



Salsas of the World

MARK MILLER WITH ROBERT QUINTANA
Photographs by Jon Edwards

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Mark Miller

with Robert Quintana

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Introduction

I have been in love with the idea of salsas my whole life, as long as I can remember. I love the idea of adding something more to my food to make it tastier, more interesting, spicier, more colorful. To give food more edible textures and make it more fun to eat has always seemed like a great idea. More flavors were better at four years old and they are still better today. “More is better!” was and is one of my great slogans in the restaurants. I believe that we should strive for more meaningful, more interesting, and more creative experiences in food and in life. And when it comes to food, what is better than something that you add to make it taste better! Salsas can make food more pleasing. And when food becomes pleasing—not just a nutritional necessity—it becomes a joy. You find out that food can make you happy!

The idea of playing with my food and creating new flavors at an early age wasn’t always encouraged—or seen as the necessary developmental steps of a great chef—but I was given a large amount of latitude because I had an insatiable curiosity about food and why it tasted like it did. I would pop lots of things in my mouth as a way of learning about it. It’s what we all do at early levels of learning, but I have never stopped.

At the beginning of our food experiences, we play with food when it gets put on our plate. We maybe feel like we are supposed to eat it because it makes our mother happy. But sometimes we don’t eat it—because it’s green, or it’s bitter, or it’s too strong, or it’s too hot, or a hundred other reasons. The problem is it becomes an all or nothing approach to food. The main reason we don’t eat certain food is that it is not what we like or want *at the time*. This can be hard to express when we are very young, and this problem can last our entire lives—sometimes people just don’t know what it is they want to eat.



However, later in life, your big culinary breakout usually comes about when you get to choose what you like to eat. And you get really excited about food because now the possibilities of what you like just got a whole lot bigger. When you are a little older, you still don't go shopping and prep and cook all your own food, but you get to add ingredients to your dishes to make the food more what you like. So the food begins to reflect you and your tastes. You take more ownership in the process of creating flavors and foods that you are passionate about.

I remember from when I was very young that eating out was so exciting, not because I was going to a fancy restaurant or because it was good food, but because I got to order something that I wanted to eat. I got to choose. And I could spice it up to how I wanted to before I ate it. You can choose many different ways to build a hot fudge sundae—all vanilla ice cream one time; all coffee ice cream the next time; or with one scoop of coffee, one scoop of chocolate, and one scoop of vanilla the next time. You can use thick hot fudge and lots of whipped cream and leave the nuts off (which I discovered through trial and error interfered with the consistency and taste, and which I learned the scientific reasons for later on). A grilled hot dog was good, but a grilled hot dog with sweet honey mustard and

homemade red-and-green piccalilli from my grandmother's pantry was a great hot dog, a memorable hot dog, one worth repeating, one worth looking forward to. We all have done that in our early eating lives: by trial and error created those flavors that are most satisfying. The trick is to keep creating them your whole life.

The lesson that I was learning early on was that good food became better when there was more to it. Another flavor added to the experience. I was becoming a flavor thrill seeker, developing a lifelong bent to seek out new flavors and new food experiences. I remember fried summer Ipswich clams from the Cape were wonderful, but the same yummy clams dipped into a creamy, tart, and sweet tartar sauce were fantastic! This was one of my first salsa experiences. Another was recognizing slices of roasted pork loin were tastier and sweeter with a homemade cinnamon-maple applesauce. The pork tasted better and the applesauce tasted more interesting when you ate them together. I was learning quickly that I liked my food experiences to have more flavors, more excitement, more mystery, and more fun than the normal kid. When it came to food, why be satisfied with less?

So my early culinary education started, and the more I created my own flavors the more interested I became in food, not just cooking it but eating it. I started in earnest to look for combinations of flavors that worked and tried to figure out the internal culinary flavor logic of each dish. I started with simple combinations: warm, velvety oatmeal with sweet maple syrup and rich, cold cream; peanut butter and jelly sandwiches; bologna with mustard; tuna fish salad with celery. I eventually moved on to more complex combinations: Maine lobsters cooked in seaweed with drawn butter; Polish sausage with sauerkraut; Italian sandwiches with meat, sautéed sweet peppers and onions, and melted cheese. My first foray into the world of food outside of the familial was pastrami sandwiches on rye bread with kosher dill pickles on the side. I eventually moved on to beef tacos, then Indian curries, then Chinese chop suey. My culinary world was getting wider and the combinations of flavors that worked together to create these memories were also getting wider.

