

La Huella en revista *Bon Appétit*

- La prestigiosa revista norteamericana *Bon Appétit* le dedicó diez páginas a “La Huella”, incluyendo una gran cobertura fotográfica y la publicación de los textos de siete recetas del libro. Además, publicaron la tapa del libro y testimonios del cocinero Alejandro Morales.






THE RESTAURANT

The best beachside restaurant on the planet isn't in St. Tropez or on the Amalfi Coast. It's in a tiny town in Uruguay.

**AT THE END OF
THE WORLD**



Hunter Lewis travels to
La Huella to master the fine art
of the South American grill



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC WOLFINGER



You can smell the fire-roasted meat long before you hear the tropicalia music

or spot the chimneys jutting from the thatched roof. And when the restaurant finally does emerge from the sand dunes of Playa Brava to José Ignacio, Uruguay, it looks like a beherman pirate ship run aground—a warren of dining rooms, decks, and open-air bars made of wood and canvas. Inside, a hulking iron grill roasts a glow onto sun-kissed South American and European families, who toast the full moon and their good fortune with key capisucas. Servers glide among them in Chuck Taylors, whisking wooden platters of grilled steaks, sauced shrimp, and roasted vegetables to the tables. Everything is smooth. Everything is right. Everyone is happy.

Welcome to La Barilla, the most idyllic seaside restaurant in the world. “We’re a paradise, a single beach restaurant with simple food,” says Alejandro Morales, the chef at La Barilla. Except it’s not. During January, the high season in North America, Morales and his crew of 60 cooks serve up to 1,800 covers a day. How many single beach restaurants maintain their own farm program, partner with organic farms to grow their vegetables, and have a splashy cocktail bar on next January? Where else would you spot a beautiful woman in a bikini and savoring parking into a skillet of wood-roasted provolone while her kids play in the sand?

The owners of La Barilla (pronounced La WAI-shuh)—Martin Pittaluga, Gustavo Barbero, and Guzmán Artagoitia—opened the restaurant 11 years ago. The idea was to lend vacationing South Americans during the summer and the people of José Ignacio year-round. Soon after, boutique hotels, sports cars, and fashionable cognoscenti began to descend on the sleepy fishing village, which is a jolt of land six streets by seven streets surrounded on three sides by the Atlantic Ocean. Over the years, the trio has brought their experience at European and South American restaurants to bear, cultivating an ecosystem that’s as much a way of life as it is a place for good food and drink.

During the off-season, the team travels abroad for ideas to bring back to the motherland. Morales’s mastery of *asado*—the South American tradition of cooking meat over open fire—is homegrown, but he learned to prepare paella in Spain and shellfish pastas in Italy. La Barilla’s bread •



Chef Alejandro Morales works the grill.

Roasted Provolone

KEYWORD Try an aged provolone for a tangier version of this simple, tasty appetizer. (Deli style works, too.)

- 1 1/2"-thick slice provolone (3–6 oz.)
- Pinch of dried oregano
- 4 toasted walnuts, coarsely chopped
- Grilled toast

Preheat broiler to high. Put cheese in a 3" x 4" ovenproof skillet. Broil cheese until browned and bubbling, 5–10 minutes. Transfer hot skillet to a plate lined with a paper or kitchen towel. Season with oregano, garnish with walnuts. Serve hot with toast.

Plancha-Style Shrimp

KEYWORD Cooking plancha style on a ripping-hot cast-iron griddle or skillet quickly sears tender shellfish like shrimp, scallops, or baby squid, leaving a beautiful golden-brown crust. Before you unleash the griddle, until it's smoking, prep all of your ingredients. Be ready for a little sizzle (it takes a minute). This dish can also be made on the grill.

- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 4 garlic cloves
- 24 large shrimp (about 1 1/2 lb.), middle sections peeled; heads and tails left intact, if desired
- 1 medium red onion, thinly sliced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 Tbsp. chopped flat-leaf parsley
- Lemon wedges

Cook oil and garlic in a small sautépan over low heat until garlic is soft but not yet golden, about 10 minutes. Remove pan from heat and let cool. Strain garlic oil through a fine-mesh sieve into a small bowl; set aside.

