



TAPAS

Chap and Eve Alvord spice up a gathering with these savory Spanish appetizers

i was first introduced to *tapas* back in the early '80s, when my publisher announced the location for our company Christmas party.

"We're meeting at 6 p.m. at The Ballroom," he said, proudly. "It's a topless bar."

The man was known for his eclectic taste but, I have to admit, this one left me befuddled. I turned to my colleague. "What did he say?" I asked. "*Tapas* bar," she replied. "It's a Spanish thing. Like appetizers ... but you get to eat lots and lots of them."

And that we did. Seems my eclectic publisher had his finger on the pulse of a finger food that was soon to explode on the culinary scene. Now, 15 years later, *tapas*—savory, robust little bites of food like spicy chorizo sausage and sherried shrimp—are making their way onto chic tables across the country.

It's an impressive transformation for a humble, 400-year-old Spanish and Mexican tradition. According to food writer Pepita Aris, author of *Recipes From a Spanish Village* (Simon and Schuster, 1990), the word *tapa* actually means "cover"—as in a piece of bread balanced over a drink in a Spanish inn to keep out the flies in hot weather. Tasty but simple accompaniments—like sausage, cheese or anchovies—were perched atop the crusty round to make happy hour a little more interesting. Today, *tapas* often make up the bulk of a meal—be it a large, cocktails-plus-dinner event, or an intimate luncheon for a small group.

For Chap and Eve Alvord, who recently hosted an executive committee meeting for PONCHO (Patrons of Northwest Civic, Cultural and Charitable Organizations), intimate was the order of the day. And *tapas*—along with

the culinary skills of chef Peter Kelly from Spazzo Mediterranean Grill in Bellevue—were called into action. The result was a visual feast of six different varieties of the happening appetizers, including sautéed prawns, whipped feta and *Tortilla Española*, a satisfying potato and onion frittata. Though lavish in taste, they were a convenience bonanza for Chef Kelly. "Most *tapas* can be prepared ahead of time and served at room temperature," he explains.

The *tapas* inspired compliments from the Alvords' guests, as did their stunning view of Lake Washington—a feature of which their stucco contemporary home takes complete advantage. Originally a Tudor-turned-Northwest-contemporary, it had all the bones of a good party place when they moved in seven years ago. The lakefront house had plenty of square footage and

boasted a yard roomy enough to become an aesthetic extension of the interior. But there were problems, too. "The A-frame design meant the view was blocked by the roof line," says Chap, president-elect of PONCHO and current chair of the PONCHO International Fine Arts Committee. "The first thing we did was get rid of the [A-frame] roof and open up the view."

Then it came time to banish the boxy interior of the trilevel structure. "When you give a few parties, you realize that if you have lots of little rooms with walls and doors, people get cut off from each other," says Eve.

With the help of interior designer



Sampling *tapas* in the Alvord dining room are (left to right)

Chap Alvord, Diane Kuenster, Eve Alvord, Annette Parks,
Pinky Haley and Carol Evans. Chef Peter Kelly (opposite, below)
applies the finishing touches to a platter of *tyrosalata*
(whipped feta with olive oil and green onions) and sautéed prawns
(opposite, above) for *Gambas al Ajillo* (Garlic Shrimp).

By Hillary Quinn
Photographs by Scott Areman

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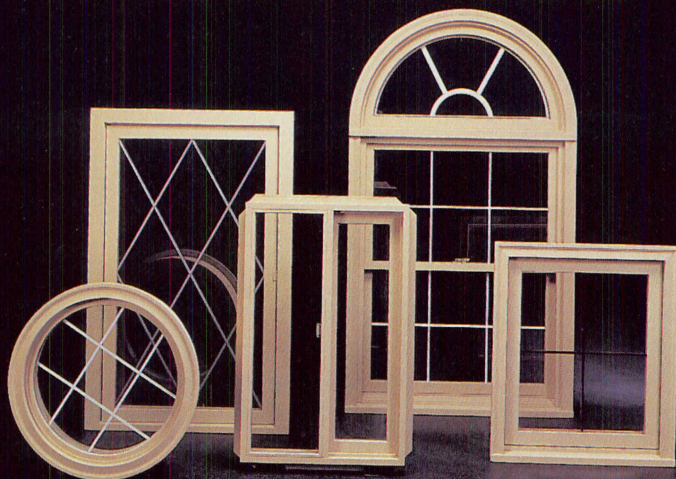
Chester Peralá (who also designed most of the furniture), they opened up the interior spaces, creating airy rooms divided by open railings, staircases and—most notably—pedestals of glass sculpture, a feature that has become the cornerstone of the Alvords' vast art collection. "Initially, we thought glass would be perfect to show off the light in the new house," notes Eve, "but now it's become a passion and focus."

