



MEXICAN TRADITION · PRECISION-COOK · SLOW-MEAT · MAIN · SUNDAY
LUNCH · DINNER-PARTY SHOWPIECE

Beef Cheek SV Barbacoa · 65°C / 48 h · Avocado-Leaf Finish

Whole beef cheeks rubbed with a toasted-chile adobo, vacuum-sealed with avocado leaves and a splash of stock, cooked sous-vide at 65°C for 48 hours. Connective tissue (collagen) converts fully to gelatin without the muscle fibers ever exceeding well-done — producing a pulled-meat texture with the deep beef flavor that traditional pit barbacoa achieves over six hours of agave-leaf steam, but with absolute control. Finished by a quick blast in the kamado for smoke + edge-char, shredded with two forks, served with warm corn tortillas, chopped onion-cilantro, lime, and the strained cooking liquor reduced to a dark consommé. The Sunday-morning Mexico-City market dish, made with French precision.

Protein Whole beef cheeks (carrillera de res / cachete)

Serves 6 as main · 8-10 as taco filling

Difficulty Intermediate · Advanced timing (48-h plan)

Active 1 h active across 3 days (rub + bag day - 2; finish + plate day 0)

Total 48 h SV + 30 min finish + 30 min plating

Barbacoa Without the Pit, Without the Compromise

Traditional *barbacoa* from central Mexico — the Sunday-morning dish you queue for at the markets in Mexico City, Texcoco, Tlaxcala — is whole goat or lamb (sometimes beef cheek + tongue + cabeza) wrapped in agave (maguey) leaves, lowered into a pit lined with hot stones, sealed with earth, and slow-cooked overnight by radiant heat. The leaves contribute a vegetal, slightly bitter steam-aromatic; the pit's slow descending temperature produces meat that pulls apart with a fork and a broth (*consomé*) so concentrated it's served as a soup-course before the tacos. There's nothing else like it in the world's slow-meat traditions.

You cannot replicate the pit at home. What you can replicate, with precision instruments traditional cooks would have envied, is the **thermodynamic outcome**: a long, low cook in a sealed environment where steam-pressure keeps the meat from drying and gentle heat dismantles the collagen scaffold without ever overcooking the muscle. Sous-vide at 65°C for 48 hours is the modern equivalent. The temperature sits exactly in the window where collagen converts to gelatin (the conversion accelerates above 60°C and runs to completion over 36-50 hours at 60-68°C) while the actin/myosin muscle proteins denature gently rather than expel moisture catastrophically. Beef cheek is the perfect cut for this protocol: it's pure facial muscle wrapped in heavy connective tissue, the same proportion that pit-barbacoa cuts have, asking for the same long collagen breakdown.

What's lost in the SV translation is the agave-leaf steam (specific to maguey, not commercially available outside Mexico). What's gained is exact temperature control — no overshoot, no dried edges, no scrambling to feed a fire at 4 am. The compromise this recipe makes: **avocado leaves** (from the same Lauraceae family as bay laurel, with a similar anise-pine aromatic) substitute for maguey, sealed inside the bag where they release their oils into the meat over 48 hours. Mexican cooks have used avocado leaves for slow meats for centuries; the substitution is regionally honest, not a Western workaround. The kamado finish at the end (10 minutes at high heat with smoking pecan or oak) restores the smoke that the pit would have provided.

This is a **two-tier accessible recipe**. Beef cheek runs \$8-12/lb at Sedano's, La Casa de los Trompos, or any halal/Latin butcher in Miami; you can serve six people for around \$30 of meat. The Tier B path swaps in **wagyu cheeks** from Marky's or a

specialty supplier (~\$40/lb) — extraordinary, but the Tier A version is genuinely complete. The technique transfers identically. This is the recipe you put on Sunday brunch when 8 friends are coming over and you want them to remember the meal six months later.