Later when I went to university at Berkeley (where I studied Art and Culture in the Anthropology department), I started to cook for myself full-time. I was further exposed to the rich ethnic food traditions of the Bay Area. I started to learn more about intricate, more complex flavor combinations and I started to incorporate those lessons into my cooking. My food experiences and my academic studies were complementary: they were both teaching me about how different cultures expressed themselves in varied ways and that there was no "better" or "higher" culture, but that almost every culture had created masterpieces of the human experience in some form or another. And when it came to cooking, I learned that each culture has some great food! There is certainly no monopoly of great tastes and great food from just one particular cuisine.

Part of what I learned during those years was that because I was limited in funds, I had to make my food taste fascinating without buying expensive prime cuts of meat or gourmet products. I learned to use spices and seasonings to make the difference, and learned that the mastery of flavors was the key to a rich food experience. The world of salsas became important to my success, as they could create a number of delicious bites in the same meal. Simple, inexpensive Indian samosas became magical with a tamarind chutney and fresh cilantro mint raita; a grilled skirt steak was scrumptious with salsa fresca; and vegetable couscous with the addition of harissa and a few Moroccan merguz sausages was

as satisfying, and even more so, that many richly ornamented dishes from classic European cuisines—and a lot more affordable.

When I cooked, the more salsas there were in the meal, the more interactive and fun it was for everyone. Salsas were a way that everyone could customize their food to their own taste and style, just like I had done as a kid. When you add a salsa to your food, you are actively taking part in the final taste. Your food becomes more personalized, more intimate, and more satisfying.

During the ensuing years while I was studying anthropology, traveling, and sampling the food of a diverse number of cultures, I came to realize that every culture has its own versions of salsas. I saw salsas pop up in tropical, magical Bali—a hot, herbaceous salsa of sweet soy and chiles served with suckling pig or Balinese roast duck. In Burma, I tasted strong, bitter, spicy salsas made from fermented tea leaves. These went on top of the baked tofu custards. At the storied city of Pagan, I sampled twenty varied salsas on the falafel carts of Jerusalem, outside the Old Wall. I added harissa to my wild boar couscous in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco; I added pesto to my summer soup in Provence; I ate piquant peanut salsa on grilled beef heart brochettes outside of Cuzco, and discovered a myriad of salsas in market kitchens, loncherias, taco carts, and restaurants across Central America while visiting the majestic pre-Columbian ruins. Salsas were for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They were part of the experience of eating that made it exciting, with endless flavor possibilities.

When I started my first restaurant, Fourth Street Grill in Berkeley, it was a casual restaurant specializing in fresh grilled fish and meats with lots of ethnic accents. Salsas were an important part of our food philosophy at Fourth Street Grill. We bought great ingredients, cooked them simply (mostly on the live mesquite grill), and created a range of flavor possibilities by altering the salsas. It was a perfect way to keep the food simply cooked. We had a small staff of three, including myself, for prep and cooking and had to serve up to 250 people per night without altering our operational efficiency and control of the process. We made salsas full of exciting flavors, and we made a lot of different salsas every day: they went on the fresh grilled fish, steaks, chicken, double-cut pork chops, and Provencal loin lamb chops.

From Fourth Street Grill to my next restaurant, Santa Fe Bar and Grill, to my third restaurant, Coyote Café, salsas became an even more important part of the menu. Food at my restaurants was centered on the great ethnic food traditions that I had discovered and enjoyed my whole life and that I find so full of passion and mystery. From Latin to North African to Asian, I was cooking food that was simple and honest in preparation—over a grill or from a wood-burning oven—but was complex, multilayered, and rich in levels of sensory experience. Great ethnic cuisine depends upon the mastery of subtle techniques that have evolved for multiple generations in a culture over hundreds of years, executed at the highest level. They do not depend upon exotic, costly, rare ingredients or faddish ideas. My audience supported my culinary choices and I had a great career, with thirteen restaurants total on three continents over thirty years. I am very grateful to all my loyal guests who followed me across the culinary globe.

This book is homage to all the great cooks, whether they are cooking at home or in simple carts or

market stalls, wherever they are, who serve great, honest food with wholesome ingredients and some wonderful bowls of salsa on the table. The recipes include my personally chosen favorite salsas from all over the world, from the very simple to amazingly complex puzzles of flavor combinations.

