

# HUACHINANGO VERACRUZANA

Written by Bob Skolnick photography by Marty Snortum Studio



**F**or those of us who have been fortunate enough to visit the Mexican coast (either the Caribbean or the Pacific side), we understand that whole grilled fish is a staple, a delicacy and something to be coveted. You can grill virtually any fish, but I prefer a small, whole Red Snapper. I recommend a 1 1/2 to a 2 pound fish. You can order them from your local grocer's fish section, or secure them at most specialty foods stores that offer fresh seafood. At this size plan on one fish per person as there is a less than 50% yield accounting for head, tail and bone structure.

#### Preparing the Fish for Grilling

The fish should come to you eviscerated and rinsed, but more than likely the scales have been left on. They must be removed. You can scrape the scales with a fish scaler, potato

peeler or the edge of a French knife. I recommend cooking the fish with the head left on, but if you are squeamish you can request to have it cut off at they grocery store. Rinse the fish fully in cold water and then rub the inside and outside of the fish cavity with olive oil, lime juice, and black pepper. Place a small bunch of cilantro sprigs and oregano sprigs along with a small whole New Mexico green chile (punctured a few places) inside the fish cavity along with a half lime cut into wedges. Seal the cavity by tying it three times with pieces of butchers twine soaked in lemon juice.

#### Grilling the Whole Fish

Prepare your hardwood charcoal fire using Mesquite charcoal. I prefer a grill with a tight closing cover and an

adjustable cooking grate. Allow the fire to fully blossom and then cool down to amber coals and ash. The fish is delicate and should be cooked using indirect heat, avoiding direct contact with the flame. A top shelf of the grill or a fish-grilling basket is ideal. Because you are cooking several whole fish at once, your best option is to elevate the primary grill shelf well above the coals and allow the coals to mature to medium white ash fire. Make sure you brush the grill shelf or the wire basket with oil before placing the fish on it to prevent the fish's skin from sticking. The whole fish will take about 35 to 45 minutes to fully cook. Brush the fish periodically with the olive oil and turn it twice during the cooking process. The flesh should be somewhat firm to the touch when done. It is acceptable to make a slit in the skin with a paring knife to check the degree of doneness if you are unsure.

### Sauce Veracruzana

Serves 4

- 6 each vine ripened tomatoes, seeded and chopped coarse
- 2 each red bell peppers, seeded, de seeded and sliced into 1/4 inch strips
- 2 each green bell peppers, seeded, de seeded and sliced into 1/4 inch strips
- 2 each Spanish onions, cut into 1/4 inch strips
- 1 cup Spanish olives, pitted and stuffed
- 1/4 cup fresh garlic, minced
- 1 each jalapeno, stemmed, seeded and diced
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp fresh lime juice
- 4 oz clam juice - bottled
- 1/4 tsp cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- 1 tbsp oregano leaf
- 3 tbsp capers
- 1 cup fresh cilantro, chopped

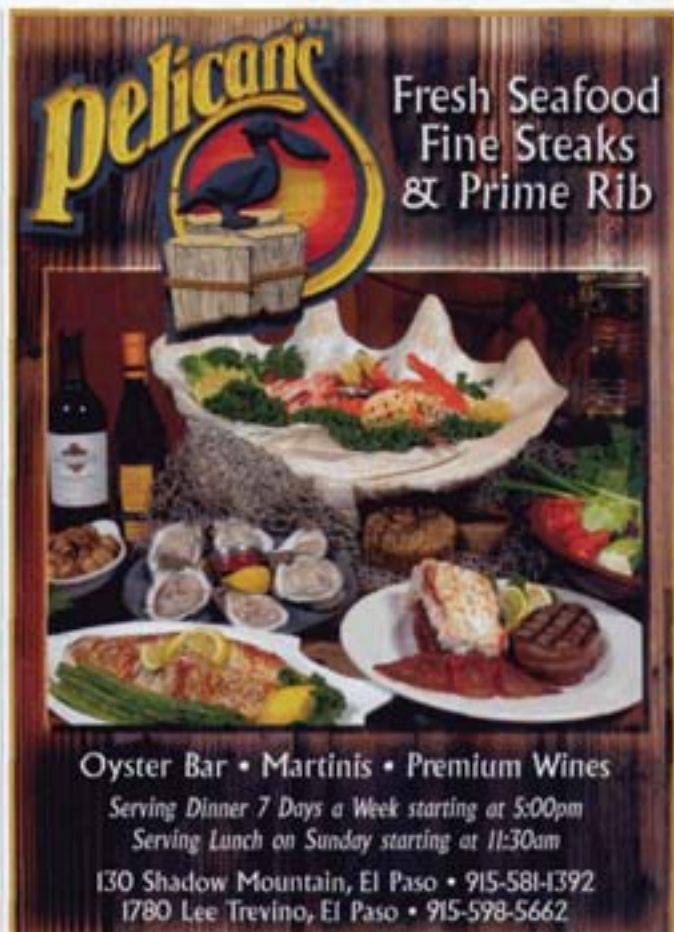
#### To Prepare the Sauce

1. Heat half of the olive oil in a thick bottom saucepan and add the onions, red and green bell peppers and jalapenos and sauté until slightly browned. Add the garlic and sauté a few minutes more. Remove the sautéed vegetables to a platter and hold at room temperature.
2. Heat the remaining olive oil and add the chopped tomatoes, lime juice, cinnamon, ground cloves, oregano and half of the chopped cilantro. Sauté the mixture on high heat for three minutes to break down the tomatoes.
3. Add the clam juice and stir. Bring the mixture to a boil and then reduce to a rolling simmer until the sauce starts to thicken in about five minutes.
4. Add back in the sautéed onion, peppers, garlic and jalapenos. Add in the sliced green olives and the capers. Simmer for an additional ten minutes to infuse the flavors.

#### To Plate the Dinner

Place a whole cooked Red Snapper on a serving platter and remove the three pieces of string. Spoon on the finished Veracruzana Sauce to cover. Garnish with sliced lemon and sprinkle additional chopped cilantro on top. I recommend the fish be accompanied by Arroz Verde (rice cooked with parsley) and warm flour tortillas.

*Buen Provecho!*



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