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OCTOBER 29, 2012

The cooks of Islamic Spain, or Al-Andalus, like the Romans before them, had a penchant for using vinegar-and-olive oil pickling sauces, or [escabeche](#), to flavor and preserve everything from fish to vegetables. The technique survived the demise of Al-Andalus in Spain, as well as in many former Spanish colonies. In my native Cuba, [escabeche](#) was synonymous with [sierra](#) (sawfish), much appreciated for its firm, white flesh. You could go to any cafeteria or restaurant and always find on the countertop a large earthenware [cucurbita](#) filled with fried sawfish steaks topped with an olive oil-and-vinegar pickling sauce. Cuban [escabeche](#) often resemble contemporary Iberian models, simply seasoned with garlic, sliced yellow onion and bell pepper, and some bay leaf. Because escabeches start with a sofrito, the iconic Spanish and Latin American flavor base subject to infinite permutations, it is not surprising to see that [escabeche](#), too, vary tremendously across Latin America. But vinegar and olive oil remain the backbone of this singular, ocean-spanning technique. —Maricel E. Presilla, author of [_Gran Cocina Latina: The Food of Latin America_](#) (W.W. Norton & Company, 2012)

Pescao en Escabeche (Maricel E. Presilla's Fish with Escabeche Sauce)
In Cuba, escabeche, a vinegar and olive-oil pickling sauce, is synonymous with sierra (sawfish), much appreciated for its firm, white flesh.

- 6 (8-oz.) swordfish steaks, cut ½" thick
- 12 cloves garlic, minced

- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 bay leaves
- 2 large green bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and cut into ¼"-thick rings
- 1 large yellow onion, cut into ¼"-thick rings
- 2 cups distilled white vinegar

Rub fish with half the garlic, and season with salt and pepper on both sides; let sit for 20 minutes. Place flour in a shallow plate, and dredge each fish steak in flour to coat, shaking to remove excess.

Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add fish steaks, and cook, turning once, until browned on both sides and cooked through, about 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer fish steaks to a serving bowl or platter; set aside. Add remaining garlic to oil, and cook, stirring, until golden brown, about 1 minute. Add bay leaves, peppers, and onion, and cook, stirring, until softened, about 4 minutes. Add vinegar, and bring to a boil; cook for 2 minutes. Pour over fish steaks and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour before serving.

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