

A fisherman's salad with a Catalan twist

Salted cod, canned tuna, anchovies, escarole and romesco sauce rendezvous at the Xató

Every January in the coastal town of Vilanova i la Geltrú, about halfway between Barcelona and Tarragona, six or seven thousand local citizens and their guests crowd into the town square to take part in a *xatonada popular* - a food-filled festival built around the rather simple, rather delicious salad called *Xató*.

Xató - the name is pronounced almost exactly like the French word *château* - is an invention of Vilanova i la Geltrú. [...] It is a popular salad in Catalonia today - to the point that Barcelona restaurant critic Carmen Casas has called it "the most important salad of our [i.e., Catalan] cuisine." It was apparently a fisherman's dish originally, and purists say it should be made with slightly wilted escarole because escarole that had been out on a fishing boat all day

would surely have wilted. In some towns, *Xató* is invariably served with a wedge of room-temperature *truita* or omelet on the side - usually a serious one, filled with sausage or ham or at least white beans - and indeed this combination makes a delightful light lunch or supper. *Xató* is traditionally a dish consumed on *Dijous Gras* or "fat Thursday," as well - a pre-Lenten holiday resembling our [America's] (and France's) Mardi Gras, but with a five-day head start.

TO SERVE 4

1/2 cup Tarragona-style Romesco sauce

Mild extra-virgin olive oil
1 head escarole or salad bowl lettuce, rinsed and dried

1/2 pound salt cod, desalted, skinned, boned, and finely shredded
4 ounces good-quality canned tuna, crumbled salt
8 anchovy filets, soaked in water for 1 hour and patted dry

Put the *romesco* sauce in the bottom of a large salad bowl, then thin with 2-3 tablespoons olive oil, mixing together well with a fork or small whisk.

Tear the escarole leaves into large pieces, then toss them briefly in *ro-*



Often served with an omelet, *Xató* is traditionally consumed on *Dijous Gras*, the Thursday before Lent. / Juanpe Rodríguez

mesco sauce with the salt cod and tuna. Salt to taste if necessary. Divide the salad among four plates, and crisscross two anchovy filets on top of each.

Romesco (Tarragona-style)

TO MAKE 1-1.25 CUPS

3 dried ancho peppers soaked in warm water for 1 hour, seeded and minced

Mild extra-virgin olive oil
2 tomatoes

6 cloves garlic, minced
24 almonds, blanched and roasted
24 hazelnuts, roasted
2 sprigs parsley, minced
2 slices fried bread
2 teaspoons good-quality red wine vinegar and salt

Preheat the oven to 350 [F, 175 C]. Sauté the fresh and dried peppers briefly in a small amount of oil. Bake the tomatoes in a lightly oiled baking dish for 10 minutes; then remove and

cool. With a mortar and pestle (preferably) or in a food processor or spice mill, make a thick paste of the garlic and sautéed peppers. Work the nuts, parsley, and fried bread into a mixture, mixing well. Carefully peel and seed the tomatoes, and coarsely chop. Work the tomatoes into the mixture, then add vinegar and 2-3 tablespoons of oil and salt to taste. Mixture should be thickly liquid. (Taken from *Catalan Cuisine* by Colman Andrews.)

Boqueria's greens, oranges and reds are a deliciously artistic display

M. MIRALLES

Saturday in the centre. Shall we go see an art exhibit? Or maybe some sort of live performance, a festival of fruits, vegetables and other natural elements. It'll also have to be an historical tour. Let's go to the Boqueria, surely the most characteristic of the network - more than 40 markets in Barcelona. A gust of wind, a breath of fresh air coming from the main entrance on the Rambla. The square, dating back to 1836, was not covered until 1914. An open plaza surrounded by Ionic columns. It takes a while to get to know the Boqueria. In the entryway there are the fruits and vegetable stands, candies, delicacies and an historic bar called el Pinotxo. More than a bar, it's worth talking to the owner. A book has been written about it: *Pinotxo. La vida i la cuina a la Boqueria* ("Pinotxo. The life and cuisine of the Boqueria.") Everything is displayed so



Mercat de Sant Josep-la Boqueria is on the Rambla, number 89 / ANDREU PUIG

neatly, a shock to the eye already accustomed to somewhat chaotic nearby streets. You can smell strawberries, figs and mint. And the col-

ours, shades of green, orange and red. There's a constant murmur: "A com són?", "How much?" and "Deixa-m'ho arregladet," give me discount.

Let's do lunch: Elisabets, Barcelona



A bargain menú for your buck

There are few menus del día that offer better value than Elisabets, the bar-restaurant founded in 1962 on the street of the same name in the old part of Barcelona. For winter warming its estofado de lentejas (lentil stew) and hígado a la plancha (fried liver) is a treat, while in spring and summer they lighten up with habitas con jamón (broad beans with ham), salads, sardines and swordfish. The tables are old-style wrought iron and marble and the decor is bakelite radios. The service is fast and friendly and at 7.60 euros for three courses and drink, though coffee is not included, it is hard to beat.

Elisabets, Carrer Elisabets, 2-4, 08001 Bcn. Tel: 93 317 5826