Place shrimp and onion in separate medium bowls; season with salt and pepper. Heat a cast-iron griddle over high heat until smoking. Arrange shrimp on one half of griddle in a single layer and onion on the other half. Alternatively, using a cast-iron skillet, cook shrimp first, then onion (don't overcrowd the pan or the shrimp will steam instead of sear). Cook until shrimp are golden brown, about 1 minute. Turn shrimp and onion; drizzle with some garlic oil, and cook until shrimp are cooked through, about 1 minute longer. (Continued on page 102)

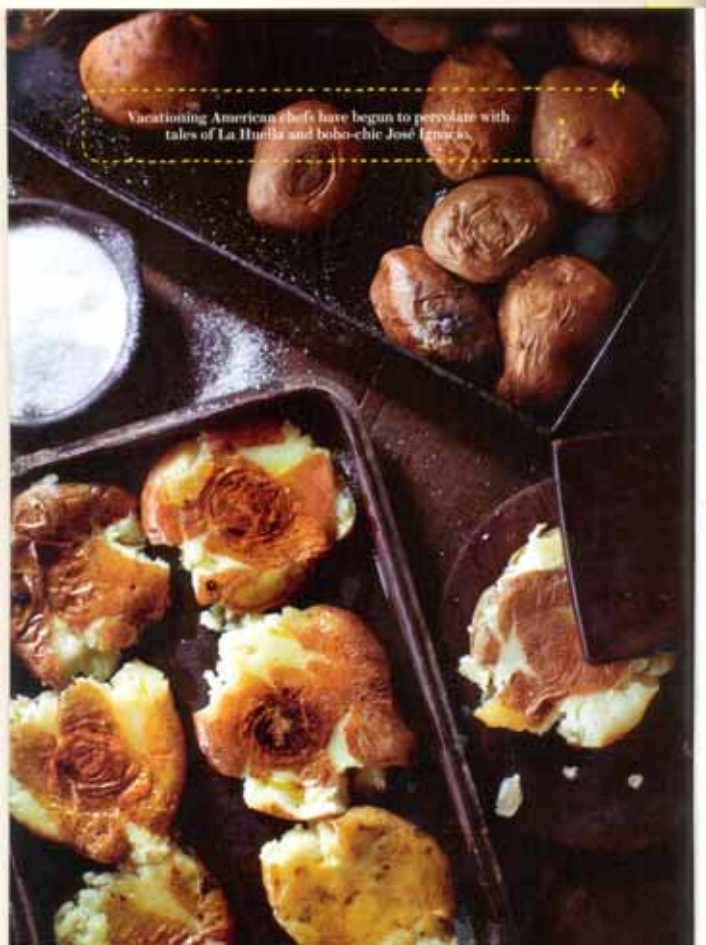


Oregano-Chile Chimichurri

KEYWORD Green Chile

For the most garbly sauce, use a hot green chile. Add hot sauce, if desired. Combine 1/2 cup dried oregano and 1/2 cup crushed red pepper flakes in a small bowl. Add 1 cup white wine and massage mixture with your hands. Let stand until oregano and pepper flakes are softened and water is absorbed, about 15 minutes. Add 1 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley, 4 minced garlic cloves, and 1 tsp. kosher salt. Stir in 1/2 cup hot sauce (if using) or sweetener oil. For stored or at least 1 hour or chill for up to 2 days to soften those peppers. Before using, to taste with red wine vinegar and rose garlic, salt, or oil, if desired.





Vacationing American chefs have begun to percolate with tales of La Huella and bobo-chic José Ignacio.



Andrés Barrantes (left) working with pastry chef José Ignacio in the kitchen of the restaurant in San Francisco. The fish is being cooked on the grill. (Right) A fish being cooked on the grill. (Photo: [unreadable])

belonging to Don Tartar Bakery in San Francisco, and the idea for the organic farm came from Sara Platten.

