

EATING & DRINKING

IN MY KITCHEN

Francisco Migoya

The 'Modernist Bread' maestro dishes on favorite tools, frozen food and the pleasure of a good gin and tonic

IT WAS ONLY a matter of time before the Modernist Cuisine Cooking Lab in Bellevue, Wash.—command central for culinary geeks—trained its laser focus on bread-making. And when the founder, ex-Microsoft CTO Nathan Myhrvold, sought a partner for this project and a new head for his test kitchen, he turned to Francisco Migoya. The Mexican-born former executive pastry chef of Napa Valley's celebrated French Laundry was at the time a professor at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. "They were looking for a candidate who had three-Michelin-star experience, had written books and had an education background," said Mr. Migoya. "There aren't that many people who fit that profile."

In 2014, Mr. Migoya headed west and embarked with Mr. Myhrvold on meticulous research and development that resulted in "Modernist Bread," a five-volume compendium of over 1,200 recipes published by the Cooking Lab on Nov. 7. Though certainly a food nerd's dream, the work isn't mere science for science's sake. Mr. Migoya applies the same curiosity and enthusiasm to cooking in his kitchen at home, in Issaquah, Wash. "I wanted to make what I was making better," he said. "And the only way to do that is to really understand how it works."



BREAD IN THE BONE Mr. Migoya at home outside Seattle.

KYLE JOHNSON FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The kitchen tools I can't live without are: \$2 metal tongs. It's like an extension of your hand. A fish spatula is great for many things, not just for flipping fish. It's super thin so it slides easily under hamburgers, for example. I wish every kitchen would have a scale. There's nothing more imprecise than using volume to measure. And a thermometer. You don't want to have dry chicken? Take the temperature. When it reaches 162 degrees or so, take it out, let the carry-over heat take it to 165, and boom, you never have to eat chicken that's like sawdust again.

On weeknights, I typically cook: something from the freezer. Last night I made tacos with flank steak I'd thawed. I had good tortillas, and I made a black bean salad and guacamole. It was super fast.

A typical breakfast for me is: fruit, like a banana, yogurt and maybe sliced

turkey, just to keep me going. Sometimes on the weekends I like to make scrambled egg tacos with salsa. I love Mexican breakfast. I think Mexicans do breakfast really well.

If I'm not in my kitchen, then I'm probably in my: art studio in my house, drawing or painting or making a sculpture. Or in my bedroom of course, because I have to sleep at some point.

My favorite season for cooking is: fall, by far. That's when you start to cook things longer, and spices and aromas linger in the air. And there's the produce, pumpkins, gourds, squashes, apples. It's such an aromatic season.

A cocktail I love is: gin and tonic. I hadn't had a gin and tonic until I went to Spain the first time in 2009. It seems like a drink you'd get at a dive bar. Then I saw how it could be

made into a really awesome drink. There's one bar I like to go to in Barcelona called the Gimlet. They make a gin and tonic where every glass has three perfect ice cubes. They pour the gin in to get it cold, the lemon is peeled into your glass so the oil gets in, and they give you the tonic on the side, in the bottle, so you can pour it yourself. Once I had it like that, I was hooked.

The most underrated ingredient is: Old Bay Seasoning. I use it with practically everything. It really brings flavors out. When I'm roasting potatoes: Old Bay. When I'm roasting chicken: Old Bay. Next time you make French fries, toss them in Old Bay.

A food trend that I am totally over is: eating locally for the sake of eating locally. I've had the conversation with hard-core locavores, and then we start talking about tea or sugar, and the conversation ends there. You can probably do it in California, but not in Idaho. It's a little elitist, to be honest.

My approach to cooking is a lot like my approach to: life in general. Honestly, *mise en place* is a way of life for me. Everything that I do is structured by the mentality of having everything ready in advance. Just to make the most of your time and to reduce the amount of errors you can make with any given task.

