged for up to 150 days before being rubbed with olive oil and pimentón, a process that gives it its trademark orange color. Pair the cheese with Jamón de Teruel (a ham derived from cross-race Duroc pigs from the landlocked region of Aragon in northeastern Spain) together with figs, honey and almonds to create a classic Spanish charcuterie cheese board — an easy-to-make dish ideal for brunch.

Carmen Motamedi is an importer with La Española Meats, a Spanish specialty goods shop founded in 1982 by her mother, Juana Gimeno Faraone, in Southern California. According to Motamedi, the best anchovies are from Cantabria; the best olives, olive oil and jamón are from the south; and the best rice is bomba from Valencia, where both her mother and paella are originally from. Faraone still cooks paella every Saturday at their brick-and-mortar shop in Harbor City.

"When I go abroad and find products, I need to go see the maker," Motamedi says. "I don't buy items that are packaged [by a third party]. I want to make sure that there is a story to every single item. [For] our Maese Miguel Manchego cheese, they are working directly with the shepherds in La Mancha. The sheep are not caged — they graze the land. There's still human contact with the animals. Our Losada olives are handpicked and packed all on site, so it's amazing."

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Carmen Motamedi
Importer at La Española Meats

Spain produces a wide variety of cheeses, olives and olive oils.

SPANISH BRUNCH PREP AND PAIRINGS AT HOME

WITH HIGH-QUALITY RAW MATERIALS AT the heart of Spanish brunches, preparing the meal at home can be a hassle-free experience – one that does not require turning on any kitchen appliances. The conservas at Despaña Fine Foods and Tapas Cafe, for example, are small, flavorful bites that can be easily paired with rustic bread or dolloped on top of thin, crispy Galician potato chips.

“You just open them up and serve them alongside olives or piquillo peppers,” says Despaña Foods Vice President Angelica Intriago. These richly succulent preserved seafoods also deserve a place among tapas, in salads, sandwiches, rice and pasta dishes and on seafood platters. “You don’t need to do much to it and that’s the key to those tinned specialties,” says Intriago.

To pair with any seafood, Lorena Ascencios, wine buyer at Astor Wines and Spirits in New York City, recommends pouring cava, Spain’s Designation of Origin sparkling wine, most of which hails from the Mediterranean wine region of Penedés, south of Barcelona, or mixing sherry cobblers. “Sherry is only from the Jerez area in Andalucía,” she says, “much like how Champagne can only come from the region of Champagne.”

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> Wine buyer at Astor Wines and Spirits

For Spanish sherry producers, the unique terroir of sherry – its close proximity to the sea – is what sets it apart from wines grown in other regions of the world. “They’re like, ‘This is ours, we’re proud of it, and you can’t make the same thing in upstate New York because it’s made from these grapes, and it comes from our soils and our territory,” says Ascencios. “It’s important – it’s part of the identity of the country. It’s harder for Americans to understand because we are so individualistic and we feel like we can make anything here, which is true and what’s great about this country. But that’s very different to the Europeans.”

Thin and crispy Galician potato chips are the perfect accompaniment to conservas. Spain also produces globally acclaimed wines and spirits such as cava and sherry.

The unique flavor profiles of sherry can add an unconventional twist to elevate brunch. Ascencios recommends Amontillado sherry as a cocktail pairing: “Amontillado sherry is dry and, with the cocktail, best mixed with some citrus and a simple syrup to add a little bit of sweetness. It’s complex, earthy, nutty.”

Sangria is perhaps the best known Spanish libation stateside. On top of that, Ascencios sells a lot of Basque ciders, which are lighter in alcohol and suit many brunchers. And while Ascencios handles a lot of online orders, she recommends coming in and asking the sales staff.

Ultimately, brunch the Spanish way should be a relaxed, social affair. “It is a perfect combination for anything Spanish,” says Intriago, “where the focus is sharing and enjoying quality food and wines.”

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> **Angelica Intriago**
> Vice president of Despaña Foods

WHERE TO SHOP FOR FOODS AND WINES FROM SPAIN

Shop Food:

Caputos

Delicias de España

Despaña

La Española

Iberico Club

Igourmet

Tienda

Mercado Little Spain

Murrays Cheese

Shop Wine:

Wine.com

Decanto

K & L Wines

Marx Foods

Total Wine

Astor Wines

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