

## A No-cook Breakfast to Power Your Week

Cinnamon roll overnight oats, assembled in minutes, make healthy meal prep a pleasure.

See B3



## Flavors of the Jamaican Diaspora In a Weeknight Pasta

Jerk seasoning gives rasta pasta lots of flavor with little effort.

See B3

# FOOD

THE EPOCH TIMES

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## A Guardian of Old New Mexico

At Rancho de Chimayó, Florence Jaramillo has proudly and tirelessly championed the region's culinary traditions for 57 years

ERIC LUCAS

Florence Jaramillo pays \$64 per pound for real honey.

She's been known to drive through the night to pick up a truckload of red chile, her restaurant's most crucial ingredient. She and her staff have pulled all-night sessions in the past to make 300 dozen tamales—by hand.

And, at age 90, the grande dame of Southwestern cuisine still gets up at 5 a.m. to go to work at her famous northern New Mexico restaurant, Rancho de Chimayó. Waitstaff and cooks must be found, accounting records must be maintained, supplies must be ordered well ahead of time, and work schedules must be set. A newly troublesome pinched nerve in her hip hasn't slowed her down, although she doesn't spend much time in the kitchen now and uses a walker to help her get around.

**Cooks still make the 350-seat restaurant's signature red chile stew one five-gallon batch at a time.**

"I can't sit still," Jaramillo said.

Autumn's amber light poured through casement windows in thick adobe walls in a quiet room in the 19th-century territorial ranch house that holds the restaurant.

"No one's going to knock me down," she said, labeling the COVID-19 pandemic and pinched nerves as just the most recent in a lifetime of challenges.

**A Living Treasure**

Born in the Great Depression and growing up during World War II, Jaramillo—"Mrs. J." to everyone in New Mexico and the culinary business—has operated Rancho de Chimayó for 57 years now. She treasures her role as a shepherd of quality and guardian of tradition.

Her menu focuses on traditional New Mexico dishes—red and green chile, blue corn flat enchiladas, tortilla soup, carne adovada, chiles rellenos—including a large section titled "Comidas Nativas." One creation, stuffed sopaipillas, was originated by Mrs. J. in 1967. Another menu mainstay, a New York steak topped with green chile, hasn't changed in a half-century.

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The menu focuses on traditional New Mexico dishes, such as red and green chile, carne adovada, and blue corn enchiladas.



Florence Jaramillo—or Mrs. J. as locals know her—opened Rancho de Chimayó with her ex-husband, Arturo Jaramillo, in 1965. Now, at age 90, she's still going strong.

## FLASH IN THE PAN

# Olive Oil Ology

Learning to properly taste—and fully enjoy—this culinary elixir

ARI LEVAUX

A few years ago in Rome, I found myself in a cramped room drinking olive oil from a cup. I was with a group of food writers, learning how to properly taste olive oil before traveling to the hilltop city of Perugia, where we would put our new tasting skills to work at an annual event celebrating Italy's best artisan extra virgin olive oils. But first, we needed a better understanding of the magical culinary ointment that we'd be sampling.

We weren't walking around dipping

bread in bowls of oil like you do in tasting events that steer you toward a purchase. This was a serious effort to understand the complex properties of a fine, extra virgin olive oil, aka EVOO. To this end, we finished each sip with a loud, drawn-out slurp called a stripaggio.

**Olive Oil Evaluation**

First, we covered each sample cup with a hand to let the vapors build.

Continued on B4



All you need to enjoy olive oil is a good, crusty loaf and some salt. The olive oil is the main event.



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Cooks still make the 350-seat restaurant's signature red chile stew one five-gallon batch at a time.

"The other day, I told someone I had once bought an item on layaway. 'What's that?' they asked," Jaramillo said. "The concept of paying for something before you take it home is outdated, I guess."

Opened in 1965, Rancho de Chimayó received a James Beard Classics award in 2016, a recognition that barely topped a 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award for Mrs. J. from the National Restaurant Association. She's been named a Living Treasure of Santa Fe and Woman of the Year in the New Mexico restaurant industry; the state legislature has declared a Florence Jaramillo Day in her honor.

## Deep Roots In the Valley

In a world where new and shiny things race across the globe like tsunamis, Rancho de Chimayó's fame and Mrs. J.'s stewardship provide gratifying evidence that the old ways still hold great meaning and value. Execution and quality distinguish the food there, not innovation, that glistening bugaboo that has changed human life so much. The cultural folkways still alive in Chimayó hark back thousands of years and have sifted through centuries of challenge and change.

"If times were hard, around here people always had chile, corn, and beans. They grew what they needed. They hunted and fished," Jaramillo said.

