



Rising Star Deborah Benaim Cooks Up Latin-Inspired Kosher Food



If food is involved, Deborah Benaim is a happy camper. A featured celebrity chef on NBC's *Food Fighters*, consultant for cooking TV shows, and private chef in Los Angeles, she is a rising star in the food world. Jewish National Fund was thrilled to have Benaim as the head chef of Kosher Carne, the SXSW kosher Latin food truck sponsored by JNF, which was a hit amongst festival attendees at the SXSW festival in Austin, TX in March.

Born in Venezuela, Benaim grew up in a richly multi-ethnic family: her mother is Venezuelan, her father is Israeli, her maternal grandparents are from Morocco and Eastern Europe, and her paternal grandparents are from Spain. That inspired her creative view on cooking, and also inspired her to challenge herself in cooking ethnically-inspired kosher food.

"You don't see a lot of ethnic food in the kosher community," said Benaim, who was formally trained at Wolfgang Puck's flagship restaurant Spago Beverly Hills. "Translating ethnic cuisine into kashrut isn't easy, but I like the challenge. You figure out unique ways to make dishes."

Looking to bring something exciting and innovative to her home state, Deborah chose to feature the arepa, a flatbread that is prominent in Venezuelan cuisine, on her SXSW menu.

"I was excited to introduce people to arepas," she said. "They're a great food truck food: easy, fun, and full of awesome flavors that people haven't tried before. It was an opportunity to cook the food I grew up with—my comfort food—and create awareness that this dish exists. I've always gotten great feedback when I've made them for parties. I love Latin food; it's such fun, unpretentious food and you can find a way to make it your own."

Combining the vivid flavors of Latin cuisine and the world of kosher food, Benaim served up a menu that featured a variety of arepas, yucca fries, rice, beans, and plantain chips served with guasacaca, a Venezuelan avocado-based salsa. She even added a schnitzel arepa one day.

"Deborah's SXSW menu was brimming with love, soul, and delicious flavors," said Jessica Schapiro, JNF's Manager of Affinities, who was there representing JNF. "Deborah's commitment to cooking, paired with her love of Israel, made her the perfect partner for JNF's SXSW food truck. Every dish tasted like traditional Venezuelan food with a modern and Middle Eastern twist. Deborah and her team's energy and amazing food made the Kosher Carne food truck a SXSW highlight for hundreds of festivalgoers."

"The Kosher Carne food truck was my first time working with JNF, but I already knew it to be an amazing organization," said Benaim. "It was such a pleasure to work with JNF and offer a new channel of connection through the vibrant and familial nature of food. With their support, we fused the Latin and kosher worlds through the Kosher Carne pop-up food truck and served over 1,000 SXSW attendees from Barcelona and Chile to New York and Miami. We brought people together in the dynamic city of Austin to converse and laugh over delicious arepas and salsa music, to learn about Venezuelan cuisine, JNF's work, and the mission of #OpenShabbat. I can't say enough how proud and humbled I am by all of the incredible feedback and the hard work of the Jewish National Fund and Kosher Carne family."

Benaim credits her grandmothers for instilling in her a love of cooking. From her memories of helping her grandmother cook when she was four years old to more recently spending a summer filming her grandmother making family recipes, she has taken the sentimental value of the foods that she grew up with and translated that into her food.

"As a chef, Israel gives me so much inspiration," she said. "Walking in the shuk, smelling the marzipan in the bakeries of Jerusalem, fresh produce that you don't see in the United States... There are so many levels of my love for Israel. I have heritage and deep ties to Israel - my dad was born in Be'er Sheva and my grandparents still live in Ashdod. Aside from Israel being an amazing place, it has this power to create new memories that become nostalgic moments."

"Food really brings people together," Benaim continued. "You can talk about food, and you talk while you're eating the food. It's a beautiful tool."

Contact Deborah Benaim at dbfinecook@gmail.com and visit her website deborahbenaim.com

Pollo con Aceituna (Chicken with olives)

"This has been a staple at Shabbat dinner since I can remember. My grandparents grew up in Melilla (a Spanish colony in Morocco) and moved to Israel and then finally ended up in Venezuela where I was born. All along the way my family has adopted the foods from the many countries in which they've lived."

Ingredients:

1 whole chicken deconstructed into breasts, thighs, wings, and drumsticks
 1 bunch of thyme
 1/2 cup white wine
 1 head of garlic, chopped
 1 white onion, chopped
 1 liter of chicken stock (preferably homemade or low sodium if store-bought)
 1/4 cup olive oil
 Flour
 Salt
 Pepper
 Castelvetrano Olives

Instructions:

1. Take chicken and season both sides with salt and pepper.
2. Dredge skin side of chicken with flour and set aside.
3. In a dutch oven, heat olive oil and sear the chicken skin side down until crispy.
4. Remove from heat (it's ok if the chicken is not cooked all the way... just want to sear the skin).
5. Once you have seared all the chicken, add onion, garlic, sprigs of fresh thyme, and cook in the fat that you cooked the chicken in.
6. Once the onions and garlic start to become caramelized, add the chicken back into the dutch oven with the skin side up.
7. Add white wine and chicken stock.
8. Bake in the oven at 350 degrees for about 2 hours until it is melting off the bone. About 15 minutes before the timer goes off, add the castelvetrano olives and crank up the oven to 400 degrees to crisp up the skin again. ■