

# Cook the Book: 'Spain' by Jeff Koehler

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Despite the popularity of tapas restaurants and high-end Spanish cuisine in restaurants these days, I've had surprisingly few new Spanish cookbooks cross my path. Occasionally I will notice Spanish influence, or else find

chapter headings for "[insert alternative cuisine here] tapas," but these nods towards the country are less than satisfying. So imagine my delight when my copy of *Spain* arrived in the mail.

This colorful, in-depth look at Spanish cuisine is written by famed food and travel writer **Jeff Koehler**. Koehler has lived in Spain for almost 2 decades, penning posts for everyone from *Saveur* to *Men's Journal*. His previous books on Morocco, paella, and Mediterranean staples have received plenty of positive acclaim as well. In other words, Koehler is the right kind of guy from whom to learn about Spanish cooking.

Unlike his previous books, *Spain* is a wide-reaching tome, covering classic dishes from every region of the country. He thankfully resists the urge to delve into the modernist side of things, preferring to stick to good, home-style country cooking. That said, there are few shortcuts taken. Koehler expects you to shop for the best ingredients you can find and to prepare them with care. Cooking from Spain requires a commitment to taking your time and gently coaxing flavors from each ingredient. After all, classic Spanish cuisine doesn't hide behind layers of sauces or a bounty of spice. Each element in a dish is meant to shine on its own.

Because of the inherent simplicity of much of Koehler's food, it is easy to notice missteps; at times I found dishes too subtle and often in need of a boost in salt or acid. These tweaks were easy to make and remember for next time. Koehler does a far better job writing recipe directions. Paella, which we will cook later this week, becomes less intimidating for the newbie (a.k.a.: me) in his detailed, encouraging words. His vivid descriptions of new textures and tastes are written so clearly that it is easy to follow his visual cues. Such thoroughness transforms the unknown into the familiar.

We'll prepare a range of Spanish dishes this week, starting with a few tapas. We'll fry **chicken croquettes**, bake a giant **empanada**, and gently toss together a **salt cod and orange salad**. Later we'll simmer a velvety **fish soup** before ending our tour of Spain with **shellfish paella**.

## Win 'Spain'

Thanks to our friends at Chronicle Books, we have five (5) copies of *Spain* to give away this week. All you need to do for a chance to win a copy is to tell us about **your favorite Spanish dish** in the comments section below.