This is a fact that suggests her menu's rainbow trout is perhaps not as non-traditional as it may seem, and the rellenos, enchiladas, and more are anchored in the tides of time, not the Mexican food craze that seized the United States in the 1970s and '80s.

The vale of Chimayó lies in a foothills basin watered by streams from the Sangre de Cristo Mountains above, where the first snows of autumn fleck the peaks with ivory. Massive old-growth cottonwoods anchor the narrow bottomlands along the creek just downhill from the restaurant. Across the way, the 1816 Santuario de Chimayó has been drawing many thousands of devotional pilgrims each year for almost two centuries. Discarded crutches hang on the walls of the chapel's pocito (healing room), where handwritten testimonials and prayers testify to humanity's incandescent embrace of hope in the face of despair. Do miracles occur there? Spend a couple of hours on a quiet autumn day and one can only conclude that serene, beautiful Chimayó itself is a miracle.

The steady traffic to the Santuario was perhaps the only sensible reason Mrs. J. and her ex-husband Arturo left a stable life in Connecticut to return to his ancestral family home in 1963 and create a destination restaurant. Chimayó was—and is—a remote place. To this day, cell coverage in the area is



Each year, Mrs. J. hangs ristras, strings of drying red chiles, all over the restaurant exterior. Once they're dry, she'll replace them with fresh ristras and use the previous ones in her famed red chile.

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sketchy at best, and diners can't get on TikTok while waiting for a table. The road is a seven-mile winding country lane from Española, the nearest big town. Her vast parking lot is unpaved gravel, a fact that amazed her colleagues during her 11-year tenure on the board of the National Restaurant Association.

## Facing the Future

Of course, no one can defy change completely. Rancho de Chimayó was forced to close for seven months in 2020, then again for two months in early 2021. When Jaramillo reopened, she abandoned her lunch menu in favor of an all-day version. Now, like millions of small business owners, she's bedeviled by staff shortages, and for the first time ever, she's contemplating signing up with a Santa Fe temp worker agency.

Even more daunting changes lurk. Her daughter, who lives in Texas, can't take over the restaurant because of health problems. A couple of prospective buyers have approached her, but she's uncertain how they would honor the restaurant's heritage and dislikes the r-word that denotes our culture's usual path for elders.

"I keep prices down so locals can still afford to come here. And I like seeing people from the valley and our regular customers. How are your kids? Your husband?" Jaramillo said. "And I'm committed to the quality of our food. Never skimp on that. Ever."

She gazed around the small room, in

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The restaurant is set in Arturo Jaramillo's ancestral family home, a 19th-century territorial ranch house with adobe walls. The tables and chairs were handmade using the original floorboards.

which the tables and chairs were handmade using floorboards from the original territorial house.

"There is so much history here," she said. "So much."

Eric Lucas is a retired associate editor at Alaska Beyond Magazine and lives on a small farm on a remote island north of Seattle, where he grows organic hay, beans, apples, and squash.

## FLASH IN THE PAN

# Olive Oil Ology

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ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK



High-end olive oil doesn't come cheap, and should be enjoyed to the max.

Continued from B1

We then would rotate the cup circularly to coax more vapors into the trapped air above the oil, and take a whiff, and stare thoughtfully toward the horizon. The smell of a good olive oil can be fruity, or dominated by the famous "fresh cut grass" smell of chlorophyll, or more elusive odors like rosemary, artichoke, green tomato, or "tropical fruits."

At the time, Italy was reeling from some oil-based scandals, after it was discovered that olive oil labeled extra virgin oil from Italy was sometimes neither Italian, extra-virgin, nor even pure olive oil. The investigation involved trained tasters doing what we were doing, in order to discern the true elixir from the frauds.

After these deep nasal inhales, I learned to sip the oil and work it around my mouth, feeling the viscosity and tasting the progression of piquancy and bitterness that gives quality extra virgin olive oil its personality.

Finally, we slurped. The stripaggio is not delicate. Most people would be embarrassed

**Finally, we slurped. The stripaggio is not delicate. Most people would be embarrassed to make sounds like that while eating, but not a roomful of gung-ho food nerds.**



## Red or Green? New Mexico's Enchanting Dilemma

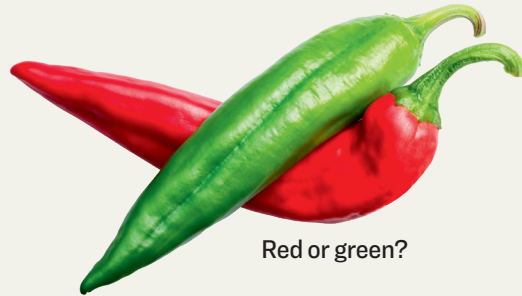
"Red or green?"

