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First Sip: Colombia's Sexy Tomaseca

by Karen Catchpole | Oct 08, 2014

2-3 minutes

If we tell you, we'll have to kill you. That the gist of the answer I received when I asked Colombian Chef Leonor Espinosa to provide the recipe for the *tomaseca* I happily sipped after a glorious nine course tasting menu at her Bogota restaurant, [Leo Cocina y Cava](#).

Sommelier Laura Hernandez was a bit more forthcoming. She explained that the details of the recipe for *tomaseca* are, indeed, a cultural secret, but that the drink is based on *viche*, a regional variation of distilled sugarcane. That sugarcane, known as *aguardiente* in Colombia, is infused with cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, anise, and honey, plus a secret blend of herbs.

Tomaseca has been made by Afro Colombians on the Pacific coast of Colombia for hundreds of years and is believed to help restore female reproductive organs after childbirth. It's sometimes called *bebida de la mujer*, though diners of both sexes are welcome to try it.

The *tomaseca* served at Leo Cocina y Cava is made exclusively for the restaurant by women involved in Chef Espinosa's *Fundacion Leo Espinosa*, which was set up to preserve Colombian culinary customs, including such secret recipes.

Chef Espinosa, whose restaurant made the list of [Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants](#) for the first time in 2014, says she serves the drink as a means of keeping Colombian traditions alive and educating diners about its culinary heritage. "Most people have never heard of *tomaseca*," says Hernandez, "but they're anxious to try it."

Served chilled, the golden *tomaseca* was like a mild, smooth cognac and tasted of honey, wood, spices, and maybe a few ancient secrets.