

# Grab Your Fork

because life is one long buffet table



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2009

## Cooking Modern Mexican at VictorsFood

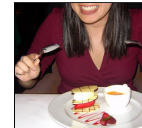


*Victor Pisapia with an ancho chilli*

**Mention Mexican food to an Australian**, and most of us will immediately think of corn chips, sour cream and cheese.

It's no wonder that Mexican cuisine tends to get a bad rap. In fact, much of what is labelled here as "Mexican", is more Tex-Mex - an American interpretation of Mexican cuisine that spread from Texas and other states in the southwest. Nachos and tacos are as Mexican as, say, pineapple fried rice and sweet and sour pork are Chinese.

**Victor Pisapia** is a huge fan of Mexican cuisine. When he moved to Australia from the United States, he opened the hugely successfully Rattlesnake Grill. Today he's leading us in a Modern Mexican cooking class through his company VictorsFood.



**GRAB YOUR FORK** is Helen's gastronomic journey around Sydney and abroad.

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- > [Nose-to-tail bbq](#) with Fergus Henderson

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Sydney North
Sydney East..
Sydney Inner West..



*Dried ancho chillies*

It's easy to dismiss chillies as simply being hot, Victor tells us, but individual chillies have unique flavours and nuances. We try slivers of dried **ancho chilli** which is almost fruity in flavour. **Chipotle** chilli is smokey, reminding me of smoked paprika. The chipotle is simply a jalapeno chilli that has been smoked.



*Achiote paste*

Achiote is an interesting paste made from ground annatto seeds from the annatto fruit. Its intense red colour meant it was often used by native American Indians as body paint, especially the lips, giving rise to its nickname "the lipstick tree". The paste saves much work involved in grinding the seeds, and includes vinegar, salt, garlic and other spices. It's used primarily for rubbing onto pork, but can also be used in stews or rice, and is used in Latin American, Jamaican and Filipino dishes.

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*Plantain bananas and jicama amongst limes, chillies and red onions*

**Plantain bananas** are a staple in Mexican cuisine, a starchier cousin to Cavendish bananas, that are best sliced and deep-fried. They have more of a potato or sweet potato texture without the sweetness.

**Jicama** looks like a potato in the shape of a giant garlic bulb. It tastes much like a cross between a potato and a nashi pear, not quite as sweet or juicy as the nashi fruit. The vegetable is popular in Asian cuisine, used in Malaysian *popiah* fresh spring rolls, and also in several Vietnamese dishes.



*Smoked salmon quesadillas ready for pan-frying*

Whilst we chatted, Victor prepared **smoked salmon quesadillas** for us to snack on. These, he said, were perfect for dinner parties as they can be prepared in advance and then reheated when guests arrive.

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### Latest Comments

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### BloggerHacks

### Posts by Month

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### Useful References

[Top 10 Sydney Eats for Tourists](#)  
[10 Tips on How to Market Your Restaurant](#)

[Complete List of Sydney Food Blogs](#)

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### Sydney Event Calendar

2009 DIARY DATES

SAT 03 OCT: [Good Living Growers' Market, Pyrmont](#)





*Smoked salmon quesadillas with lime sour cream*

## Smoked salmon quesadillas with lime sour cream

5 x 8-10 inch flour tortillas  
10 slices of smoked salmon  
125g cream cheese, softened  
1 tablespoon fresh dill, chopped  
1/2 medium red onion, finely diced  
salt and pepper  
200g lite sour cream  
1 lime, juiced  
2 limes cut into wedges  
capers and dill (optional garnish)

Combine the cream cheese with the dill, red onion, salt and pepper.

Spread the cream cheese mixture thinly (don't use too much) on a tortilla. Lay two slices of smoked salmon on one half, then fold over to make a semi-circle and press lightly to flatten. Repeat for each tortilla.

Place two quesadillas on a pre-heated non-oiled fry pan or beneath a low-med grill. Grill for 1 minute on each side or until lightly golden. Watch them closely as they will brown quickly.

Cut the quesadillas into wedges. Top with the combined lime juice and sour cream (pour into a squeeze bottle for artistic freedom). Add fresh lime wedges, capers and a sprig of dill for an optional garnish.

### REGULAR OUTDOOR MARKETS

FIRST SAT: [Good Living Growers Market, Pyrmont](#)

SECOND SAT: [Castle Hill Farmers Market](#)

THIRD SAT: [Northside Produce Market](#)

FOURTH SUN: [Boulevard Market, Olympic Pk](#)

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**men's style**



*Making the red chilli sauce with ancho chillies, mulato chillies, chipotle chillies, tomato, garlic and coriander*

And then we were onto the chopping boards. It was an intimate class of six who were delegated to charrilling capsicums and tomatoes, de-seeding chillies, slicing, dicing and more. The process of making real chilli sauce from dried chillies was particularly intriguing. There was quite a process involved but the resulting sauce was phenomenal in flavour, layered with sweetness and smokiness and only a subtle smouldering heat.



