

# A Seder



*The Seder plate at Vic's includes (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) roasted eggs, rhubarb haroset, heirloom celery, Orange Mostarda (recipe p. 98), grilled ramps, and Beets and Pistachio Yogurt (recipe p. 99).*

BY GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

# to Savor





AT VIC'S IN  
NEW YORK CITY,  
HILLARY STERLING  
HOSTS A JOYFUL  
PASSOVER FEAST.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER TESTANI





# Why is this night at Vic's,

an Italian restaurant in downtown Manhattan, different from other nights? The bartenders are mixing Manischewitz spritzes as well as the usual Aperol ones. With the addition of the syrupy Concord grape wine, they taste like kir royales. There's a plate of blistered wood-oven-baked matzo on the pass right next to an order of ravioli. Alongside the regular Italian menu, diners can order off a slip of paper that reads "Fifth-Night Seder," which offers, among other things, a Seder plate, tzimmes, chicken liver, and kugel.

But what comes to the table are not your typical Passover foods. Chef Hillary Sterling, who initiated this alternative holiday meal several years ago, uses tradition as a jumping-off point. Her Seder plate, for instance, embraces the symbolism of the ritual Passover centerpiece, but consists of nibbles that are meant to be eaten and relished. The haroset, a stand-in for the mortar used by Jewish slaves in Egypt, whose suffering and emancipation are at the center of the Passover story, is usually a mash of



Regulars at Vic's in NYC—including Tess McNamara (BELOW, TOP), Eva Karagiorgas, and Jason Burke (BELOW, BOTTOM)—gather for a Seder dinner inspired by Jewish-Italian traditions of the Emilia-Romagna region. AT RIGHT: Sterling's Carrot Farinata (recipe p. 75)



apples, red wine, cinnamon, and walnuts. In Sterling's hands, it's a vibrant pink compote of stewed rhubarb with sherry-soaked prunes, red wine, almonds, and hazelnuts. One bite of her outrageously delicious roasted egg with pecorino—a swap for the plain hard-boiled egg on most Seder plates—may have ruined me for all others.

Sterling's decision to host a Seder on the fifth night of Passover, which lasts for eight days, was inspired by the Seder Hamishi (hamesh means "five" in Hebrew), a ritual adapted by medieval Jews in Spain, Portugal, and Italy, who had been forced to convert to Christianity during the Inquisition. By celebrating on the fifth night rather than the first or second, when most Seders take place, these crypto-Jews hoped to escape scrutiny and persecution. Each year, Sterling, who herself is Jewish and grew up in Brooklyn, looks for menu inspiration in Italian-Jewish gastronomy. This year, she focused on Ferrara, a city in Emilia-Romagna with a rich Jewish history that dates back to the early Middle Ages. This is how tzimmes, an

Ashkenazi Jewish dish of cooked carrots with prunes, became a farinata, a chickpea flour pancake typical of Ferrara, enriched with carrot juice, roasted carrots, prunes, and chile butter. And the requisite brisket? It appears as brisket meatballs. "Everyone makes brisket [for Passover], and the Italians make polpette, so why not bring them together?" says Sterling.

On this night, the brick-walled dining room is boisterous. Amy Winehouse is playing on the speakers. There is nary a Haggadah in sight, and no, the restaurant is not kosher. But the feeling is familial. At one booth, cousins have gathered with their spouses for their third Seder of the week. As New Yorkers who practice their faith openly, this fifth-night Seder takes on a different significance. "On this night we are only with the family we choose," says Eileen Aptman, who has attended previous Seders at Vic's. "It's a wonderful way to continue to celebrate the holidays without the formality. And the ramps on the Seder plate are outrageous."





Sterling's Turkey Schnitzel is extra-crispy thanks to a matzo breading.



## Turkey Schnitzel

ACTIVE 45 MIN; TOTAL 1 HR 45 MIN; SERVES 8

*A meat mallet makes pounding thin cutlets easy; a rolling pin is a fine substitute. Pound gently to avoid tearing.*

- 1 (1-lb.) boneless, skinless turkey breast**
- 3 qt. water**
- 1½ cups kosher salt (about 8 oz.)**
- ½ cup granulated sugar**
- 2 cups finely crushed matzo (from 1 [10-oz.] pkg. matzo crackers)**
- 2 cups white rice flour or finely ground matzo meal (about 10½ oz.)**
- 1 Tbsp. garlic powder**
- 2¼ tsp. fresh marjoram leaves**
- 2¼ tsp. fresh oregano leaves**
- ¼ tsp. fresh thyme leaves**
- 4 large eggs**
- Canola or grapeseed oil, for frying**
- 5 lemons, halved crosswise, divided**
- 3 cups baby arugula (about 3 oz.)**
- 1 cup loosely packed fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves**
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil**

1. Cut turkey breast into 4 (4-ounce) cutlets. Place each cutlet between 2 sheets of plastic wrap; pound with the flat side of a meat mallet until cutlet is ¼ inch thick. Cut pounded cutlets in half, creat-

ing 8 (2-ounce) cutlets.

