

SEPTEMBER REFLECTIONS: Twenty-three years ago in September was our first visit to Spain and Portugal. A mad exploration of southern Iberia, we sought out Hemingway haunts, tapas bars specializing in pickles and hanging *jamon*s, and historic sites. We fell instantly in love with the food, the wine and the culture.

Twenty-one years ago on September 3, 1987, Sharon and I were married. At our wedding we served Spanish tapas and Muga Rioja, catered by *La Gaviota*, a Seattle Spanish restaurant ahead of its time.

Fourteen years ago on September 1, 1995, I retired from the US Customs Service to open The Spanish Table. Seven years ago in September 2001, we gambled and opened our second location in Berkeley, California. Now we have four stores in three states. It has not been easy, small business never is, but it has been an adventure and we want to thank all our customers who have made it possible to survive and to prosper. ¡Gracias! Obrigado!

FAVORITES: In America's constant quest for the new, some quality older products can end up in the back seat. While a few of our items are no longer available or are now wildly expensive due to the soaring Euro, a number of our old favorites are still around:

VIÑA TONDONIA: There is no winery more traditional by intent than Bodegas Lopez de Heredia. Established in 1877, their historic Gran Reservas are only produced in exceptional years with hand selected grapes. The red wines are barrel aged for 8 years and then further aged in the bottle for another 8 years. The white Gran Reserva is barrel aged for 4 years and then receives additional bottle aging. The corks are sealed with wax to prevent any air infiltration. Since its founding, the family has preserved small stocks of the 22 most memorable vintages in the bodega's history and we just received a selection going back to the 1968 vintage.

MUGA: There have been two great vintages in Rioja this millennium: 2001 & 2004. We are lucky enough to have the last of the 2004 Muga Reserva in stock (\$29.99).

REMELLURI: When we opened The Spanish Table, we bought 4 wooden cases of Remelluri and stacked them up in a store that was otherwise quite Spartan. Remelluri still comes in wooden boxes and we have a few bottles of the memorable 2001 vintage still available (\$34.99). The distributor has moved on to the 2003 vintage.

MARTINSANCHO: The New York Times has suddenly discovered the white wines of the Rueda region. Steve and Almudena who founded Seattle's Classical Wines have always known about Rueda and we have stocked this wine since the day we opened.

COLHEITA TAWNY PORTS: When we opened The Spanish Table, Todd Cromwell was personally taking orders for tawny ports and also delivering them. Using this hands-on technique, he single-handedly pioneered the introduction of *Colheita Portos* (single vintage tawnies, rather than blends) into the Seattle market. The 1995 Rocha Colheita, made from grapes being picked the day The Spanish Table opened is a good introduction to *Colheitas* at \$35.00.

BOMBA RICE: When we read that the chefs of Barcelona had suddenly discovered *bomba*, we knew we had to import some. Valencian paella rice is a hybrid. Bomba is one of its two parents. Hard to grow and subject to disease, it is cultivated by small farmers in isolated paddies. But it absorbs more broth and results in a more flavorful paella.

FIDEÓ: No one knew what we were talking about when we first wrote about *fideuá* back in our old days of printed and mailed newsletters. Fideuá is made with noodles instead of rice and cooked in a paella pan. The small noodles are boiled in rich broth and served with *ali oli*, garlic mayonnaise. While paella is often most interesting when it contains a multitude of ingredients, I prefer a simple fideuá: a big can of clam juice, a healthy pinch of saffron, a heaping spoonful of *Pimetón de la Vera*, the chopped fillets of an inexpensive white fish and some baby shrimp meat. That's it. Inhale the aromas of this dish and then dive in.

LEMON STUFFED OLIVES: One day we received a sample of lemon stuffed olives from Spain and the offer to bottle them under **The Spanish Table's** own label. The buttery, piquant flavor hooked us immediately. But to start, we had to buy a whole pallet and then two pallets when we reordered to offset the packing costs. We only had one store at the time, and knowing it was a little crazy, we said yes. Many customers are now just as addicted to them as we are and today two pallets only last a few months.

PEBRELLA: It was cookbook author Paula Wolfert who asked us if we could get *pebrella*. She had discovered it while visiting the market in Valencia. An obscure and intensely flavored member of the thyme family, it is native to Alicante. This time of year, we sprinkle it over farmer's market salads, bricks of feta cheese and chops besides adding a pinch to savory sauces and gravies.

BEVIA COARSE SEA SALT: Txori and The Harvest Vine restaurants buy cases of this Spanish sea salt from us. They sprinkle it over everything from heirloom tomatoes to octopus to padrón peppers. If you don't have one of these big plastic shakers in your kitchen, you should.