*The blended red chilli sauce*



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*Barbecuing the pork marinated in achiote*



*Slicing the cooked achiote barbecue pork*



*Sauteeing prawns with green onion*





*After adding the tequila to the prawns, flambe to burn off the alcohol*



*Transferring the cooked prawns to a bowl*



*The table setting for lunch*

Many hands make light work, and within two hours, we were sitting down to a Mexican spread we'd all helped prepare.



*Tequila prawns  
with roasted yellow capsicum sauce and pico de gallo*

**Tequila prawns** was the biggest hit of the day. We'd all helped to peel the prawns, Victor showing us **how to remove the veins with ease**: simply twist the head 90 degrees and then grasp the vein and tug gently so the whole vein is pulled out in one piece. It works a treat!

The roasted yellow capsicum sauce was mellow and sweet, a perfect pairing with the fresh prawns, livened by the pico de gallo of diced onion, tomato, coriander and lime.



*Rocket, jicama and orange salad with cayenne lime dressing*

The **rocket, jicama and orange salad** was fresh, light and perfect for summer. The crisp batons of jicama went so well with the sweet orange segments and peppery rocket.





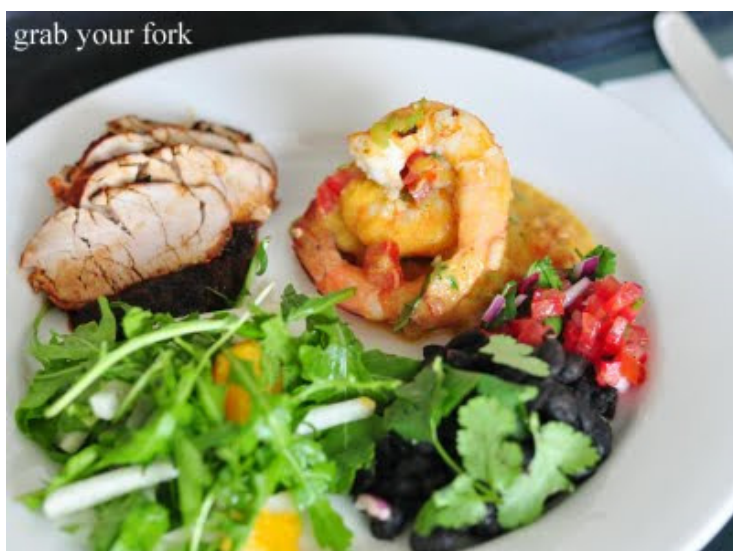
*Achiote barbecue pork with red chilli sauce*

**Achiote barbecue pork** was tender but the star for me was the red chilli sauce, a deep chocolate brown sauce that was so smoky and aromatic. I could eat this sauce on its own rice, it was so good.



*Black bean ragout*

I also loved the **black bean ragout**, the beans tender but textured. I liked the mouthfeel of these beans, a little starchy and strangely satisfying.



### *My lunch plate*

Fresh, flavoursome and exciting, I'm tempted to recreate some of these dishes for a dinner party this summer!

*Grab Your Fork attended the Modern Mexican cooking class as a guest of [VictorsFood](#).*

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posted by Helen (Grab Your Fork) on [10/18/2009 01:08:00 AM](#) 

## 1 Tip of a flat belly :

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### 5 Comments:

At [10/18/2009 9:11 AM](#),  [The Ninja](#) said...

And the Ninja snakes the first comment!

That was highly informative, I've never thought that much about Mexican food before (probably because of its lack of presence here in Australia). The dishes you guys cooked up look mouthwateringly sizzling but I'm still full from a night at sakana-ya so I'll probably come back and drool a bit later in the day.

At [10/18/2009 9:34 AM](#),  Anonymous said...

Honestly, to call the Mexican food in Australia "Tex-Mex" is an insult to Tex-Mex. Most of it doesn't bear any resemblance to either traditional Mexican cuisine or Tex-Mex. :)

At [10/18/2009 10:24 AM](#),  [Miss Dissent](#) said...

This was really interesting, the chili sauce looks amazing! Have you been to Agave on Crown Street to dine yet? Oh and have you seen this place where you can buy many of the ingredients for Mexican cuisine?  
<http://www.fireworksfoods.com.au/>

At [10/18/2009 10:43 AM](#),  [chocolatesuze](#) said...

mmm the quesadillas sound awesome and oh how i miss prawns!

At [10/18/2009 11:42 AM](#),  Anonymous said...

This sounds like a great experience. I loved the Mexican food when I visited many years ago, and have craved it since. Yes, most of the representations of 'Mexican' in Australia have been very sad. So it was a joy to discover Rattlesnake Grill in the late 90's, then disaster when they closed. I'm excited to find out that Victor is back on the scene and doing cooking classes! On my way there now to book a class!

## Post a Comment

**Did you enjoy this post? Then add your comment!** I'd love to hear your thoughts, and talking to myself is no fun at all :)

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