2. Stir together 3 quarts water, salt, and sugar in a large saucepan until salt and sugar dissolve, about 2 minutes. Add cutlets; let stand at room temperature 1 hour. Remove cutlets from brine, and pat dry.

3. Combine crushed matzo, rice flour, garlic powder, marjoram, oregano, and thyme in a food processor; process until herbs are finely chopped, about 1 minute. Transfer mixture to a medium bowl. Whisk eggs in a separate medium bowl until lightly beaten. Dip cutlets in eggs, and dredge in matzo mixture, pressing to adhere. Place coated cutlets on a plate.

4. Set a wire rack inside a rimmed baking sheet. Pour canola oil to a depth of ¼ inch in a large cast-iron skillet; heat over medium-high until shimmering. Add 2 coated cutlets; fry until golden brown and cooked through, about 1 minute and 30 seconds per side. Transfer cutlets to wire rack. Repeat process 3 times with remaining 6 cutlets.

5. Squeeze juice from 1 lemon half over cutlets. Arrange cutlets on a serving platter. Combine arugula, parsley, and olive oil in a large bowl. Squeeze desired amount of juice from a second lemon half over arugula mixture; toss to coat. Serve cutlets with arugula mixture and remaining lemon halves.

**WINE** Juicy, Grenache-based kosher red: 2016 Capçanes Peraj Petita

## KEEPING IT KOSHER

Passover is the time of year when Jewish people give up leavened foods for seven days in Israel and eight days in the diaspora to commemorate the Exodus of Jewish slaves from Egypt. You may notice grains, beans, or seeds in some of these Passover recipes. They belong to a class of food called kitniyot that have long existed in a gray area: Kitniyot historically have been permissible during Passover to Sephardic Jews (with Spanish ancestry), but not Ashkenazim, Jews from Central or Eastern Europe. In recent years, some rabbis have concluded that kitniyot are in fact kosher for Passover no matter your heritage. But because of tradition, many Jews still do not eat kitniyot on Passover. Where possible, we offer alternatives to kitniyot in these recipes. We'd also like to note that while some of these recipes contain dairy and others contain meat, if you pick and choose the dishes individually, they can be part of a kosher Passover meal.

## Carrot Farinata

PHOTO P. 73

ACTIVE 30 MIN; TOTAL 45 MIN  
SERVES 8

*This cross between traditional stewed carrot tzimmes and Italian chickpea flour pancakes embodies the beautiful blending of cultures that's at the heart of the Seder dinner at Vic's.*

- 1½ cups (12 oz.) dry sherry**
- 1 cup dried prunes (about 6 oz.)**
- ½ cup unsalted butter (4 oz.), softened**
- 3 Tbsp. honey**
- 1¼ tsp. Calabrian chile powder or piment d'Espelette, divided**
- 2½ tsp. kosher salt, divided**
- 1¼ cups chickpea flour (about 4⅞ oz.)**
- 1¼ cups refrigerated carrot juice (such as Bolthouse Farms)**
- ½ tsp. ground toasted coriander seeds**
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil**
- 4 medium-size multicolored carrots, cut lengthwise into ¼-inch-thick slices, carrot tops reserved**
- Pinch of black pepper**
- ⅓ cup canola or grapeseed oil**

1. Bring sherry to a boil in a small saucepan over medium-high. Place prunes in a heat-proof glass bowl; pour sherry over. Let stand until cool, about 20 minutes.

2. Stir together butter, honey, 1 teaspoon chile powder, and ½ teaspoon salt in a bowl until well combined. Set aside.

3. Preheat oven to 500°F. Whisk together chickpea flour, carrot juice, ground coriander seeds, 1½ teaspoons salt, and remaining ¼ teaspoon chile powder in a bowl until smooth. Set aside.

4. Heat olive oil in a 12-inch cast-iron skillet over medium-high. Add carrot slices, black pepper, and remaining ½ teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until just tender, about 10 minutes. Remove from skillet; set aside. Wipe skillet clean.

5. Add canola oil to skillet; heat over medium-high until very hot, about 2 minutes. Pour in chickpea batter. (Oil should come up over batter.) Arrange carrot slices on top of batter; cook 1 minute.

6. Transfer skillet to preheated oven; bake until set, about 12 minutes. Remove from oven; transfer chickpea pancake to a cutting board. Cut into 8 wedges. Top with butter mixture and soaked prunes (drain before serving). Garnish with carrot tops.



Confit Kugel Wedges with  
Chicken Liver Mousse  
and roasted onions.  
OPPOSITE: Diners pass  
Sterling's Seder plate  
across a table laden with  
Oven-Fried Baby  
Artichokes with Lemon-  
Caper Aioli (BOTTOM LEFT)  
and Matzo with Horse-  
radish Butter (TOP RIGHT).  
Recipes start on p. 98.

**MORE ONLINE**

Get the recipe for  
this chicken liver  
mousse online at  
[foodandwine.com/  
vics-chicken-liver-  
mousse](http://foodandwine.com/vics-chicken-liver-mousse).









