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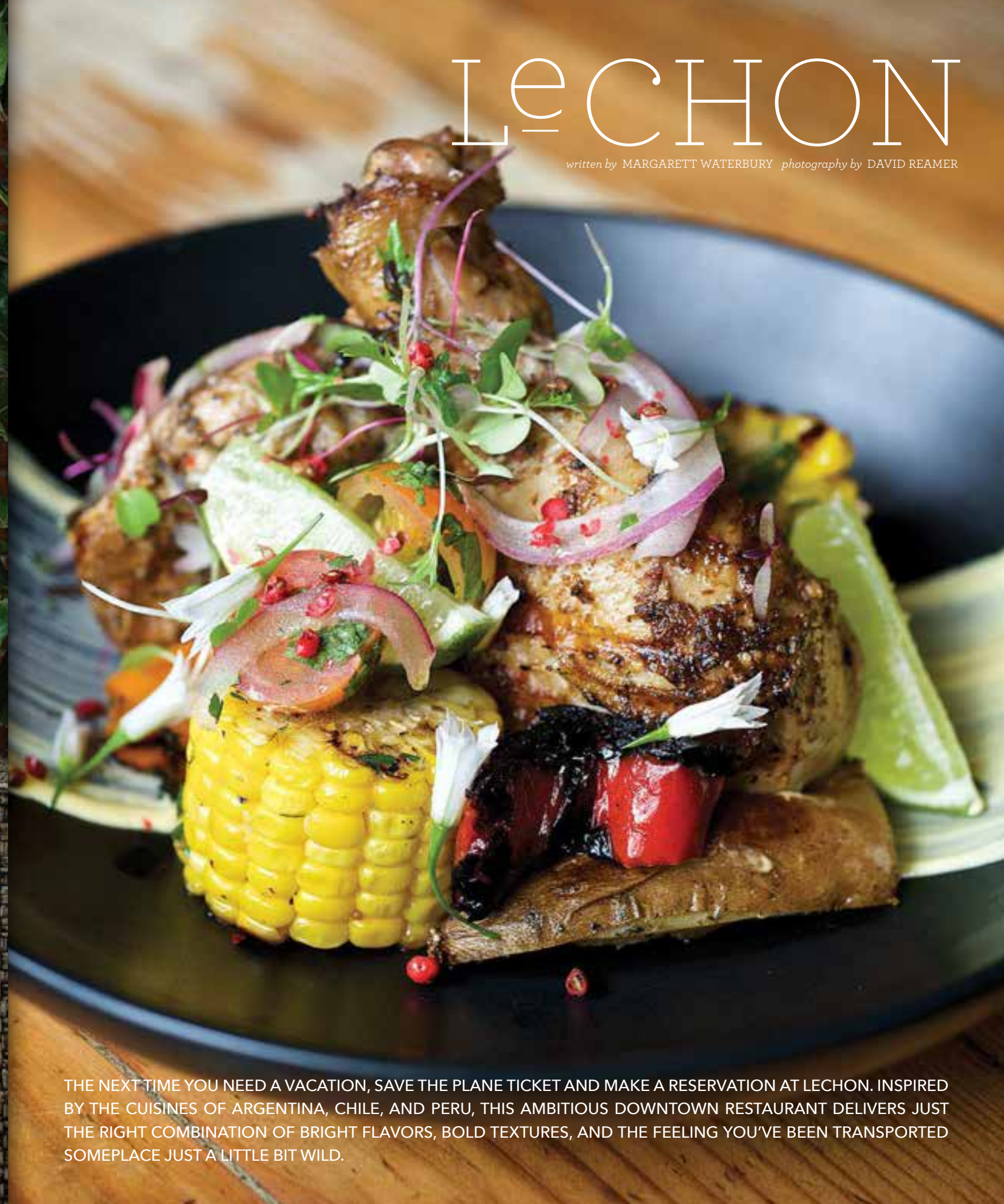
**DESIGNER GARRET CORD WERNER
BRINGING THE OUTDOORS IN**

As the child of a politician, executive chef Jaco Smith was exposed to international cuisine from an early age, and spent many years working and living abroad. He says all his experiences taught him something valuable—even washing dishes in a Scottish B&B.



