

142 becoming basque

Allan Ansell



Paella for 200 simmers with seafood and chorizos at the Basque Market on Grove Street, 2013.



Food and
FAMILY

by Txardio

Epifania's life on the small farm near Ibarrangelua in the Basque region of northern Spain was busy with daily chores, which included helping her mother cook for the family. But the winter of 1925 brought a surprise to the young daughter of Silbestre Lamiquiz. A young Basque man from America showed up, boasting of his job as a foreman on a sheep ranch in a far off place—Idaho. He didn't hide the fact that he was looking for a wife willing to move to America and help him on a ranch larger than many entire townships in Epi's world.

His name was David Inchausti. He was raised in a little town just over the hill from Epi's home. He dressed as fine as any man she had ever known. David could only be away from his new Idaho home near Mackay for a few months, but he had big plans. David and Epifania fell in love, and in a month they were married. He promised that within a year he would send her a ticket so she could join him in Idaho. Not long after David's arrival back in Idaho, he received a letter from his beloved wife. "The ticket you promised

me must now be for two. I am to have your child.” As it turned out, Epi and her young daughter, Maria Rosario, made it to Idaho just before the baby’s third birthday. David met his wife and daughter at the train station in Pocatello. They bumped along the dusty roads in his new Ford Model A to the Drake Ranch near Mackay. Epi’s new life included cooking for the numerous shepherders who worked for the large ranch where David was foreman.

She soon learned that the beloved olive oil, choricero peppers and fresh fish that she was accustomed to in the Basque Country were not available in Idaho. She had to adapt her cooking. And cooking for up to 30 hungry Basque men was nothing like cooking for her sisters and young brothers back home. One of the first recipes Epi adapted was the vinegar and oil dressing she used on all of her simple but tasty salads.

Epi’s Garlic Vinaigrette

- 1 clove garlic minced
- ½ cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup Mazola corn oil
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tbs. sugar

Blend together the vinegar, minced garlic, salt and sugar. Drizzle the oil into the mixture as it continues to mix to allow the oil to emulsify (author’s word, not Epi’s). Toss dressing with the salad and serve immediately.

—Epifania Lamiquiz Inchausti

After another five years and two more daughters, David and Epi moved down the road to Hailey, where David opened the Gem Bar. Epi continued to fix dinners for the few boarders the Inchausti family housed. After a neighboring house of ill repute was vacated, David and Epi bought the building for the family. There was room upstairs for boarders and a large dining room where Epi served the Basques who stayed with the family, as well as up to 20 diners each night. Soon, word of her cooking skills and unique menu spread throughout the Wood River Valley. Her clientele reached beyond Basque boarders to include Sun Valley visitors, including the occasional celebrity—Bing Crosby, Clark Gable and Tony Bennett, to name a few.

Epi’s journey to Idaho was similar to many other women who married Basque men and later became cooks at boarding houses or ranches. Using traditional menus and cooking methods handed down for generations in the



Basque Museum & Cultural Center

Marie Mingo Guisasola Aberasturi, a native of Gizaburuaga, ran Bob's Café in Emmett and, later, the hot-lunch program at Boise's St. Joseph School.

Basque Country, they introduced a cuisine rooted in Old World traditions, but adapted to its new environment in the American West.

Like Epi, Flora (Churruca) Aldazabal and sisters Carmen (Pagoaga) Lete and Luisa (Pagoaga) Bilbao became boarding house/ranch cooks known for their Basque cooking. All three came to Boise in the late 1960s. Carmen and José Lete joined Flora and Juan Aldazabal in leasing the Letemendi Boarding House on Sixth and Grove streets in Boise. Flora and Carmen cooked, made beds, cleaned the boarding house, shopped and did whatever else needed to be done. Each Basque boarder paid \$90 a month for three meals a day and a bed. Although the menu did not change drastically from day to day, the food was always good, Flora said. The following is a typical weekday menu:

Allan Ansell



Chris Ansotegui preserves Epi's traditions on Meridian's Main Street. Opposite: Epi and David Inchausti.