"Well, which is hotter?"

"Usually the red, but it varies."

The preceding conversation takes place thousands of times every day in New Mexico restaurants such as Rancho de Chimayó. It's as integral to life in the Land of Enchantment as the regular or decaf question heard in coffee shops around the world. The red or green query determines which sauce you'll get on your enchiladas, chimichangas, tacos, steak, and so forth. The two standard sauces are made with fresh or roasted green chiles or with fully ripe, dried red chiles.

HORTIMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK



Red or green?

The outcome can be as distinct as the result of the coffee question: Chile is a low-level mood-altering substance, just as powerful as caffeine. In the case of chiles, the alkaloid involved is capsaicin, and the level of that in any given chile determines how hot it is.

Usually green is milder. The chile isn't ripe when picked, after all.

But that's not always true. Jalapeños are hot when green and so are their higher-octane cousins, serranos. And red-ripe jalapeños are smoked to make chipotle, a hot powder—yes, that's what the restaurant chain is named for. And chile heat varies by season, weather, locale, growing technique—even from plant to plant. It's a wonderful illustration of nature's infinite variety.

HORTIMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK



Chimayó red chile.

Red chile stew (sauce) is made from dried red chiles ubiquitous in New Mexico. Red chile is generally hotter than green. Green is generally thicker and lusher than red, which is sharper, slightly acrid, and smoky; both usually include onion, garlic, perhaps a thickener such as cornstarch.

The most famous red chile pepper is a distinct variety known as Chimayó red, grown for generations in the valley surrounding its namesake village. It's a very rare type, grown in local backyards non-commercially: A few shops in Chimayó sell some in the fall. The local supply can't begin to meet Mrs. J.'s needs at Rancho de Chimayó, so she brings truckloads of both red and green chiles up from the Hatch Valley in southern New Mexico.

So, red or green? The New Mexico legislature has declared this to be the "Official State Question."

"I really can't pick just one," said Mike Hultquist, of Chili Pepper Madness. "Each is perfect for something. Life is too short to be bland."



ZINA JUNDI

Jaramillo was named a Living Treasure of Santa Fe in May 2019.



GEORGIA EVANS/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Santuario de Chimayó has been drawing many thousands of devotional pilgrims each year to the rural, remote village of Chimayó—and Mrs. J.'s restaurant.



Ristras hang along the exterior of the restaurant.



### RANCHO DE CHIMAYO'S CARNE ADOVADA (NEW MEXICO BRAISED RED CHILE PORK)

Carne adovada, one of New Mexico's most celebrated dishes, features pork marinated and then braised in a thick, fiery sauce made with dried New Mexico red chiles. The restaurant Rancho de Chimayó serves it with rice and posole (recipe follows) or as part of a combination plate with a pork tamale, rolled cheese enchilada, beans, and posole with red or green chile.

SERVES 6 TO 8

**1 tablespoon canola or vegetable oil**

**4 cloves garlic, minced**

**8 ounces whole, dried New Mexico red chile pods (about 25)**

**4 cups water, divided**

**2 tablespoons diced yellow onion**

**1 tablespoon crushed chile pequin (dried, hot New Mexican chile flakes)**

**1 teaspoon garlic salt**

**1 1/2 teaspoon crumbled dried Mexican oregano**

**3 pounds thick, boneless shoulder pork chops, trimmed of fat and cut into 1- to 2-inch cubes**

Warm oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add garlic and sauté until just golden. Immediately remove from heat.

Break stems off of the chile pods and discard the seeds (it isn't necessary to remove every seed, but most should be removed). Place chiles in a sink or large bowl, rinse carefully, and drain.

Place damp pods in one layer on a baking sheet and toast in the oven for about 5 minutes, watching carefully to avoid burning. Chiles can have a little remaining moisture. Remove from the oven and let them cool.

Break each chile into 2 or 3 pieces. In a blender, purée half of the pods with 2 cups of water (you will still be able to see tiny pieces of chile pulp). Pour into the saucepan with garlic. Repeat with remaining pods and water.

Stir the remaining sauce ingredients into the chile sauce and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. The sauce will thicken, but should remain a little soupy. Remove from heat. Cool it to room temperature. Stir pork into chile sauce and refrigerate overnight.

The next day, preheat the oven to 300 degrees F. Oil a large covered baking dish.