AT A GLANCE

Specs

<p>YIELD</p> <p>2 × 1 kg whole beef cheeks → 1.4 kg pulled meat (after collagen conversion + trim)</p>	<p>SV TEMPERATURE</p> <p>65 °C / 149 °F — collagen conversion + muscle preservation</p>	<p>SV TIME</p> <p>48 hours exactly (45 - 50 acceptable)</p>	<p>ADOBO RATIO</p> <p>30 g toasted chile mix + 8 g salt + 4 g cumin + aromatics per kg meat</p>
<p>CHEEK SIZE</p> <p>2 × 800-1100 g whole cheeks (one cheek per side of the animal)</p>	<p>DIFFICULTY</p> <p>Intermediate</p> <p>●●●○○</p>	<p>ACTIVE TIME</p> <p>1 h total (15 min rub day -2; 15 min bag; 20 min finish day 0; 10 min plating)</p>	<p>KEY RULE</p> <p>Plan the 48-h cook backwards from service. Bag at 2 pm Friday for 2 pm Sunday lunch.</p>

What Changed & Why

This is a **two-tier accessible recipe**. Beef cheek is one of the great undervalued cuts in American supermarkets — Latin and halal butchers carry it routinely for \$8-12/lb. Both tiers ship the same SV protocol; the differences are ingredient quality (Tier B uses wagyu cheeks + handmade tortillas + premium consommé garnish). The pivot ingredient is the **avocado leaves**: Tier A uses dried Mexican avocado leaves from Sedano's or any well-stocked Latin grocer; Tier B uses fresh leaves from a Florida-grown avocado tree (Pablo can ask any Miami-based cook with a yard) for stronger aromatic. The chile-adobo is the same recipe at both tiers — accessible chiles (guajillo + ancho + chile de árbol) are correct, not a compromise.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
TECH	Pit-barbacoa: meat wrapped in agave leaves, lowered into stone-lined earth pit, slow-cooked 6-8 hours over descending heat	Sous-vide at 65°C for 48 h with avocado leaves sealed in the bag, finished 10 min on the kamado for smoke	The pit is unreplicable at home — most kitchens lack a yard, the leaves (maguey/agave), the stones, and the food-safety supervision a 6-hour buried cook requires. SV at 65°C for 48 h achieves the same thermodynamic endpoint (full collagen conversion to gelatin, muscle proteins gently denatured) in a sealed environment with absolute temperature control. Avocado leaves substitute for maguey aromatically (Mexican cooks have used both for centuries; not a Western workaround). The 10-minute kamado finish at the end restores the smoke layer the pit would have provided. Tradition's outcome, modern instrument's precision.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
<p>TECH</p>	<p>Dry-rub then braise in liquid in a Dutch oven for 4-6 hours at 150°C</p>	<p>Dry-rub with toasted-chile adobo, vacuum-seal with leaves + 30 ml stock, SV 65°C × 48 h</p>	<p>Braising in liquid produces tender meat but dilutes the meat's own juice into the surrounding broth — the muscle ends up cooked AND rinsed simultaneously. SV vacuum-sealing keeps every drop of the meat's own juice in contact with the meat itself. The 30 ml of stock added to the bag isn't to braise; it's to give the steam-pressure system enough liquid to distribute the rub flavors uniformly while keeping the bag wet enough that the meat's surface doesn't desiccate against the bag walls. After 48 h the bag holds maybe 100 ml of intensely concentrated liquor — that's the consommé, reduced further on the stove.</p>