*Brisket Meatballs  
in Tomato Passata  
with a crumbled  
matzo garnish*



# Brisket Meatballs in Tomato Passata

ACTIVE 25 MIN; TOTAL 45 MIN  
SERVES 8

*Chef Hillary Sterling's twist on traditionally uncooked tomato passata gets a quick simmer with orange, oregano, and chile flakes. Use San Marzano tomatoes for the best flavor.*

## MEATBALLS

### Cooking spray

**3 cups crumbled unsalted matzo (about 5 [7-inch] sheets)**

**1/3 cup water**

**2 1/2 lb. ground brisket**

**2 large eggs**

**2 Tbsp. olive oil**

**4 1/4 tsp. kosher salt**

**1 Tbsp. ground fennel seeds (optional)**

**1 tsp. crushed red pepper**

**1/4 tsp. black pepper**

## TOMATO PASSATA

**1/2 cup sliced garlic (about 18 garlic cloves)**

**3 Tbsp. olive oil**

**2 (28-oz.) cans whole peeled San Marzano plum tomatoes, drained and crushed**

**1/4 cup fresh marjoram leaves (from 1 bunch)**

**5 (4- x 1-inch) orange peel strips**

**1 Tbsp. kosher salt**

**1 tsp. crushed red pepper**

## GARNISHES

**Crumbled matzo**

**Fresh marjoram leaves**

**Chile oil (such as Roland)**

**1. Make the meatballs:** Preheat oven to 425°F. Set a wire rack inside a large baking sheet; coat with cooking spray. Combine crumbled matzo and 1/3 cup water in a large bowl. Add brisket, eggs, oil, salt, ground fennel (if using), crushed red pepper, and black pepper. Mix with hands until combined. Shape mixture into 16 balls (about 1/3 cup or 3 1/4 ounces each). Arrange meatballs on prepared wire rack. Bake in preheated oven until browned and a thermometer inserted in thickest portion of meatball registers 150°F, about 22 minutes.

**2. Meanwhile, make the tomato passata:** Cook garlic and oil in a large skillet over medium-high, stirring often, until garlic is soft but not brown, about 1 minute and 30 seconds. Add crushed tomatoes, marjoram leaves, orange peel strips, salt, and crushed red pepper. Bring to a boil over medium-high; remove from heat.

**3.** Transfer meatballs to tomato passata in skillet. Serve warm, garnished with crumbled matzo, marjoram, and chile oil.

**WINE** Dark-fruited kosher California Cabernet: 2016 Baron Herzog



## Orange Torta

ACTIVE 20 MIN; TOTAL 45 MIN  
SERVES 10

*To make this recipe in a 12-cup Bundt pan, reduce oven temperature to 325°F. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, about 1 hour and 20 minutes, loosely covering with foil to prevent excess browning.*

### Baking spray

**1 cup drained orange pieces from Orange Mostarda, plus liquid for drizzling (recipe p. 98)**

**6 Tbsp. fresh orange juice**

**3 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice**

**6 large eggs, separated**

**1 cup plus 2 Tbsp. granulated sugar, divided**

**1/2 tsp. kosher salt**

**2 cups almond flour (about 7 oz.), sifted**

**Almond gelato or non-dairy frozen dessert, for serving**

**Chopped toasted almonds, for garnish**

**1.** Preheat oven to 350°F. Coat 10 cavities of 2 (6-cavity) mini fluted tube cake pans (such as Wilton) with baking spray; set aside. Process drained orange pieces, orange juice,

and lemon juice in a blender until smooth, about 2 minutes, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Set aside.

**2.** Beat egg whites in a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment on high speed until foamy, about 2 minutes. Gradually add 1/2 cup sugar, beating until stiff peaks form, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer mixture to a large bowl.

**3.** Place egg yolks and remaining 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar in stand mixer bowl. Beat on high speed until pale yellow and creamy, about 2 minutes. Gently stir egg yolk mixture, orange mixture, and salt into egg white mixture. Gently fold in almond flour.

**4.** Spoon batter evenly into the 10 prepared pan molds (about 3/4 cup per mold). Tap pans gently on counter to release any air bubbles.

**5.** Bake in preheated oven until cakes are golden brown and edges pull away from sides, 22 to 25 minutes. Let cool in pans 10 minutes. Invert cakes onto a wire rack; let cool completely, about 20 minutes. Serve cakes with almond gelato; drizzle with mostarda liquid, and garnish with chopped toasted almonds.

## WE'LL DRINK TO THAT

Wine plays a central role in the Passover Seder. Four glasses are consumed throughout the course of the meal, and blessings are made over each one. Wine also makes multiple appearances at Sterling's fifth-night Seder—in the tongue-in-cheek Manischewitz cocktail, in the rhubarb-prune haroset, and at the table itself. To accompany her menu, Sterling is partial to Italian wines. She recommends Northern Italian whites, such as the 2017 Beni di Batasiolo Roero Arneis from Piedmont, which she says can hold up to salt and horseradish. For reds, she recommends Dolcetto, also from Piedmont, or Taurasi from Campania, such as Mastroberardino's Radici Taurasi, which does well with the rich brisket meatballs. In addition, we've listed our favorite kosher options that pair brilliantly with both dishes.