LECHON

written by MARGARETT WATERBURY photography by DAVID REAMER



THE NEXT TIME YOU NEED A VACATION, SAVE THE PLANE TICKET AND MAKE A RESERVATION AT LECHON. INSPIRED BY THE CUISINES OF ARGENTINA, CHILE, AND PERU, THIS AMBITIOUS DOWNTOWN RESTAURANT DELIVERS JUST THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF BRIGHT FLAVORS, BOLD TEXTURES, AND THE FEELING YOU'VE BEEN TRANSPORTED SOMEPLACE JUST A LITTLE BIT WILD.

Grilled Branzini with Olive Pepper Relish



BRANZINI

Brush the fish with a small amount of Olive oil, season with salt and pepper and cook on the grill until fully cooked. Squeeze fresh lemon juice on the fish. Place the fish in a serving dish and then top with the Olive caper relish. Sprinkle Jacobsen Sea Salt on top and garnish with micro greens and sliced radishes.

OLIVE PEPPER RELISH

1/2 cup Green Olives (quartered)
1 Red Bell Pepper (small dice)
1/4 Red Onion (small dice)
2 T Chives (thinly sliced)
1/2 bunch Green Onions (thinly sliced)
1/4 cup Aji Amarillo
1/4 cup Rice Vinegar
1 T Agave
Zest of 1 Lemon
1/2 T Aleppo
Salt to taste
2 Tablespoon Extra Virgin Olive Oil

After doing all the preparation, mix all the ingredients together in a bowl.



FOUNDED IN AUGUST OF 2015, Lechon is one of the newest additions to Portland's burgeoning South American restaurant scene. Here, the food draws cues from the Patagonian tradition of the churrascaria, those Argentinian restaurants specializing in meats grilled to order over a wood fire, as well as the flavors and colors of the tropics and the uniquely cosmopolitan upbringing of Jaco Smith, Lechon's executive chef.

Jaco fell in love with cooking as a young child. His father was a politician, which means his family frequently entertained guests from all over the world. "We just grew up with the best food," he says. "It was amazing." His mother taught him to make classic dishes like chicken a la king, béchamel sauce, and meringues, while their chef, Trudy, showed him how to make cookies and decorate cakes. "I used to run back from Kindergarten because I wanted to be around Trudy and cook with her in the kitchen," laughs Jaco.

Jaco graduated from high school just as apartheid ended and the sanctions against South Africa were lifted, making international travel possible for the first time in a generation. He took full advantage. During his early career, he worked on a kibbutz in Israel, a B&B in Scotland, a restaurant in London, and one of the world's largest hotels and convention centers in Tennessee.

After completing the prestigious three-year apprenticeship program at the Greenbriar Resort in West Virginia, he spent a decade working in high-end hotels. That life provided stability, but ultimately, Jaco missed the warm, intimate environment of restaurants. "I love to be around customers, to talk to each person, to observe them from the line," he says. "I like to see how people experience our food, the delight on their faces."

When the owners of Lechon asked Jaco to help them open the restaurant, he immersed himself in South American cuisine, especially Argentina, Chile, and Peru. To his surprise, there were unexpected parallels with the food he grew up eating in South Africa. "The ingredients are different, but the cooking



methods are the same," he says, like the treasured role of cooking over wood fire. "In South Africa, our favorite time is cooking on the grill."

At Lechon, that means a significant number of the dishes are cooked over an adjustable wood-fired grill built right into the line, including meats, seafood, and vegetables. Even bread gets a turn over the flames: their popular gaucho bread is cooked directly on the grill before it's finished with a smoky bonfire salt and served with verdant, herby chimichurri sauce. "Cooking with fire is all about what you create at the dinner table," says Jaco. "When people sit outside and build a fire, it brings people together."