Breakfast

Chorizos
Eggs
Toast
Coffee

Lunch

Red Beans
Roast Beef
Roasted Potatoes
Fresh Fruit

Dinner

Porrusalda
(Leek Soup)
Thinly cut Steak
Fried Cod Fish with
Pimientos
Fresh Fruit

Flora and Juan moved to Elko in 1964 to buy the Star Hotel, which they ran as both a boarding house and a restaurant. After their time at Letemendi's, Carmen and José moved to the Aldecoa sheep ranch outside of Boise. Luisa and her husband, Felix, lived on the Nicholson sheep ranch near Melba, where under the guidance of Mari Ursa she learned ranch-style cooking. Deer, elk and beef were on the menu, along with occasional tongue, pigs' feet, tripe and *bacalao* (salted cod fish). Basques at the ranch made their own chorizos and *morzillas* (blood sausage). With Luisa at the Nicholson ranch and Carmen at the Aldecoa ranch, several sheepherders noted that they had never been fed so well.

Like the Star in Elko, many Basque boarding houses throughout the West began serving food to the public in the 1960s to boost their bottom line as fewer and fewer Basques immigrated to work on the ranches. Although this style of restaurant never took hold in southern Idaho, the Basque restaurants of Nevada and California became well known for their family-style service. Restaurants like the Wool Growers in Bakersfield, the Winnemucca Hotel in Winnemucca and the Star in Elko became the quintessential versions of Basque restaurants in the American West.

The dining experience was similar in all of these restaurants. Many of these Basque-styled dinner houses served twice a night, so if diners missed the first hour, they needed to wait until the next serving began. While waiting, patrons might partake of Picon Punch, featuring a dark, bitter French liqueur made from oranges. Although it is not popular in the French Basque region, it has become the Basque drink of preference in Nevada and California restaurants.



Inchausti family

Picon Punch

Fill an 8 oz. stemmed glass with ice. Rub a lemon twist around the edge of the glass. Add the following ingredients:

1/4–1/2 oz. grenadine syrup

2 oz. Picon liqueur

Splash of soda

Stir slightly to mix

Float 3/4 oz. of brandy

Some bartenders insist that the stirring is done after the brandy, but then it's not a float. Your call.

Patrons were ushered into the dining room, where they found long tables set with plates, silverware, water glasses and wine goblets. The Basque dinner houses were not places for private conversation over a quiet dinner. Diners often felt they had been invited into someone's home to have

148 becoming basque



dinner with the host family. Servers brought wine carafes, bread baskets and soup tureens to the table. Each diner served him or herself and then passed it on, just like at home. After the soup bowls were cleared, a simple but delicious salad with a garlic vinaigrette followed. Then, plate after plate came out, filled with thick Basque red beans, green beans with garlic, french fries, fried cod fish and large dinner steaks. Dessert was often an apple compote of cooked apples with cinnamon and red wine or Basque rice pudding.

Boise's introduction to Basque family-style dining came in late 1979 when Pug Ostling of the Sandpiper restaurant joined with two first-generation immigrants to establish the Boarding House. Its proprietor, Nicasio Beristain, had lived in Boise since immigrating in the 1950s and chef Ramon Zugazaga came from the Star Hotel in Elko. Serving roast lamb, lamb chops, pork chops, steaks, tri-tip roast, baked chicken and several cod and halibut dishes, they filled the house with an authentic feel and fantastic food night after night.

