

THE  
VERSAILLES  
RESTAURANT  
COOKBOOK

ANA QUINCOCES & NICOLE VALLS

Foreword by Andy Garcia

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF FLORIDA

*Gainesville · Tallahassee · Tampa · Boca Raton · Pensacola · Orlando · Miami · Jacksonville · Ft. Myers · Sarasota*

# CONTENTS

Foreword by Andy Garcia ix

Introduction:

The History and Family of Versailles 1

Some Basics 000

Appetizers 000

Soups and Stews 000

Egg Dishes and Salads 000

Fish and Seafood 000

Chicken Dishes 000

Pork 000

Beef Dishes 000

Sandwiches 000

Side Dishes and Snacks 000

Desserts 000

Beverages 000

Acknowledgments 000

Glossary 000

Index 000

# FOREWORD

## Versailles: A Place of Solace

The New Oxford Dictionary’s definition of solace is “comfort or consolation in a time of distress or sadness.” Solace is not only a state of mind but can also be a place—a place where one finds comfort, consolation, cheer, support, and relief.

All exile communities will find places of solace wherever they end up. Places that provide this most necessary emotional and spiritual space. Where one can gather with fellow exiles and share a profound love and nostalgia for the country they have left. For those of us in the Cuban exile community in Miami, Versailles is such a place.

Since its inception Versailles has been a gathering place not only to reminisce but also to socialize. Its famous “Ventanita” or small walk-up window serves you perhaps the most famous and strongest Cuban coffee in the world. Versailles continues to host dignitaries, celebrities, and a constant flow of politicians in need of support, as they mingle with the locals. But most important, it is a place where one can immerse oneself in its authentic Cuban culture and vibe.

Its food is exquisite and traditional. The waiters are the real thing, with a joy for life and never without a friendly smile. Its clientele is now of all cultures in need of this experience and great food. And at its heart is that Cuban thing—whether it is the obligatory early morning *café con leche y pan tostado* (coffee with milk and toasted Cuban bread and butter) or an afterhours late-night meal to replenish and reconstitute. For me it is white rice with two fried eggs in extra virgin olive oil, sunny side up with fried bananas and *picadillo*, which is a traditional peasant type of ground meat hash.

Memories have been created there by all of us looking for a little something to ease the pain. The hole in one’s heart that lives in all exiles, who carry with them a deep love for the country left behind. It is like an impossible love. You can love her, but you can’t be with her.

But you can find solace somewhere else, and for many, that place is Versailles.

*Andy Garcia*

*Actor/Director/Producer*

## Basic Tomato-Based Sauce ♦ Sofrito

Sofrito is the foundation of many Cuban dishes. It is also a wonderful condiment, especially with store-bought roast chicken or sautéed mushrooms. This sofrito can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 5 days in a tightly sealed container.

### Makes about 2 cups

¼ cup olive oil  
1 large onion, chopped  
4 garlic cloves, minced  
1 medium green bell pepper, chopped  
1 cup tomato sauce  
1 bay leaf  
¼ cup *vino seco* (dry white cooking wine)  
1 teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon pepper  
½ teaspoon dried oregano leaves  
½ teaspoon ground cumin

♦ Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, and bell pepper, and sauté until the onion is translucent, 5 to 7 minutes. Add the tomato sauce, bay leaf, and *vino seco*, and cook 5 minutes more. Reduce the heat to low, add the salt, pepper, oregano, and cumin, and stir. Cover the pan and let the vegetables simmer for 10 to 15 minutes. Remove and discard the bay leaf.

## Mojo Criollo

½ cup olive oil  
10 to 12 garlic cloves, minced  
1 medium yellow onion, grated  
2 teaspoons salt  
½ teaspoon white pepper  
¾ cup sour orange juice, or a mixture of equal parts lime juice and grapefruit juice

♦ To make the Mojo Criollo, heat the oil in a medium saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the garlic, onion, salt, and pepper and sauté for 10 to 15 minutes. Remove from the heat and add the sour orange juice or the lime/grapefruit juice combination. Set aside to cool to room temperature.

*Note:* The mojo will keep for up to a week, covered and refrigerated.

# APPETIZERS

Our culture loves to *picar* (to graze). Appetizers or starters are rarely served individually at the dinner table but rather are passed around in large platters while family members grab handfuls of the treats, fearing that the plate won't come around a second time. Our appetizer section comprises the most popular “shareable” plates at Versailles. These are the dishes people not only share before their meal but also eat late at night in lieu of a meal. In essence they are Cuban “bar food,” for lack of a better term.