Dishes at Lechon are beautiful, flavorful, and often feature unexpected details, but they're neither snobby nor challenging. "I want the food to be accessible," says Jaco, which makes for a dining experience that anybody can enjoy. And, unlike many South American restaurants, vegetarians will find plenty of options at Lechon, from light, lively vegetarian ceviche to heartier fare like the

Lechon's inspiration comes from the classic cuisines of South America, but Jaco isn't constrained by tradition. Surprising, visually dramatic ingredients like edible flowers and smoke-filled domes give dishes a contemporary twist. Outside, a direct view of the Portland's Westside Esplanade makes for unparalleled people watching.

Lechon puts an unexpected spin on ceviche by topping it with tequila-lime foam and an ampule of ruddy chili syrup for diners to apply as it suits them. Crisp empanadas are stuffed with savory fillings like braised brisket or piquillo peppers. Cocktails feature classic South American spirits like pisco, cachaça, and tequila, as well as brightly flavored tropical fruit and distinctive garnishes.



impossible-to-stop-eating patatas bravas, smothered in a paprika tomato sauce and garlic make for a tangy-savory punch.

The “Tapas” section of the menu holds additional delights, including a delicious glazed pork cheek dish paired with creative accompaniments like grapes, mustard seeds, and grilled leeks cut into short, stubby towers. A Spanish-inspired arrangement of grilled octopus served with potatoes, chorizo, preserved lemon, and salsa verde is Lechon’s most popular dish, and for good reason – it’s as beautiful as it is satisfying, with a parade of textures.

But food isn’t the only reason to visit Lechon. The restaurant’s exceptional bar program also warrants attention, and its emphasis on South American spirits and other ingredients is a refreshing change of pace from other watering holes.

The wine list is split between Oregon and South American producers, while beers are selected with an eye towards food-friendliness, including a fruity, lightly hoppy red ale specially brewed by Widmer to pair with Lechon’s food. Plus, the bar has some of the coolest décor in town: it’s flanked by two enormous fish tanks, including one filled with backlit jellyfish, making it feel a little bit like the summer home of one of the friendlier Bond villains.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about Lechon is the opportunity it gives guests and staff alike the opportunity to keep exploring. Last year, they launched a Sunday Supper series, each month showcasing a different cuisine from around the world. Past themes have included Spain, South Africa, and an Italian dinner themed around the classic 1990s film *Big Night*. “I just love it,” says Jaco. “We get to explore these different countries and teach our cooks a different kind of cuisine, so they keep learning, and we’re investing in our people. It’s so awesome.”

Nearly two years in, Lechon isn’t resting on its laurels. This spring, the restaurant plans to open an event space as well as a major expansion of its outdoor patio, a wrap-around affair with riverfront views and a colossal wood-burning oven for al fresco dining. Jaco is also excited to incorporate some new dishes he experienced on a recent trip to South America with his sous chef, where they ate their way from Patagonia to the Amazon. “I always want to see and learn more,” says Jaco. “I always want to know – how can we take the restaurant to the next level?”

Reservations 503.219.9000. Open daily for lunch and dinner; Brunch Saturday and Sunday. 113 SE Naito Parkway, Portland www.lechonpdx.com

Freekeh Bowl with Chickpea Quinoa Fritters, Citrus, Young Lettuce, Feta, Charred Onion Crema

RECIPE ON PAGE 116



FREEKEH BOWL WITH CHICKPEA QUINOA FRITTERS, CITRUS, YOUNG LETTUCE, FETA, CHARRED ONION CREMA

Serves 5

FREEKEH

- 3 cups Freekeh, cooked and chilled
- 2 Lemons, juiced and zested
- 2 T Mint, chopped
- 3 T Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Salt and Pepper to taste

Cook the Freekeh according to the directions on the package and once it is cooked, refrigerate. In a mixing bowl mix all the ingredients together and adjust the seasoning.