Spoon carne adovada into the baking dish. Cover the dish and bake until the meat is completely tender and the sauce has cooked down, about 3 hours. Stir once about halfway through. If the sauce remains watery after 3 hours, stir well again and cook uncovered for about 15 minutes more. Serve hot.

Recipe from "Rancho de Chimayó Cookbook: The Traditional Cooking of New Mexico, 50th Anniversary Edition."



Dried New Mexico chiles give this classic regional dish its unmistakable flavor and bright red hue.

### RANCHO DE CHIMAYO POSOLE

Posole is dried field corn (hominy) that's treated with mineral lime to soften and remove the skins and to improve the flavor. It also refers to the stew based on posole. At Rancho de Chimayó, it's served as an earthy, fragrant side dish for carne adovada (braised red chile pork).

Find prepared posole at RanchoGordo.com. Find canned hominy and whole dried New Mexico chiles at well-stocked grocery stores and Latino markets.

**1 cup dried prepared posole (maíz pellado para pozole or maíz pozolero) or 1 25-ounce can hominy, drained and rinsed**

**1/2 pound pork shoulder, trimmed of fat and cut into 1-inch chunks**

**2 celery stalks, finely chopped**

**1/4 cup finely chopped yellow onion**

**1 1/2 teaspoon garlic salt, plus more to taste**

**2 or 3 dried red New Mexico chiles, stemmed, seeded, and rinsed**

**If using dried prepared posole:** Rinse well, then put it in a bowl and cover it with 2 inches of water. Let it soak for at least 4 hours. Drain.

Put prepared posole in a large heavy saucepan or stockpot and cover with 8 cups of water. Bring the water to a boil, covered, then reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, for 2 hours.

Add remaining ingredients and cook for 1 1/2 to 2 hours more or until the corn is puffed (almost like popcorn) and the pork is fork-tender, stirring every now and then toward the end and adding enough hot water if necessary to keep posole covered.

**If using canned hominy:** Pour it into a pot, and add the remaining ingredients and 4 cups of water. Bring the water to a boil, covered, then reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, until pork is fork-tender, 1 to 1 1/2 hours, stirring every now and then toward the end and adding enough hot water if necessary to keep posole covered.

Season with garlic salt to taste and serve with a slotted spoon. Make ahead up to 3 days, chilled.

to make sounds like that while eating, but not a roomful of gung-ho food nerds.

Sucking air through the olive oil in your mouth disperses oil droplets to hard-to-reach taste receptors of the tongue and throat, helping to paint a fuller picture of the oil's flavor. Meanwhile, as the air stretches the oil, you can feel its viscosity, and how it holds together in the turbulence of your stripaggio.

Some oil starts with a fruity whiff and a buttery kiss and stays smooth all the way through, making it good for baking, or for dressing a lettuce-based salad. Some oil starts with a kiss and ends with a slap, or at least a raspy cat-lick to the throat, making it more suitable for pairing with stronger flavors such as chicory salads, or drizzled on pasta or other savory dishes.

#### Olive Oil Enjoyment

Since my olive oil education, EVOO began filling the niche that I previously filled with mayonnaise, as my "energy dense" condiment of choice. Mayo, like olive oil, has properties of texture as well as flavor. And they both improve food with fat.

Back home, I regarded California olive oil with newfound interest. As with wine, you can find some amazing olive oil coming out of the Golden State if you know where to look. They include large-scale, high density operations with mechanical harvesters, as well as small artisanal producers much like the ones I visited with my group in Italy.

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Professionally tasting olive oil is a serious and particular process.



There are Italian fingerprints all over California's wine and olive oil industries, thanks to waves of immigrants who felt at home in that Mediterranean climate of the American West, and planted many of the state's original vineyards.

A high-end olive oil doesn't come cheap, and should be appreciated to the max. You should consider it more of a main event, and less as a supporting sauce for the main event. The thing that the oil goes onto is a substrate, a stage upon which to display the star in all of its glory.

My favorite substrate is bread. I know, I just said that bread isn't for real olive oil tasting. It gets in the way, because it tastes so good it's hard to stay focused, and next thing you

know you're in a food coma. And if you try to slurp the oily bread, you might inhale breadcrumbs and choke. The bread is for proper enjoyment of the EVOO, rather than evaluation.

So get yourself a good, crusty loaf, and some tasty olive oil, and some salt. You don't need pepper, because a good EVOO has those peppery notes. But some minced garlic will all but guarantee the addictive nature of the meal. Mix up the oil, salt, and garlic, and start dipping. Let the seasoned oil impregnate the spongy bread, and enjoy the greasy green grassy goodness.

Ari LeVaux writes about food in Missoula, Mont.