Everyone has a favorite appetizer or snack at Versailles. There is scarcely a time when the waiter arrives at the table to take drink orders (with a green basket of hot buttery bread in hand, mind you) without members of the group starting to call out their favorite starters to share, tapas style. Going to Versailles is often a group activity. Whether you go before or after a function, in your team uniform, or in black tie, Versailles is a must stop to fill the void in your belly that only good Cuban food can satisfy. So whether it's *mariquitas con mojo*—freshly and delicately fried plantain strips with garlic sauce (Cuban ketchup, as we like to call it)—or creamy delectable chicken or ham croquetas, or our popular *yuquitas fritas* with cilantro aioli, you are in for a real treat.

Sometimes patrons come in and order every appetizer on the menu, and then the feeding frenzy begins. Yes, it gets loud sometimes, but that is the wonderful thing about Versailles. Food is made to be shared and enjoyed while exchanging stories and telling the latest Pepito joke (the Cuban equivalent of “little Johnny”). Versailles brings families together, and appetizers are often the precursor to a fabulous meal, which is almost certainly followed by a few shared desserts and then languishing over your cortadito or cafecito.

The recipes here tease your palate but can also satisfy a big appetite. We are not talking about cheese and crackers. These appetizers are hot and flavorful, with a few exceptions that are served cold. There is something for everyone in this chapter. Salty, crunchy, spicy, creamy, tangy—you name it. So, let's get started! These appetizer recipes epitomize the joy of Cuban cuisine and are sure to become favorites.

## Plantain Chips ♦ Mariquitas with Mojo Criollo

Who needs chips and salsa when you can feast on these crispy strips of heaven? Few things can compare to a fresh-from-the-fryer plantain chip dipped in garlic mojo. Eating just one is an absolute impossibility, so make plenty—they go fast!

**Serves** oo

2 or 3 green plantains  
3 cups oil  
sea salt



♦ Heat the oil to 375°F in a large, heavy pot over medium-high heat.

Once the oil is hot, peel a plantain and cut into paper-thin slices, no more than 1/16 of an inch thick. Immediately place the slices into the hot oil and fry the plantains for 3 to 4 minutes, turning them occasionally, until they are crisp but not brown. Transfer the fried plantains to drain on a paper towel-lined plate and sprinkle them generously with salt.

Let the oil return to 375°F before cutting more slices and frying each consecutive batch.

### Mojo Criollo for Mariquitas

10 to 12 garlic cloves, minced  
1 teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon white pepper  
¼ cup grapefruit juice  
¼ cup fresh lime juice  
1 tablespoon white vinegar  
1 bay leaf  
3 tablespoons of water or more to reduce acidity

♦ To make the Mojo Criollo for Mariquitas, combine all the ingredients and mix well. Taste, adding more salt and water as necessary. Allow to sit for 30 minutes to an hour before serving alongside hot mariquitas (plantain chips).

*Note: The mojo will keep for up to a week, covered and refrigerated.*

## Ham, Chicken, or Cod Croquettes ♦ Croquetas de Jamón, Pollo, o Bacalao

Croquetas are probably everyone's favorite Cuban snack food. They are certainly popular at Versailles. Croquetas are fried little bundles of goodness and everyone loves them. They are a little time-consuming to make but well worth the effort. These are great alone, in a sandwich, or with any meal. With so many fillings to choose from, you will never tire of eating them.

Although croquetas are perfectly acceptable at room temperature, they are best right out of the fryer—crispy on the outside, creamy and divine on the inside. These little treats are so flexible; they can be made in large quantities and frozen until ready to fry. So there's no reason why you should have to save these for parties or special occasions.

Serve them with our delightful Ensalada de Pollo.



## Ham Croquettes ♦ Croquetas de Jamón

Makes 25 to 30

3 cups ground sweet deli ham (you can buy it sliced from the deli and pulse it in a food processor until finely ground)  
2 cups whole milk  
1 stick of salted butter  
½ cup all-purpose flour  
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg  
½ teaspoon ground white pepper  
½ teaspoon salt or more to taste  
2 cups ground cracker meal or bread crumbs  
3 eggs beaten  
oil for frying

♦ The base of this recipe is a thick béchamel sauce. In a heavy saucepan, bring the milk to a boil. In a separate large saucepan, melt the butter until it begins to bubble. Whisk in the flour, salt, nutmeg, and pepper. Reduce the heat to low and continue stirring until the flour mixture attains a light golden color. While continuing to whisk, add milk a cup at a time, incorporating each addition completely before adding the next. Once all the milk has been added, bring heat up to medium and bring to a boil. Continue stirring to avoid getting large lumps. Once the béchamel has thickened, add the ground ham and combine well. Set aside and allow the mixture to come to room temperature, then refrigerate for at least 4 hours.

In two separate bowls, place the cracker meal and the beaten eggs. Take about

## Chicken Croquettes

The only difference between the chicken and ham croquettes is that you will be using cooked ground chicken instead of ham. Use a combination of white and dark roasted skinless chicken meat, and pulse it in your food processor until finely ground. In addition, increase the salt by 1 or 1½ teaspoons, since the chicken is less salty than the ham. I also like to add about ½ a teaspoon of paprika to the chicken recipe, but this is optional.

an ounce or a heaping tablespoon of ham mixture at a time and form it into cylinders about 1 inch in diameter and 2 inches long. Dip each cylinder in egg and then roll in cracker meal. Do this twice with each cylinder. Allow the croquetas to rest refrigerated for about an hour before frying.