CHICKPEA QUINOA FRITTERS

- 1 cups Dry Chickpeas
- 4 T cooked Quinoa
- 1/2 small Onion
- 2 cloves Garlic
- 1/2 cup tightly packed Cilantro
- 1/2 cup tightly packed Parsley
- Zest of 1 Lemon
- 3 T ground Coriander
- Salt and Pepper to taste

Soak the dried chickpeas in water overnight. In a food processor grind all the ingredients together except for the cooked quinoa. In a mixing bowl add the cooked quinoa and adjust seasoning. Deep fry the fritters at 350°F until dark brown.

CHARRED ONION CREMA

- 1 cup Crema
- 1/2 Onion, sliced and charred on the grill
- 1 teaspoon Balsamic Vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire
- Salt and pepper to taste

Slice the onion and season them with salt and pepper and a touch of olive oil. On the grill char the onion slices till they are tender and appear dark in color. Once cool, transfer all the ingredients into a blender and puree until smooth.

ASSEMBLY

Lightly dress the young lettuce in olive oil salt and pepper and citrus juice. Spoon the freekeh on top of the greens, garnish with citrus segments and feta. Spoon the charred onion crema on the plate and lastly, fry the fritters and add to the dish.



SHRIMP CEVICHE WITH LIME CHILE SYRUP

Serves 4

- 1 pound small Shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1 small Cucumber, quartered and diced
- 1/4 cup sliced Red Onion
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh Cilantro
- 2 T minced pickled Jalapeño Chiles
- 2 T diced Pineapple
- 3/4 cup Orange Juice
- 1/4 cup fresh Lime Juice
- 1/4 teaspoon Salt
- 1/4 teaspoon Cracked Pepper

Cook shrimp in a pot of boiling water 3 minutes or until just done; rinse with cold water to stop the cooking process. Combine shrimp with remaining ingredients in a bowl. Cover and chill several hours to combine flavors. Lastly drizzle some lime chili syrup before serving.

CHILE LIME SYRUP

- 2 T Chile Sauce
- 1/4 teaspoon Soy Sauce
- 1/2 Lime, juiced

PERUVIAN GRILLED CHICKEN

Serves 4

- 1/3 cup Soy Sauce
- 2 T fresh Lime Juice
- 5 garlic Cloves
- 2 teaspoons ground Cumin
- 1 teaspoon Paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon dried Oregano
- 1 tablespoon Vegetable Oil
- 1 whole Chicken (about 3 1/2 pounds), quartered

MARINATE CHICKEN

Blend soy sauce, lime juice, garlic, cumin, paprika, oregano, 1/2 teaspoon pepper, and oil in a blender.

Put chicken in a large sealable bag and add marinade. Seal bag and marinate, chilled, 8 to 24 hours.

GRILL CHICKEN

If using a charcoal grill, open vents on bottom and lid of grill. Light a large chimney starter full of charcoal (preferably hardwood). When coals are lit, dump them out along opposite sides of bottom rack, leaving a space free of coals (the size of the quartered chicken) in middle. When you can hold your hand 5 inches above the grill rack directly over coals for 3 to 4 seconds, coals will be medium-hot.

If using a gas grill, preheat all burners on high, then reduce heat to medium-high.

AJI CREMA

- 1/2 cup Sour Cream
 - 1 T Aji Amarillo
- Mix together in bowl with a whisk

SALSA CRIOLLA

- 1 large Cherry Tomatoes cut in 1/2
- 1/2 cup finely chopped Red Onion
- 1 Scallion, chopped
- 1 teaspoon minced Cilantro
- 2 T Olive
- 1 T Lime Juice
- 1/2 teaspoon Salt
- 1/4 teaspoon Black Pepper

Stir together tomato and remaining ingredients. Season salsa with additional salt and pepper if desired.

