

# A final salute to Spain from a lifelong fan

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**By T. Susan Chang**

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The late, great Penelope Casas wrote extensively about Spain and Spanish food (although she herself was a Greek-American New Yorker) in countless magazines and half a dozen cookbooks over the course of a long career in print. What was to be her last book, “1000 Spanish Recipes,” had just gone to press when she passed away from leukemia at 70 two years ago.

“1000 Spanish Recipes” is her legacy, and it is magisterial, brimming with tapas, paellas, ensaladas, and the many meals of a lifetime. They are concisely written, which means that using these recipes can require some cooking intuition. An occasional step is left out, sometimes you need to make an adjustment.

But by and large, the story this book tells is one of simple techniques embellished with flourishes of flavor in the form of sauces and garnishes, an approach that works well even with side dishes you might normally overlook or prepare in haste.

An almond sauce for asparagus is one of those things you might never think to try on your own. It’s essentially tomato, garlic, blanched almonds, and sherry vinegar whizzed in the food processor into a smooth consistency and draped over simply cooked spears. Another food-processor puree amalgamates garlic and paprika into a kind of rosy mayonnaise that instantly transforms simple steamed cauliflower.

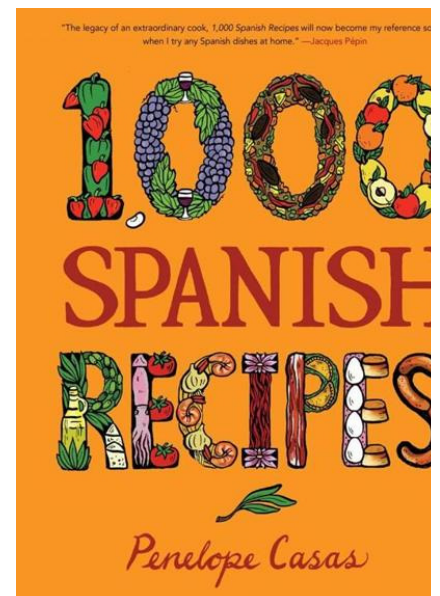
A little zucchini gratin demonstrates that all you really need is a bit of breadcrumbs and garlic and parsley to banish forever the dull sameness of the cooked squash. Meanwhile, baguette croutons for crunch and a nip of vinegar wake up a dish of sauteed greens. It turns out, however, that you can’t substitute chard directly for collards, as Casas suggests, and I was obliged to make some major changes in cooking time and technique.

Chickpeas with tomatoes and sausage is one of those soul-filling dishes that turns out to be easy to pull together half an hour. Gently scrambled eggs with shrimp and spinach stirred in make a satisfying way to start the day



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Those who enjoy paella will rejoice in an entire chapter devoted to rice dishes. I counted 56 paellas but content myself with trying only two: A mushroom paella confused me slightly when it called for the same saffron in two different steps; ultimately, despite liberal handfuls of diced prosciutto, it ends up like a rather tame risotto.

A sweet-and-sour chicken paella, on the other hand, rocks the house. For liquid it relies on a mix of broth and orange juice, which simmers down to become thick, hazy, and sweet. If that's not enough, it's sprinkled with glo walnuts cooked in caramel. It's so irresistible that you can almost forgive the fact that Casas doesn't mention w to add the chicken pieces back into the pan after the initial browning.

In fact, many of the proteins revolve around the subtle and cunning use of fruit to sweeten, moisten, and emph what would otherwise be dishes so simple as to be almost austere. A roast chicken, for example, is nothing more than roast chicken, but with a five-ingredient orange sauce it becomes a feast. You have to guess what kind of vinegar Casas calls for — I used sherry vinegar — but the sauce is so good you'll be casting about for bread or potatoes to soak it up.

Like the chicken, pork chops get the sparest possible treatment; they're seasoned, browned, and turned once in pan. But prunes simmered in a bit of wine turn into a lush, velvety sauce (especially if you double the cornstarch which I find it advisable to do).

"1000 Spanish Recipes" is a generous vault of dishes and a good kitchen companion if you keep your wits about you. It's a fitting farewell from a writer who remained to the last a fervent ambassador for what was once, at least her own country, an underappreciated cuisine.

## **1,000 SPANISH RECIPES**

By Penelope Casas

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,

720 pp., \$35

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