After the Boarding House closed in 1982, Boise was once again without a Basque restaurant. But in late 1987, Jesus Alcelay, a Basque immigrant from Oñati, opened the Oñati Restaurant in downtown Boise in the same building that was once the Valencia boarding house. Jesus wanted to change peoples' views of Basque cooking by serving side dishes such as *croquetas*, a chicken roux-filled fritter, along with authentic Basque fish dishes such as cod *oliotara*, which is baked cod with olive oil, parsley and a touch of red pepper. Over the next 16 years, Jesus initiated a new style of Basque cooking compared to that of the old boarding houses. The tasty *croquetas* that he made so famous are perhaps Jesus' greatest contribution to local Basque cuisine. As he remembers, not a single restaurant in the western U.S. served *croquetas* when the Oñati opened its doors. But he couldn't remember a single restaurant in the Basque Country that didn't serve them. Jesus also introduced *solomo*, a marinated pork loin that is sliced, grilled and served with roasted red peppers or *pimientos*. Certain essential Basque foods were very difficult to find in Boise. Leeks were nearly unknown to local food



Jon C. Hodgson - BasquePhotos.com

Dan Ansotegui (above) founded the Basque Market. Owned by Tara and Tony Eiguren since 2006, the market imports cheeses and meats. Bar Gernika, founded in 1991, was Ansotegui's first venture on Grove Street.

150 becoming basque

Allan Ansell



Epi's sautés Spanish shrimp in butter, lemon and garlic.

distributors. Pimientos were so expensive that it became difficult to serve them as often as needed. The Atlantic hake, called *merluza* in Spanish and *lebatza* in Basque, was very difficult to replace with the types of fish found in Boise. After two years in downtown Boise, the restaurant moved to the Ranch Club in Garden City. It closed in 2000 when Jesus returned to the Basque Country to open a new restaurant in his home town of Oñati.

Cod Fish ala Romana

2 lbs. fresh or frozen cod fish fillets
Salt
1 cup flour
3 eggs beat
½ cup vegetable or olive oil
5 tbsp. butter
Lemon zest from ½ lemon
Juice from ½ lemon

Slice the cod at a 45° angle in 4 oz. servings (about 8 slices). Heat the oil at a medium/low heat in a skillet. Salt the fillets. Dredge each fillet in the flour then coat with the egg. When oil is hot, gently slide the fillets into the oil. It is vital that the oil is not too hot, around 325°. The cod should cook more like a simmer than a frying. Carefully turn the fillets with a fork so as not to break the coating. Do not overcook the fish. In a double boiler, melt the butter, add the lemon zest and lemon juice. Again, the butter should not be heated too much or it will separate. Drizzle the butter-lemon combination over the fish and serve.

Serves 6–8 people.

—Jesus Alcelay

Basque food in southwestern Idaho has been on a journey for the last 100 years. Its cooks have adapted, and yet they have not abandoned the lessons of their ancestors. The result is a cuisine steeped in tradition but suited to modern tastes. Today, the Boise area includes four establishments that serve Basque fare—Leku Ona, Epi's Basque Restaurant, the Basque Market and the Bar Gernika Basque Pub and Eatery.

Jose Maria Artiach, born and raised in the Basque Country, came to the U.S. to work as a shepherd. He founded Leku Ona (Basque for "good place") in December 2005, for a couple of reasons. One, he says, was "because of my love of Basque culture," and the second was "the opportunity downtown to have a full-service Basque restaurant and bar on the corner

Debbie Geraghty



of the Basque Block.” The establishment also has an adjoining five-room boutique hotel, so in a way returning to the early *ostatua* (boarding house) tradition. The menu features some familiar American food items, but his restaurant illustrates the contrast between Basque-American cuisine and that of the European homeland. Generally, the Basque-American version derived from the boarding house context, which made use of readily available foodstuffs. Also, because of the involvement in the sheep industry for most early Basques, there is the marked emphasis on lamb items, at least in the Western states. Meanwhile, European Basque cuisine also has adapted to new conditions and influences, and one of the most significant recent transformations is the growing notoriety of what has been termed in Europe the “new Basque cuisine.” Leku Ona makes it a point to serve both Basque-American and European-Basque menu items prepared by Basque chefs.