Accompaniment: Lime wedges, grilled corn, roasted sweet potato

Discard marinade, then pat chicken dry. Oil grill rack, then grill chicken over area with no coals (or over a turned-off burner), skin side down first, covered, turning over once, until cooked through, 30 to 35 minutes (add charcoal to maintain heat).

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BEEF BRISKET EMPANADA

Yield 16 portions

- | | |
|--|---|
| 4 cups Flour | 3 T Chile Powder |
| 6 T Unsalted Butter, cubed | 1 1/2 teaspoons finely chopped Oregano leaves |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons Kosher Salt plus more to taste | 2 teaspoons Paprika |
| 1/2 cup Olive Oil | 1/2 cup Raisins |
| 1 lb Beef Brisket | 1/4 cup Monterey Jack Cheese |
| 5 Cloves, smashed | 1/4 cup Fontina Cheese |
| 2 medium Carrots, halved crosswise | Freshly ground black pepper, to taste |
| 2 large White Onions, 1 quartered and 1 minced | Canola Oil, for frying |

MAKING THE DOUGH

Combine flour, butter, and salt in a large bowl, and using your fingers, rub butter into flour until pea-size crumbles form. Add 1 1/2 cups warm water and stir until dough forms. Knead in the bowl until smooth, about 4 minutes. Wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Meanwhile, heat 1/4 cup olive oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Season beef with salt and pepper, and add to pan; cook, turning once, until browned on both sides, about 8 minutes. Add garlic, carrots, quartered onion, and 6 cups water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and cook until beef is very tender, about 2 1/2 hours.

Remove from heat, and let beef sit in saucepan until cool enough to handle, about 30 minutes. Transfer beef to a cutting board, and reserve 1 cup cooking liquid; discard remaining liquid and vegetables or reserve for another use. Shred meat into thin strands, and then finely chop; set aside.

Wipe the saucepan dry, then heat remaining olive oil over medium-high heat; add minced onion, and cook, stirring, until golden brown, about 12 minutes. Add chile powder, paprika, oregano and cook for 1 minute. Add reserved beef and cooking liquid along with raisins; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, and cook, stirring occasionally, until raisins are plump and meat has absorbed most of the liquid, about 20 minutes; set aside to cool. Once cool add both cheeses.

Divide dough into 24 balls, and place on a work surface; using a small rolling pin or the heel of your hand, flatten each ball into a 5" disk, brush edges with water, and place 2 tbsp. filling in the center. Fold disks in half to form half-moons, and seal edges together using the tines of a fork. Refrigerate empanadas for at least 1 hour, or up to overnight.

Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. saucepan, and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°F. Working in batches, fry empanadas until browned and crisp, about 6 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain before serving.



SPRING STRAWBERRY, EDAMAME, ASPARAGUS, MANGO SALAD WITH LIME VINAIGRETTE

Serves 4

LIME VINAIGRETTE

- 3 T Olive Oil
- 2 T Apple-Cider Vinegar
- 2 T Agave
- 1/4 cup Lime Juice

Blend oil, vinegar, agave and lime juice in a blender until smooth. Set aside.

SALAD

- 8 cups Baby Spinach (cleaned and washed)
- 4 each Asparagus, shaved
- 12 Strawberry, quartered
- 1 cup Edamame
- 1 Mango, diced or sliced
- 1 Radish, sliced
- 1 teaspoon minced Cilantro

Mix the Spinach, Shaved Asparagus, Edamame in a bowl Lime Vinaigrette Garnish the salad with Strawberries and Mango

CANDIED HAZELNUTS

- 3/4 cup Sugar
- 3 tbsp Water
- 4 1/2 oz blanched Hazelnuts (1 C) toasted
- 1/2 tsp coarse Salt, preferably Maldon