



Axoa d'Espelette (Basque Veal Stew)

I discovered this classic Basque dish when I visited the town of Espelette in southwestern France, famous for its mild dark red chillies drying under the eaves of the whitewashed houses. I brought home jars of the ground piment d'Espelette which flavours this and so many other Basque dishes, but you can buy it online from Herbie's Spices or substitute sweet paprika with a pinch of cayenne pepper. Axoa (pronounced at-cho-a) is a pepper stew; the recipe varies from cook to cook but red capsicum, pale green bullhorn chillies, ground dried Espelette chillies and onion are essential. It's traditionally made with veal, sometimes minced but I prefer the texture of a hand-cut dice, and has a touch of heat but isn't spicy hot; extra piment is always served alongside for diners to add as they like. Tempranillo, traditional to the Spanish Basque region of Álava is a great match with this dish, I enjoyed Margan Wine's tempranillo graciano shiraz from the Hunter Valley with it.

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1kg veal shoulder, diced
- 1 large white onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- Salt flakes, to taste
- 2 large red capsicums, diced
- 6 pale green bullhorn chillies, diced
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 2 teaspoons thyme leaves
- ½ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 teaspoons ground Piment d'Espelette, plus extra for serving
- ½ cup dry white wine
- ½ cup water, more or less, to cover
- Steamed potatoes, for serving

METHOD

1. Heat half the oil in a large saucepan over high heat.
2. Working in batches depending on the size of your pan, add meat in a single layer and cook for a few minutes, until just coloured all over. Remove from pan and set aside.
3. Add remaining oil, onion, garlic and a good pinch of salt and cook, covered, over medium heat for a few minutes, until starting to soften.
4. Add capsicum, peppers and a little more salt and cook, covered, for about 10 minutes, stirring often, until just starting to colour.
5. Return meat to pan, add bay leaves, thyme, half the parsley and half the Piment d'Espelette.
6. Add wine, increase heat to high, stir well to remove any bits stuck to the bottom of the pan and boil for a couple of minutes.
7. Add enough water to just cover the meat, return to the boil, reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for about 20 minutes.
8. Uncover and simmer for a further 20 minutes or so, until meat is tender.
9. Increase heat to medium and boil for 5-10 minutes, until enough liquid has evaporated to give a saucy consistency.
10. Taste and add salt, remaining Piment d'Espelette and remaining parsley.
11. Serve with steamed potatoes and extra Piment d'Espelette for sprinkling.