Salsas are used worldwide to customize and add accents and dimensions to snacks, soups, sandwiches, main plates, and roasts of meat and fish. As accessories of the flavor world, they dress up the meal and make it sexy. They give it bling! Salsas make food come alive on the palate by changing each bite with a different tempo, a different rhythm, and a different counterpoint. How long would you listen to a concert that had the same music (no matter how good it was) over and over again? The same thing holds true for food—the senses want something that keeps their attention by ever changing, endlessly creating new possibilities of experience.

Salsas are very healthy, as almost all are based on fruits and vegetables and herbs and spices, with very little extra fats or excess salts. They are easy to prepare and much more economical than buying prepackaged and processed salsas, which are usually pasteurized so the flavors have become muddled together and not spate and bright as a salsa should be. You can make a salsa very easily from scratch or one that starts from prepared ingredients that you can just add to or “dress up,” such as canned black beans or canned fire-roasted tomatoes. These can be converted to a salsa in minutes.

My early food experiences and my early experiences with salsas shaped my own culinary philosophy, which is that by adding flavors and spices to food you can create an infinite possibility of personal pleasurable experiences, and that each culture has many different ways of creating delectable dishes. You can learn these possibilities and share them with others through your cooking and recipes.

I hope this book and these salsa recipes will enrich and add to the enjoyment in your gastronomic life and those you share it with, as they have mine. We spend a great deal of time in life eating, and thinking about and preparing food, so we might as well get the most enjoyment out of it rather than looking at it as a chore. Remember, at the end of the day the one who has the most fun wins! And what better way to have fun with your food than to “play with it,” as I have done my whole life. Best wishes that you may find many new friends to add to your culinary world, friends that make you happy, that make your life more pleasurable and more interesting, and that are a joy to be with—as all good friends! To make something that tastes wonderful and to share that wonder and passion with others is to give a little more joy to life.



Easygoing Salsa

Artichoke Fennel Provençal

France

I have thrown the whole Provençal garden and market into this one. It is really worth the trouble and has a spectacular finished look. It's easy to make; it just looks like a lot of ingredients but they all work together easily. Make some simple dishes around this recipe and the dinner is done! I make Artichoke Fennel Provençal and serve it as a first course with chilled rose wine, fresh goat cheese, and some wonderful black olive country bread with a rich Provençal olive oil. The use of fresh lavender makes the recipe very authentic. Use all the light, fresh fennel fronds from the plant—they are a great addition. If you can't find baby artichokes, you can use the heart of large globe artichokes; there will be a lot more waste but you will still have the same great flavors.

Juice of 1/2 lemon
24 baby artichokes
1 shallot
4 cloves garlic
1 tablespoon olive oil
1/2 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
1/2 teaspoon whole coriander seeds
1 bay leaf
1 bunch thyme
2 lavender flower buds
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup rose wine
1/2 cup thinly sliced fennel
2 tablespoons fennel fronds
1/2 cup diced red bell pepper (1/3 inch dice)
12 Lucques olives, pitted, cut in half
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons rose wine
1 teaspoon finely chopped basil
1 teaspoon finely chopped tarragon
1 teaspoon finely chopped marjoram
1 teaspoon finely chopped thyme
1 teaspoon finely chopped chervil
1 teaspoon finely chopped parsley
2 teaspoons lavender flowers, picked

Prepare a bowl of water and add the lemon juice. Cut off the top of an artichoke and pull away the

green leaves. Cut on a diagonal around the heart, then cut in quarters and place in lemon water to prevent discoloration. Repeat with the remaining artichokes.

Dice the shallot and peel the garlic; add to a sauté pan that has a lid. Add the olive oil, peppercorns, coriander, bay leaf, thyme, lavender, and salt. Heat the aromatics on low heat for 2 minutes. Add the drained artichokes and rose wine. Cover with a lid and let artichokes steam for 10 minutes.

Remove the lid and let liquid reduce until dry. Remove the bay leaf, thyme, lavender flowers, and peppercorns. Place artichokes in a mixing bowl.

In a pot of salted boiling water, blanch the fennel and fennel fronds. Add to the bowl of artichokes along with the red bell pepper. Pit the olives and add to bowl. Add olive oil, rose wine, chopped herbs, and lavender flowers and mix gently. Yield 3 cups.

Serves 6

Heat level: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Tip: It's all about the olive oil here. Make sure to use a rich, buttery olive oil from Provence or Spain. Many of the Italian Tuscan olive oils are a little bitter for this dish.