Heat about 3 inches of oil in a large frying pan to 375°F or medium-high heat. Fry the croquetas until golden brown on all sides. Do not fry too many at once, and allow the oil to regain the original temperature before adding the next batch. Drain on paper towels. Serve with saltine crackers and a squeeze of lime or in a “croqueta preparada.”

*Note:* Did you know our ham croquetas are one of Versailles’s most sought after recipes?

## Galician White Bean Soup ♦ Caldo Gallego

This soup originated in Galicia, Spain, and is very popular in Cuban kitchens—including ours. It is a robust and nutritious dish perfect on a cold night with some crusty bread and a hearty Spanish wine.

### Serves 8 to 10

1 pound dry white beans (such as navy, cannellini, or great northern), rinsed, soaked overnight, and drained  
½ pound ham hock or shank bones  
½ pound pork belly or pancetta, diced and sautéed until golden brown  
3 ounces cured pork fatback or salt pork, rind removed  
1 small turnip, diced  
1 large onion, diced  
3 garlic cloves, minced  
3 medium potatoes, diced  
salt and white pepper to taste  
2 cups chopped fresh collard greens or turnip greens  
3 tablespoons olive oil

♦ Combine 2 quarts water, beans, ham hock, pork fatback, pork belly, onion, and garlic in a large pot over medium-high heat. Bring the soup to a boil; boil for 10 minutes. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and cook the soup for 2 to 2½ hours.

Remove the soup from the heat and let it sit for 15 to 30 minutes, so that the soup can thicken and the flavors come together. Remove the ham hock and fatback from the pot, discarding the fatback. Remove the meat from the ham hock and return it to the soup. Discard the bones.

Add the potatoes, turnips, and salt and pepper to taste. Cover the pot and let the soup cook over low heat for another 30 to 45 minutes, until the potatoes are fork-tender. During the last 10 minutes of the cooking process, add the collard greens. Taste the soup and adjust the seasonings, if necessary.

*Nadie  
escarmienta  
por cabeza agena.*

Nobody learns  
through someone  
else's experience.





## Fried Chicken Chicharones

Forget those frozen chicken fingers; the Versailles *chicharones* are something to write home about. They are golden brown, crispy, and bursting with so much flavor that they won't require any dipping sauce at all. Feel free to use boneless chicken breast to make them more kid friendly. (Chicharones are technically pork rinds; this chicken dish is similar to homemade pork rinds in texture and crispiness.)

### Serves 00

2 pounds bone in, skin on, chicken  
breast or thighs, cut in 2-inch pieces  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup Mojo Criollo (see recipe, page  
000)  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt (or more, to taste)

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon black pepper  
1 cup flour  
 $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt (for flour mixture)  
vegetable oil (for frying)

◆ Place chicken in a glass bowl or large resealable bag and pour mojo evenly over the chicken breasts. Allow to marinate at least 4 hours or overnight. Remove the chicken from the mojo, pat dry, and season the chicken with salt and black pepper. Roll the chicken pieces in the flour and place in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour.

In a large heavy skillet, heat the oil to medium heat. Add the chicken pieces and cook, turning once, for approximately 2 to 3 minutes per side,

making sure not to crowd the pan. The color should be very light. Drain on paper towel. This can be done as much as 4 hours in advance. When ready to serve, heat the oil again but this time to medium-high heat. Fry the chicken pieces again for a minute or two per side until a deeper golden color is attained. Remove and drain on paper towel. Serve immediately.

*Tip: It is not necessary to fry twice, but doing so does give the chicken extra crunch.*

## Chicken Breast Filets with Garlic ◆ Filetillos de Pollo al Ajillo

This is a delicious and versatile dish, incorporating that Cuban flavor while still being quite simple—a great option for families with small children.

### Serves 4

4 chicken breast filets  
1 lemon, juiced  
2 tablespoons of butter  
¼ cup of olive oil  
all-purpose flour for dredging  
¼ cup dry white wine  
¼ cup chicken stock  
2 cloves garlic, crushed  
1 teaspoon salt  
freshly ground white pepper

◆ In a small bowl, whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, salt, and pepper. Place chicken in a large bowl, and pour marinade over it. Cover, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours.

In a large pan heat butter over medium-high heat. Drain and pat dry the chicken breasts. *Do not discard marinade.* Dredge chicken in flour and cook breast pieces 4 to 5 minutes per side, depending on thickness, and set aside. Add reserved marinade to the pan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and continue cooking for 7 to 8 minutes until thickened. Add chicken back into the pan to heat through and serve with sauce spooned over.