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
TECH	Cook chile adobo from raw dried chiles by simmering in water 20 min, then blending	Toast dried chiles dry on a comal or cast-iron pan 30-45 sec per side until they puff + blister + fragrant; then rehydrate in hot stock 15 min; blend with garlic, cumin, oregano, vinegar, salt	Toasting the chiles before rehydration releases the volatile aromatics + caramelizes some surface sugars + deactivates the raw bitter notes. Skip this step and the adobo tastes flat + slightly bitter. The toast must be brief (30-45 seconds per side maximum) — chiles burn fast and burnt chile is acrid + ruins the rub. The rehydration uses chicken or beef stock instead of water for body. Blend with the rehydration liquid for a smooth paste. This is the Mexican technique, faithful to the tradition.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
ADD	—	Strain and reduce the bag liquor by 60% on the stovetop after the 48-h cook; serve as consomé in small bowls before the tacos	After 48 h at 65°C, the bag contains the meat's released juices + the adobo's chile/aromatic dissolution + the avocado leaves' essential oils + the small amount of stock added — a deeply concentrated liquor unlike anything achievable by braising. Strained through a fine sieve (discard the spent leaves + chile sediment) and reduced from ~300 ml to ~120 ml on the stove for 8-10 minutes, it becomes a glossy, dark consomé with extraordinary umami density. Traditional barbacoa serves the consomé first, in small bowls, with a squeeze of lime + chopped onion-cilantro on top — a soup course before the meat course. Don't skip this. It's half the dish.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
ADD	—	10-min kamado finish at 230-260°C with a small amount of pecan or oak chunks, after pulling meat from bag and shredding lightly	The SV cook produces beef that's perfectly textured but pale — the surface has no Maillard browning, no smoke. Spread the shredded meat on a foil tray (or perforated grilling pan) + place on the kamado at 230-260°C for 10 minutes with a small handful of pecan or oak chunks on the coals. The high heat creates light surface char on the meat strands; the smoke penetrates deeply because the meat is already moist + porous. This 10-minute step is non-negotiable — without it the meat tastes 'sous-vide flat' instead of barbacoa. It's the equivalent of the smoke layer the pit would have provided. Cast-iron skillet over high gas works as substitute (no smoke, but the char) if no kamado access.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
ELEV	Standard supermarket corn tortillas (Mission, La Banderita)	Hand-pressed nixtamal tortillas — from Mi Rancho (HEB), Vista Hermosa (Whole Foods), or made fresh from masa harina (Maseca for Tortillas) on a tortilla press	Tortilla quality matters enormously for tacos. Commodity supermarket tortillas are flexible but flavor-thin, often with stabilizers that make them gummy when warmed. Nixtamal-style tortillas (made from corn lime-cooked traditionally, not just dehydrated masa) have a real corn aroma + slightly chewy texture that holds up to wet fillings without disintegrating. Mi Rancho + Vista Hermosa are widely available and dramatically better. Best-in-class is making them yourself from Maseca (a 30-minute project for a dinner) — Pablo has a tortilla press in inventory. The home-pressed version is the dinner-party flex.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
SKIP	<p>Restaurant garnishes — guacamole, sour cream, shredded cheese, pickled jalapeños, multiple salsas</p>	<p>Three garnishes only: chopped white onion + cilantro (mixed in a small bowl), lime wedges, and one good salsa (a smoked-tomato salsa or salsa verde)</p>	<p>Authentic barbacoa-taco garnishing is restrained: the meat + the consomé + the tortilla are the dish. Onion + cilantro mix (called cebolla y cilantro in CDMX taquerías, served in a small communal bowl) provides crunch + brightness. Lime cuts the richness. One salsa lets each guest choose intensity. More garnishes (especially cheese, sour cream, guacamole) add textures + flavors that fight the long-cooked beef rather than complement it. Trust the meat. Three-element principle from yema curada / bottarga lobster repeats here.</p>

What You Need

● Everyday

The Meat

- 2 × **whole beef cheeks (carrillera de res / cachete)**, 800-1100 g each, trimmed of any heavy silverskin. Source: **Sedano's** meat counter, **La Casa de los Trompos**, or any halal/Latin butcher; \$8-12/lb. Order by phone 1-2 days ahead — most carry but don't always front-display.

The Adobo (chile rub)

- 4 dried **guajillo chiles**, stems + seeds removed (medium heat, fruity/raisin notes — backbone of the rub)
- 2 dried **ancho chiles**, stems + seeds removed (mild, sweet, deep-color)
- 2 dried **chiles de árbol**, stems removed (high heat — adjust to 1 if you want it gentler; or 3 if you want kick)
- 4 cloves **garlic**, peeled
- 1 tsp **cumin seeds**, toasted
- 1 tsp **dried Mexican oregano** (NOT Mediterranean — different plant, different flavor; from any Latin grocer)
- 1 tsp **black peppercorns**, toasted
- 2 tbsp **apple-cider vinegar**
- 16 g **kosher salt** (~2 tsp Diamond Crystal or 1¼ tsp Morton)
- 200 ml **chicken stock** (boxed is fine — Pacific or Swanson) for rehydrating chiles

The Bag Aromatics

- 6-8 dried **avocado leaves** (hojas de aguacate) — from Sedano's spice aisle or any Mexican grocery. Substitute: 4 fresh bay laurel leaves + 1 tsp anise seed (not perfect but workable)
- 1 small **white onion**, halved
- 30 ml chicken or beef stock (additional)

The Tortillas + Garnish

- 16-20 corn tortillas — **Mi Rancho** or **Vista Hermosa** (Whole Foods), or any nixtamal-style brand. Avoid commodity Mission/La Banderita.
- 1 large **white onion**, finely chopped (~1 cup)
- Large bunch **cilantro**, finely chopped (~¾ cup)

- 3-4 **limes**, cut into wedges
- Salsa of choice: 1 jar good salsa verde (Herdez Salsa Verde works) OR see optional smoked-tomato salsa below

Optional · Smoked-Tomato Salsa (10 min)

- 4 plum tomatoes + 1 chile jalapeño + ½ white onion: char on the kamado or under broiler 6-8 min until skins blacken; blend with 1 garlic clove + ½ tsp salt + juice of ½ lime + small handful cilantro. Done.