Shiso Leaf Tomato

Japan

My passion for Japanese food began when I started to cook and eat a lot of it in my university days at Berkeley. I had a Japanese roommate and was studying the culture of Japan and Chinese painting at the time. The cuisine—like the culture—has hundreds of layers. You learn one, only to find that there is another one beneath it. This salsa is definitely a fusion of flavors that I like and not an authentic Japanese dish, but it uses authentic Japanese ingredients throughout, and my Japanese friends like it. Try it with grilled Chicken Yakitori on the side, cold oysters, or over rice.

- 2 cups cherry tomatoes
- 3 tablespoons julienned shiso leaf (about 10 leaves)
- 1/2 teaspoon yuzo kosho paste, green (Yakami Orchard brand)
- 1 teaspoon organic soy (Kikkoman brand)
- 1 teaspoon sesame seeds, toasted
- 1/8 teaspoon Meyer lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon thinly sliced green onion, green part only

Slice the tomatoes in rings and place in a mixing bowl. Add the shiso leaf, yuzo kosho paste, soy, toasted sesame seeds, lemon zest, and green onion. Mix well. Yield 2 cups.

Serves 6

Heat level: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Tip: The organic Kikkoman soy sauce in the black bottle is readily available. It really is a superior product. Make sure to get it; it costs very little for a soy sauce that does make a big difference.

Green Chile Pistachio Pesto

New Mexico

Not only does New Mexico have the best green chiles in the world but it also grows lots of fine pistachios, though most people don't think of New Mexico as pistachio country. And New Mexico also produces the only red chile– and green chile–flavored pistachios that I know of. I have found them to be great for gifts when I visit Japan—they go over big as a spicy accompaniment for drinks! The cured lemons in this recipe are the whole cured lemons that you can find at olive bars or in jars at Middle Eastern grocery stores. They are very easy to make at [home](#). I usually have a jar of cured lemons ready to go in the fridge, as they are perfect to add to salad dressings, pastas, butter, or oils. Make sure the pistachios are bright green inside the skin, a true Kelly green, and not dried out. You want pistachios from a new crop.

2 cups canola oil
1 cup pureed poblano chiles
1-1/2 cups cilantro leaves, no stems
3/4 cup green chile pistachios (Whole Foods bulk)
5 tablespoons lemon oil (Agrumato brand)
1 teaspoon [cured lemon](#) (about 1/4 lemon, sliced)
3 tablespoons olive oil
3/4 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon lime juice

In a deep-sided pan, heat the canola oil to 350 degrees F and oil roast the poblano chiles for 3 minutes or until the skins blister. A splatter screen is recommended. Place the chiles in a plastic bag to steam. Peel and deseed when cool. Place the poblanos in a food processor. Add cilantro, green chile pistachios, lemon oil, cured lemon, olive oil, salt, and lime juice. Pulse to a fine paste. Yield 2 cups.

Serves 8

Heat level: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Tip: Try to find Meyer lemons when you are making cured lemons. They have a more penetrating, complex perfume than Persian lemons.

Red Bell Pepper Espelette Salsa

France

A Mediterranean mélange of big Spanish flavors, this recipe showcases the specialist chile powder Espelette that is popular in the Basque country in Spain and in France. Many high-end restaurants started to use it a few years ago and it has caught on. Espelette is not smoky like pimento, and is richer and brighter than paprika. It is not as hot as New Mexico red chile powder and has its own unique profile, which is very complex and not overbearing. Espelette is grown in California now. Make sure you are purchasing real Espelette by buying it from a trusted vendor such as The Spanish Table or Kalustyan's. The old-fashioned Pernod gives this recipe a splash of anise flavor; oranges and black olives are a natural together. This salsa has great colors, bright tastes, and the zing of the Espelette.

2 cups canola oil
1-1/3 cups red bell pepper strips (about 3 peppers)
1-1/2 teaspoons Piment d'Espelette, toasted
1/2 cup black olives, oil cured, pitted, and cut in rings (French Beldi)
4 teaspoons Pernod
1/2 teaspoon Microplaned orange zest
1 tablespoon orange juice
1 clove garlic, sliced on truffle cutter
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons olive oil
3 tablespoons large chiffonade basil

In a 12-inch-wide x 4-inch-deep pan, heat the oil to 350 degrees F. Fry the bell peppers on all sides until the skin is blistered and the flesh is darkened. Carefully remove peppers to a plastic bag and let steam. When cool, peel, deseed, remove any white veins, and cut into strips, about 1- x 1/8-inches. Place in a mixing bowl.