In turn, this culinary cross-pollination is now drawing chefs from across the globe. Vacationing American chefs looking for that hard back, mountain-bush-when-the-bullies-bee-essays-as-Andy-Murphy's-brother-kind-of-the-here-began-to-percolate with tales of La Huella and bobo-chic José Ignacio. "Everything at La Huella was magic, magic, magic," says French chef Morde, who took time from his burgeoning Providence Aquatics empire in New York City to drop in to José Ignacio earlier this year. Fulfillment and his business partner, Franck Castaneda, globe-trot to research ideas for their restaurants. "His kitchen's more everything at that level so that food," he says. "They're no place like La Huella in the world."

I FOLLOWED THE WOODS south in early March, arriving during Uruguay's Indian summer. At José Ignacio's food school, I had this course for a session to learn more about the woods. Not to surprise it, but the speaks to me. I was lightheaded in the culture of smoke in the barbecue joint back home in North Carolina. As a restaurant cook, I traversed the cycle of fire to wood-burning grills and ovens. And so I was at La Huella to become more fluent in the language of flames and embers.

A Uruguayan cousin has cooked beyond the scope of food that ignites once seasoned over a fire. And the backyard portable grill has replaced the open fires of the plains. Yet the woods—which refers to both the meat and the act of grilling—remains part of the fabric of Uruguay's culture, and meat is the stuff of life. "We are grivers since we are born," Mordey tells me.

In six days—in restaurants and backwoods, on the beach, and at a luxury smok in a new neighborhood—I ate nearly a quarter of my weight in succulent grilled chicken, blood sausage, sweetbread, kidneys, short ribs, skirt steaks, ramp steaks, smoking pig, pork flank steak, and roast beef. Meat is always served in the generous-portioned of the smoke sausage, ribs, steaks, ribs, and pork loin. Most of it was delicious, if a bit tough and gummy to chew, and cooked to a chewy soft-down, then American art word in. It is in the context of this food, however, that you must to understand the meaning powers of why Uruguay and the intense grape Tannin.

The days and meals in José Ignacio wrapped in a reverent of

time smoke. I entered a back yard woods behind the home of La Huella's Gustavo Barrantes. His back grill is built stone high to a steel can look into the fire as you level and food wood into an elevated iron box called a egg. As the fire burns, coals drop to the grill's base, where they're radiated under the iron grill grate. Tonight, Mordey and Barrantes roast a whole section of short ribs, cubed steaks, marinating the grain at an angle so the thicker ends are closer to the fire. Pulverize in the fire. The meat remains slowly above the coals while also taking on direct heat from the fire in the egg. In the meantime, there's plenty of whiskey and red wine, and Barrantes sets out lounge with slow heat the strong ends of the food. Finally, when the hour is just medium well, we eat it, mushroom, along with smoked roasted potatoes whisked on the grill.

The next day, the La Huella team take me to the private club that they opened last year. La Carolina is a stretch of sea and sky in a spot of sand isolated from the mainland by a tall lagoon. This time, Mordey plays promoter in a fourth-to-longer you could paroled pork a Cherry Tobacco in it. He spies a whole organic lamb over a grill grate a foot off the floor of the fourth, then takes coals steady and around the grate. We drink yerba mate tea, wine, and talk for the four hours it takes the meat of the lamb to begin to grill up from the bone. The yellow embers—along with salt, pepper, and lime—transfer from the lamb into a smoky, indigo-brown barbecue that reads any whole hog I've had.

As good as the meat may be, the wood at La Huella is even better. Mordey backs smoky tradition by using generational, thick, meaty, white flake fish, and leaving on the scales. When his coals have died down to a perfect medium, Mordey brushes the butter-fillet fish with melted butter and dresses it with salt and pepper. Then he wets it, flush into down, a steam on his skin above the embers. Eventually he flips it and lets it finish cooking in its own juices. Back home, I saw cheese! Mordey's beach-side pasture, banking extra fuel off to the side of my Weber to take under thick slices of striped bass.

In bringing such lessons to the table, I've realized that the woods, like the site at La Huella, is not magic. It's born of trial and error by experience and hard work. First you must establish a fire and a foundation of coals. If you find it and tend it, the fire will burn bright and hot. And if you build it on the beach, they will definitely come. ■