No Limits

The Meat

- 2 × **wagyu beef cheeks**, 800-1100 g each, from **Marky's Aventura** or via specialty importer (~\$35-45/lb). The intramuscular fat content of wagyu cheek is dramatically higher than commodity beef cheek — the 48-h SV converts that fat into a rich basting layer throughout the meat. Substitute: **dry-aged Angus cheeks from Proper Sausages** (Miami Shores) — call ahead, \$20-25/lb, also exceptional.

The Adobo (chile rub) — Specialty Sourcing

- Same chile + spice profile as Tier A — chiles from Mexico are the gold standard at any tier. Tier B upgrade: source **chiles secos from Rancho Gordo** (mail-order; their guajillo + ancho + chile de árbol are vastly superior to supermarket dried chiles, with brighter color + truer heat profiles). Tier B salt: **Maldon flake salt** for the rub + **fleur de sel** for plating finish. Tier B vinegar: **aged sherry vinegar** instead of apple cider (deeper acidity).

The Bag Aromatics

- 6-8 **fresh avocado leaves** from a Florida-grown avocado tree (any Miami-yard cook can source — ask via the neighborhood). Fresh leaves have 2-3× the aromatic potency of dried. Plus: 1 small Vidalia or sweet onion (instead of standard white).
- 60 ml **house-made beef stock** (instead of additional commodity stock) — see [dashi-tm6 protocol](#) adapted for beef bones, or roast bones + simmer 8 h

The Tortillas + Garnish

- **Hand-pressed nixtamal tortillas** — Pablo presses fresh from Maseca for Tortillas + warm water, on his tortilla press. 30-min project. Or order: **La Tortillería México** (Wynwood) makes nixtamal tortillas by-order for events.
- **Cebollas encurtidas en yuxtaposición**: 1 red onion + ½ cup white vinegar + 1 tsp sugar + ½ tsp salt + pinch of orange-flower water — pickle 30 min, drain, serve alongside the white-onion+cilantro mix
- Premium limes: **Key limes from Robert Is Here** if in season (smaller, more aromatic than Persian limes)
- **Two salsas**: 1 smoked-tomato salsa (made on kamado) + 1 salsa de chile-de-árbol con tomatillo (made from scratch, 15 min) — let guests choose.

EQUIPMENT

Your Kit

- Sous-vide circulator capable of 65°C stable for 48 h continuous

- Heavy-gauge vacuum-sealer bags — 1 large bag (or 2 if cheeks are big)

- Vacuum sealer (or zip bags + water-displacement method)

- Large SV container (8-12 L) with a fitted lid + a ping-pong-ball cover (slows evaporation over 48 h) OR sous-vide-specific lid

- Comal or cast-iron pan for toasting chiles + warming tortillas

- Blender or food processor for adobo

- Fine-mesh strainer for the consommé

- Kamado grill for finish (cast-iron skillet on high gas as substitute)

- Two forks for shredding (or two pairs of meat claws)

- Tortilla press if making fresh tortillas (Tier B option)

- Probe thermometer to verify bath temp on day 2 of cook

MISE EN PLACE

Before You Start

- Day -2 (Friday afternoon): chiles toasted + adobo blended; cheeks rubbed all over with adobo; refrigerated overnight in a covered tray (this is the salt + chile cure)

 - Day -1 (Saturday afternoon): cheeks brought to room temp 30 min; bagged with avocado leaves + onion + 30 ml stock; vacuum-sealed; SV bath set to 65°C and stabilized; bag submerged. NOTE the start time — 2 pm bag-in = 2 pm Sunday pull

 - Day 0 morning: confirm bath still at 65°C (calibrate with separate probe if uncertain); add hot water as needed if evaporation has lowered the bath level