In a nonstick sauté pan over medium-low heat, toast the Piment d'Espelette and add to the peppers. Slice the olives in rings and add. Add the Pernod, orange zest, orange juice, shaved garlic, salt, olive oil, and basil. Yield 2 cups.

Serves 4

Heat level: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**



Ranchero Salsa

Mexico

This is the tricolored salsa that you see on most Mexican breakfasts, on top of Sunny Side Up eggs with refried beans on the side and some warm, fresh corn tortillas. You can add more or less of your favorite chiles, and you can use vegetable oil if you like, although the recipe is named after a ranch where they have lots of hearty cooked foods. Do not let the salsa cook too long as you want to keep the individual items layered in texture and flavor. Most ranchero salsas have been sitting on the stove for hours and taste nothing like the simple, fresh version it should be. To make it easier in the morning to assemble breakfast, I usually fry the chiles a day ahead and have them peeled, but individually stored. The reason I use frying in this recipe is that the fire-roasted method is too smoky for eggs and not fresh enough. The fire-roasted tomatoes provide enough smoky, earthy notes. Ranchero Salsa is also good on fried chicken breasts, pork chops, or grilled fish.

1 cup canola oil
2 poblano chiles
4 serrano chiles
3 Fresno chiles
1-1/2 cups fire roasted and pureed Early Girl tomatoes
1/2 onion, sliced in strips
1 clove garlic, crushed
2 tablespoons lard or duck fat
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 bunch cilantro, wrapped in cheesecloth and tied
1-1/2 cups V8 Spicy Hot tomato juice

Heat the canola oil to 350 degrees F and fry the poblanos, serranos, and Fresnos in a skillet for 2 minutes to blister the skins. When cool enough to handle, peel, deseed, and cut in 1/8- x 1-1/2-inch strips; reserve. Fire roast the tomatoes and puree in a food processor; reserve 1-1/2 cups. Sauté the onion and garlic in lard or duck fat, being careful not to brown. Add the salt, wrapped cilantro, V8 juice, tomato puree, poblanos, and serranos and cook for 10 minutes. Remove the cilantro. When cool, add the Fresnos. Yield 3 cups.

Serves 6

Heat level: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**



Late Summer White Corn and Hatch Green Chile Salsa

New Mexico

This is a great late summer salsa for the BBQ table—a sort of Southwest succotash. Whether it is a side dish for other recipes in a night of grilling or just as it is on its own, you can use this salsa for everything from a side salsa to stuffing chile rellenos or even enchiladas. Corn and green chiles have an amazing affinity for each other; the sweetness of the corn combines well with the piquant, smoky chiles. Here I have included fresh, grilled nopales to make it even more of a native dish. The texture of the nopales, which some people find a little slimy, I think adds some textural interest to the recipe and the different colors complement each other. I like the contrast of the white corn against the blackened fire-roasted chiles. I always like to use fresh basil with corn, as they bring out the natural sweetness and perfume of each other. Fresh marjoram adds another fresh, herbaceous note. This salsa is amazing with grilled chicken. Or try it as a vegetarian taco topping with a little crema or grated Cotija cheese on top.

3/4 cup chopped Hatch green chile

1-1/2 cups white corn

1/2 cup chopped nopales cactus

1 cup cherry tomatoes

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon smoked salt

1/4 teaspoon sugar

2 tablespoons finely julienned basil

1 teaspoon finely minced marjoram

2 teaspoons olive oil

1 tablespoon lime juice

Over an open flame, roast the green chile and place in a plastic bag to steam. When cool, peel, deseed, and chop in 3/8-inch pieces. Reserve. Heat a cast iron pan or comal to medium-high. Roast the corn in a single layer. Do not move the corn; it should pop. This will take 1 to 1-1/2 minutes. Let cool; reserve.

Clean the cactus of any needles by cutting in the reverse direction they are growing. Grill over a medium flame and chop in 3/8-inch pieces. Let cool; reserve. Slice the cherry tomatoes in rings and place in a mixing bowl. Sprinkle with salt, smoked salt, and sugar. Add the basil to the tomatoes. Add the marjoram, green chile, corn, cactus, olive oil, and lime juice. Yield 4 cups.

Serves 8

Heat level: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Tip: Try to use fresh marjoram when available, as fresh oregano is a little too oily for some of the dishes. Marjoram is more subtle and sweeter.

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