As has an impressive accumulation of sculpture and paintings by renowned Northwest artists such as William Ivey, Kenneth Callahan and Mark Tobey, as well as international names like Miró, Chagall and Matisse. Most are housed in a cozy gallery to the rear of the house, which the Alvords often use for charitable events.

"We host about four to six charity events a year and actually designed the house with this kind of entertaining in mind," says Chap. He and Eve consulted with caterers before remodeling the kitchen, a lavish dark-blue granite space complete with two dishwashers, a bar refrigerator and dumbwaiter to the media room downstairs.

Though plans for the annual PONCHO auction (May 9 at the Sheraton Hotel) were on the agenda this particular day, the conversation kept drifting to the succulent Garlic Shrimp and savory

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Tapas Tips

Ⓢ **MAKE ENOUGH FOR A MEAL:** *Tapas* tend to be more diminutive than traditional American appetizers. The general rule of thumb is to make two to three pieces of each kind per person. Have five different dishes for a satisfying dinner, three different dishes for pre-dinner appetizers.

Ⓢ **DO PLENTY OF PRE-PARTY PREP:** The best thing about *tapas* is the fact that they can be prepared ahead of time and left standing for three to six hours at a shot. Though some items, like the shrimp and frittata (recipes below), are best served warm, most *tapas* need no refrigeration.



Chuck Lytle chats in the gallery with Elisabeth Squires (left) and Diane Kuenster.

grilled eggplant. It was the kind of moment the Alvords like best: a chance to welcome friends into their home to savor good food and discuss charitable matters at hand.

"I was brought up by parents who were involved in the cultural life of the city," says Chap. "Eve and I are simply continuing a family tradition." ►

Hillary Quinn, a former editor of Mademoiselle magazine, is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in health, beauty and lifestyle topics.

© **KEEP THE TABLE FESTIVE:** To invoke a traditional Mediterranean atmosphere, consider brightly colored table linens, an assortment of mismatched ceramic platters and votive candles in rustic terra cotta.

© **SERVE CLASSIC SPANISH BEVERAGES:** Skip the martinis and champagne and opt for glasses of sherry or a chilled pitcher of sangria—made with Chianti, Triple Sec, brandy and fresh fruit. White and red wines, plus sparkling waters mixed with fresh-squeezed juices, are also ideal quaffs.



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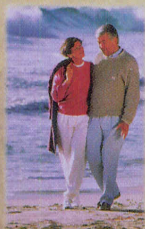


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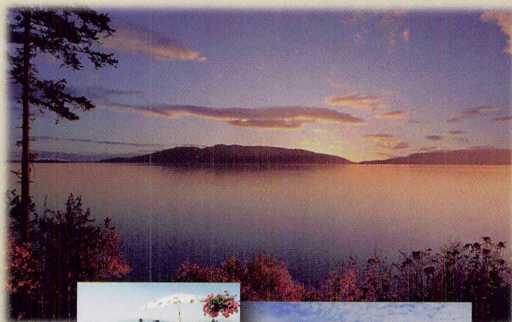
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Gambas al Ajillo

(Garlic Shrimp)

- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2 pounds prawns,
peeled and deveined
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons sherry
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Parsley garnish

Heat oil in sauté pan over medium heat. Add garlic and red pepper flakes and sauté briefly. Raise heat to high and add prawns, lemon juice, sherry and paprika. Cook until prawns turn pink and curl slightly (about three minutes). Season to taste and garnish with parsley. Serve with slices of Italian bread.



Spazzo Tortilla Española

(Spanish Tortilla)

- ½ cup plus 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 pounds potatoes, sliced thinly
- 2 pounds onions
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 6 eggs, lightly beaten

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Heat ½ cup oil in an ovenproof sauté pan and cook potato slices (in batches) slowly and evenly over moderate heat until tender but not brown. Remove to paper towels. Sauté onions in remaining oil, then season potatoes and onions with salt and pepper and combine in a bowl, allowing to cool slightly. Add beaten eggs and toss well with all ingredients. Heat three tablespoons oil in sauté pan, then return mixture to pan and bake in the oven for 7 to 10 minutes. Turn tortilla over in the sauté pan, then put it back on the stove for five additional minutes. Return again to the oven for five minutes. Remove to a serving dish and garnish as desired.



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