 - Day 0 (1 hour before service): kamado lit, chimney started, target 230-260°C with 1-2 small pecan or oak chunks added once at temp
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- Day 0 (30 min before): tortillas warming on comal stack (wrap in clean kitchen towel between batches); onion-cilantro chopped + mixed; lime wedges cut; salsa(s) ready in small bowls

- Day 0 (15 min before): pull bag from bath; open carefully (still very hot); transfer meat to a tray; strain liquor into a small saucepan; reduce liquor by 60% over medium heat (8-10 min)

- Shred meat with two forks while liquor reduces; spread on foil tray for kamado finish

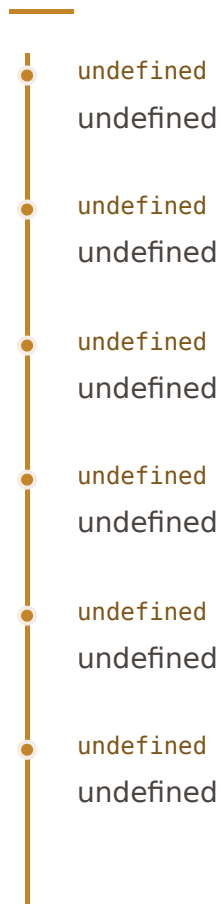
- 10-min kamado blast (with smoke); pull meat back into a warm serving dish; toss with 2-3 tbsp of the reduced consomé to glaze

- Plate: meat in a warm serving dish with consomé-glaze; consomé in small bowls (one per guest) with chopped onion-cilantro + lime to add at table; tortillas warm; garnishes; salsa(s)

- Serve immediately; instruct guests to assemble their own tacos

MAKE - AHEAD

Timeline



METHOD

The Cook

1 Phase 1 · Adobo + Cure — 30 minutes (Day -2)

1. Heat a comal or cast-iron pan over medium heat. Once hot (a drop of water sizzles + evaporates within 1 second), add the dried chiles whole (guajillo, ancho, chiles de árbol) flat against the pan.
2. Toast 30-45 seconds per side, pressing gently with a spatula. The chiles will puff slightly + the kitchen will fill with deep dried-fruit + chile aroma. Watch carefully — burnt chile is acrid + ruins the rub. As soon as you smell a hint of bitter-burn, lift the pan off the heat.
3. Transfer toasted chiles to a heatproof bowl. Pour 200 ml of hot chicken or beef stock over them; submerge with a small plate. Steep 15 minutes — chiles will rehydrate to soft + pliable.
4. Meanwhile: toast cumin seeds + black peppercorns in the same dry pan 30-45 seconds until fragrant. Tip into a spice grinder or mortar; grind to a coarse powder.
5. In a blender or food processor: rehydrated chiles + their soaking liquid + 4 garlic cloves + the toasted cumin + pepper + 1 tsp Mexican oregano + 2 tbsp apple-cider vinegar + 16 g kosher salt. Blend on high 60-90 seconds until smooth — should be the consistency of thick ketchup. Taste: should be deeply chile-flavored, distinctly salty (the cure), with cumin + oregano emerging as background notes.
6. Pat the cheeks dry with paper towels. Rub the adobo all over both cheeks — every surface, into every fold. Use about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the adobo on the cheeks; reserve the remaining $\frac{1}{3}$ in a small jar (refrigerate; you'll add a tablespoon to the consommé reduction at the end for flavor depth).
7. Place rubbed cheeks in a covered glass or ceramic tray (no metal — the chile + vinegar will react). Refrigerate at least 8 hours, ideally 18-24 hours. This is the dry-cure phase — the salt penetrates the muscle, the chile flavors begin to permeate.



WHY THIS WORKS

Toasting dried chiles releases their volatile aromatic compounds (capsaicin is heat-stable, but the fruit-and-leather notes that distinguish guajillo from ancho live in volatile esters that toasting unlocks). The rehydration in stock (not water) adds body to the resulting paste. The 18-24-h cure in the refrigerator allows salt diffusion into the meat (the standard dry-brine principle: at refrigeration temperature, salt penetrates ~3 mm per 12 hours into a muscle the thickness of a beef cheek), as well as initial chile-flavor migration via the cure's water content. By the time the cheek goes into the SV bag, the surface and outer few millimeters are already deeply seasoned + chile-flavored.

