

TEXT AND PHOTO BY SEENA CHRITI

Mexican Bread....a sweet story of love

Bread made out of wheat came to Mexico in the time of the Spanish conquest with Herman Cortez. It began to be produced in 1524 when they used a wheat called criollo. In the beginning, the ovens and bread shops were family-oriented, and they became more commercial and regulated in their sales.

At first, bread was sold in commercial establishments called pulperias in which other types of products, like food, liquors, wines, medicines were available. These pulperias were the predecessors of the so-called miscelaneas (Mom and Pop stores) in Latin America.

An interesting fact is that the people in charge of selling and distributing the bread in the markets were the indigenous women, and this makes me think of how disturbing this must have been for them. Bread was a very new food for them which did not exist in their culture. They were used to making tortillas out of corn, and all of a sudden, they were in the markets selling a product that they had never handled.

The Mexican bread has an enormous importance for its creativity in its making with the hundreds of varieties and shapes that the creative Mexican bakers have invented. But, they have not displaced the importance of the tortilla in the hearts of the people because the Mexican diet is still based on tortilla and beans.

In the 18th Century the famous Italian and French bread makers came to Mexico and brought their techniques and students and created some famous bread stores.

Up until 1920, the bread made from wheat was known for being white, and between 1923 and 1959, began to create sweet bread. The Mexican public demanded hot bread. The bolillo and the telera are breads soft on the inside and crunchy on the outside. This is the bread that is used to

make the famous Mexican tortas (sandwiches). The famous Mexican bakeries began the custom of having hot bread every 20 minutes.

In the beginning at the bakeries, it was sold from behind a counter, and the clients asked for what they wanted. In the 1950s, the stores eliminated counters, and the bread was placed in such a way that the customer could serve themselves with trays, which enormously helped the sales. I have many memories from my childhood with my mother in the bakeries with my own big round tray, picking out whatever bread I wanted.

The bread in Mexico is part of an enormous culture and tradition, where like in many Latin American cultures, there is a mixing and syncretism of the indigenous and European cultures, principally the Spanish. Every town and city have their own variety of bread, and there are an infinite number of ceremonial breads that are rooted in the popular culture, such as Day of the Dead, Thursday Santo, King's Day, etc. One bread that is very important in all of Mexico is the pulque bread, which is a mixture of the basic bread ingredients to which a fermented maguey cactus mixture is added. Pulque was considered the sacred drink of the Aztecs. This bread is so popular that it is never absent from the town's festivities. Mexico is known as the No. 1 country in the world for its richness and variety of flavors and shapes of breads. Some of their names in Spanish are conchas (shells), orejas (ears), besos (kisses), cocoles, banderillas (sticks), volcanes (volcanoes), polvorones (sand tarts), bolillos and teleras, huesos (bones), corbatas (ties), magdalenas (magdalenas) – to name just a few. ♦



Conchas



Orejas

CONCHA RECIPE

3 ¼ t. baking powder
¾ C of evaporated milk
¾ C. of warm water
2/3 C. of sugar
½ t. salt
2 eggs
6 C. flour
½ C. melted butter
¾ t. of cinnamon

RECIPE FOR THE TOPPING

1 C. sugar
¾ C. of butter
3 t. cinnamon
1 ½ t. of vanilla extract
1 ½ C. flour

PREPARATION

Put the following ingredients in a bowl and mix with an electric mixer: yeast and warm water, mix in the evaporated milk, butter, sugar, salt, eggs and half of the flour. Little by little, add the rest of the flour and cinnamon. Knead the mixture for a few minutes until it is elastic.

Put the dough in a bowl with a little oil, and let it rest for one hour until it doubles in size.

In the meantime, prepare the topping for the conchas. Mix in a bowl with a beater the butter with the sugar until it is fluffy, add the flour and continue beating it until you have a thick paste. Divide into two parts, in one part mix the cinnamon and vanilla in the other.

When the dough has doubled its volume, cut it into 18 pieces of the same size. Form each piece into a ball and put them on a previously greased cookie sheet, leaving space between each one. Divide each of the cinnamon and vanilla balls into 9 balls, flattening them with the palms of your hands. Place one of these over each one of the bread pieces, being sure that they are stuck to the dough. Using a knife, mark the form of a sea shell. Cover and let the dough rise again for one hour.

Bake at 375 F for 20-25 minutes or until they are slightly golden.