I love it when my dinner guests bring: dessert. I am a pastry chef, but it's not like I'm making éclairs at home.
—Edited from an interview by Gabriella Gershenson

Chilled Avocado Soup

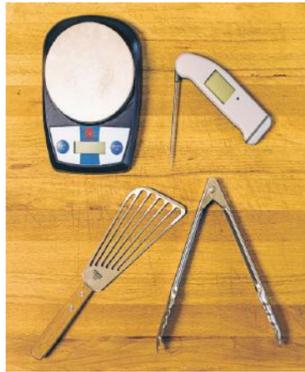
Growing up in Mexico City, Mr. Migoya learned to make this soup from Rosa Cano, his family's cook. "It's great for using avocados that are starting to get too ripe," he said.

TOTAL TIME: 15 minutes SERVES: 4

3 ripe large Hass avocados
1 jalapeño
½ small white onion, roughly chopped
Juice of 2 limes
¼ cup cilantro leaves, plus extra for garnish
2 cups cold water
Salt
½ cup Mexican crema or crème fraîche (optional)
½ cup American sturgeon caviar or smoked trout roe (optional)



1. Rinse and halve avocados. Remove pits and use a large soup spoon to scoop meat into a blender.
 2. Cut stem from jalapeño. If you like heat, leave the seeds inside. If you don't, halve jalapeño lengthwise and remove seeds. (Wash your hands well after you handle chile.)
 3. Add jalapeño, onion, lime juice and cilantro to blender. Pour in 1 cup water. Add a generous pinch of salt. Blend on low speed at first, then increase speed to high and blend until soup is smooth, with the consistency of a creamy or puréed soup. If soup is too thick, add more water in 2-3 tablespoon increments while blending until you obtain the right consistency. Taste for seasoning, add more salt if necessary and blend to fully incorporate.
 5. Transfer soup to a sealable container. Place plastic wrap on surface of soup to prevent browning. Cover container and chill soup at least 2 hours before serving.
 6. To serve, divide soup evenly among four bowls. If using, scoop 1 tablespoon crema on top of each bowl. If using, spoon 1 tablespoon caviar on top of crema. Sprinkle a few cilantro leaves over top to garnish.
- Adapted from Francisco Migoya



TASTE TECH From left: avocado soup set to purée in Mr. Migoya's Vitamix blender; trusted tools.

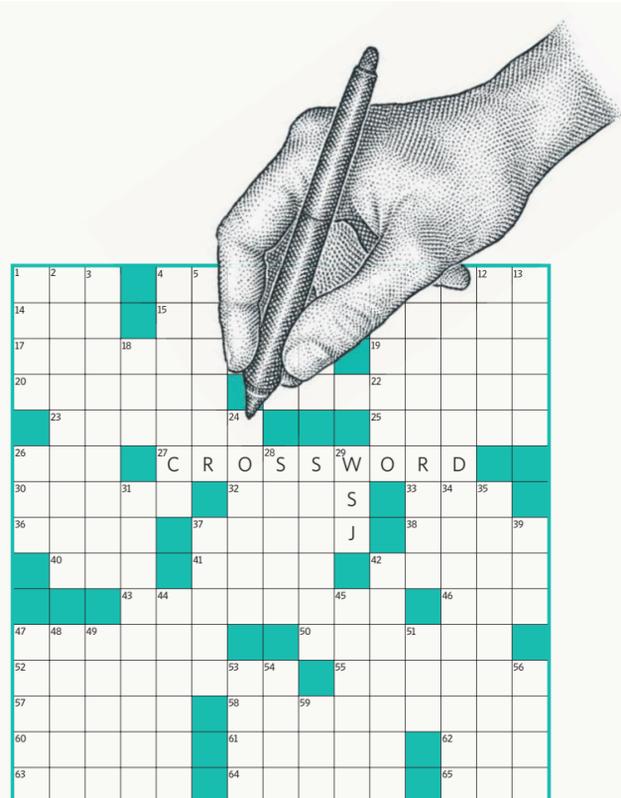
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