The other three establishments—Epi’s, Bar Gernika and the Basque Market—can trace their lineage directly to Epi Inchausti’s boarding house cui-

sine in Hailey. Raised on food inspired by her recipes of two generations ago, Epi's grandchildren have carried on her culinary traditions. Dan Ansotegui, Epi's grandson, decided while spending the 1978–79 school year in the town of Oñati that he wanted to open a Basque bar and restaurant when he returned to Boise. Dan finished his degree in elementary education and taught for five years. Subsequent trips to the Basque County just reinforced his dream. Finally, he left teaching to work full time in the restaurant business. In June 1991, Dan's dream came to fruition when he opened Bar Gernika, named for the town of Gernika (Guernica in Spanish),

where many of his relatives lived. The restaurant and menu evolved over the 16 years that Dan ran the restaurant. He sold Bar Gernika to one of his long-time employees, Jeff May, in 2007, and it is still going strong today.

Dan also opened the Basque Market in 2000. Located on the Basque Block, it began as an import market with an auxiliary kitchen to make soups, croquetas and other dishes for Bar Gernika. It quickly became a popular caterer for Basque meals and Spanish paellas, as well as a deli and restaurant. Basque cooking classes are also held there. It is now owned by Tony and Tara Eiguren.



Benedicto "Benny" Goitiandia learned sausage making at Gem Meats in Boise. Opposite: sweet red peppers hang from rafters at Benny's home near Kuna.



Making *mortzilla*, a blood sausage, has become an annual tradition in Boise.

Gernika's Basque Rice Pudding

- 2 qts. whole milk
- 1 ½ cups medium grain rice
(Spanish, Japanese and Cal Rose rices work well)
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2 cups sugar

Add the milk, cinnamon sticks and rice to a thick-bottomed soup pot and heat to a medium heat. Stir often, about every two to three minutes using a wooden spoon. After about 20 minutes, the rice will start to come to a rolling boil. The boil should remain gentle or the milk will scald. After 45 minutes from the start, add the sugar. Continue cooking another 20-25 minutes until the bubbles begin to form and break

or look like those boiling mud pits from an old caveman movie. Remove from heat and ladle into individual serving bowls. Sprinkle with cinnamon powder and cover with plastic wrap. Serve cold or if you like, serve while still warm. Approximately 20 servings.

—Dan Ansotegui

Epi's legacy remains strong in a Meridian restaurant that bears her name. Granddaughter Christine Ansotegui had a drive similar to that of her brother, Dan. Chris, known by many as Kiki, spoke a great deal with her sister, Gina, about the idea. Gina catered Basque food for several years and felt like the restaurant was a natural fit. In late 1998, they opened a small home-turned-restaurant in downtown Meridian. Chris said her motivating factor to always make sure customers leave her restaurant with the same feeling that diners once had when leaving Grandma Epi's little house on Bullion Street in Hailey. Chris remembered dinner as a time when everyone could come together to share the events of each another's day. She wanted Epi's to provide that type of atmosphere for her clients.

When the early Basque immigrants first came to the United States in the early 1900s, they brought a type of food that was distinctly Basque. The recipes were not complex, but it took a lifetime to really get them right. So, when young Basques come over today, the American-Basque food often takes them by surprise. They find themselves tasting many of the same flavors they heard about being cooked in their great-grandmother's house. Basque cooking in America has taken the route that we sometimes see among displaced cultures. The cooking in many of the Basque dinner houses here is much the same as it was in the Basque Country over a century ago. The food in the Basque areas of Spain and France has evolved into an elegant cuisine that can be served side by side with the best in Europe. Basque chefs are renowned in Europe as some of the most creative and inspired in the world. But if you ask them where the roots for their cooking began, they'll all talk about the food they had around their grandmother's table. From the farms of the Old Country to the boarding houses of the West to the modern Basque restaurants of today—grandmother's table is where it all started.

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Txardio is the Basque name for this chapter's author, who remains involved in the Basque community through music and food.