2 Phase 2 · Bag + Submerge — 15 minutes (Day -1)

1. Pull cheeks from fridge 30 minutes before bagging — let them come closer to room temperature so the bag's contents aren't refrigerator-cold when sealed (faster equilibration in the SV bath).
2. Set the SV circulator to 65°C and let the bath stabilize 15 minutes before bag-in. Use a large container (8-12 L) covered with a lid OR with a layer of ping-pong balls to slow evaporation over the 48-hour cook.
3. Have one large vacuum-sealer bag ready (heavy-gauge — standard FoodSaver bags work but use the moist-food setting; chamber-vacuum bags ideal). Both cheeks fit in one bag if it's large; otherwise use two bags + cook simultaneously.
4. Place cheeks in the bag in a single layer. Add: 6-8 avocado leaves (tucked around the meat — they release oils slowly during the cook), 1 halved white onion (skin off), 30 ml additional stock (helps moisture distribution).
5. Vacuum-seal slowly. Watch for liquid being pulled toward the seal strip — if liquid approaches, pause vacuum + seal immediately. Modern moist-food settings or chamber sealers handle this easily; older FoodSaver units require attention.
6. If using water-displacement (no vacuum sealer): heavy-duty zip bags, seal almost completely, lower into water bath slowly (water pressure displaces air), seal the last corner above water level. Use a metal spoon or weight to keep the bag fully submerged.
7. Submerge bag in the 65°C bath. Note the exact time (this is your T-48 h start).
8. Cover the bath. Walk away. The bath does the work for the next two days.



WHY THIS WORKS

65°C is a precision target for slow-meat collagen conversion. Below 60°C, collagen-to-gelatin conversion is too slow to complete in 48 h. Above 70°C, the muscle fibers begin to expel moisture significantly + the texture becomes dry-shreddy rather than juicy-pulled. 65°C × 48 h is the sweet spot identified across modern SV barbacoa protocols (Modernist Cuisine Tables A.18; Sous Vide at Home references): full collagen conversion, muscle fibers gently denatured + retaining moisture, texture is pulled-shreddy with a glistening succulence rather than dry. The avocado leaves work their oils slowly into the meat over 48 h — same principle as cooking a brisket wrapped in butcher paper, but inside-out.

3

Phase 3 · Pull, Strain, Reduce, Shred — 25 minutes (Day 0)

1. At 48 hours exact (acceptable: 45-50 h), light the kamado for the finish step — target 230-260°C with 1-2 small pecan or oak chunks ready to add at temp.
2. Pull the bag from the bath. The bag is very hot — use tongs + a kitchen towel. Place on a sheet pan to catch any leak.
3. Open the bag over a bowl, slowly, near the seal. Hot steam will escape — don't lean over it. Pour the bag contents (cheeks + leaves + onion + liquor) into the bowl.
4. Lift the cheeks out of the liquor with two large slotted spoons. Place on a clean sheet pan or cutting board.
5. Strain the bowl contents through a fine-mesh sieve into a small saucepan. Discard the spent leaves + onion + chile sediment caught in the sieve. The strained liquor (~250-300 ml) is the consommé-base.
6. Set the saucepan over medium heat. Reduce the liquor by 60% (start: ~300 ml; end: ~120 ml). Takes 8-10 minutes. Stir occasionally; you're concentrating, not searing — moderate bubble, not aggressive boil. Add 1 tablespoon of the reserved adobo (from Phase 1) for added depth + body. Taste: should be deeply concentrated + slightly chile-spicy + meaty. Adjust salt only if needed (probably already correct from the cure).
7. While the consommé reduces: shred the cheeks. The meat will pull apart with two forks (or your hands if cool enough — wear gloves) into long fibrous strands with no resistance. Discard any large fat pockets that didn't render (uncommon — most fat will have melted into the bag liquor); keep the smaller intramuscular fat that's now silky + integrated.
8. Spread the shredded meat in a single layer on a foil-lined tray (about 1 cm thick spread).



WHY THIS WORKS

Strained + reduced bag liquor is the single most concentrated meat-consommé you'll ever make at home. After 48 h of low-temperature sealed cook, the liquor contains: dissolved gelatin (5-8% of the meat's collagen converted to gelatin = ~80g gelatin in solution), all the meat's released soluble proteins, the chile + spice extracts, and the avocado-leaf essential oils. Reducing it 60% concentrates these elements without breaking the gelatin (gelatin is heat-stable up to ~95°C; you're reducing at 80-85°C with a moderate bubble). The reduced liquor, served as a soup-course, is the half of the dish that turns dinner into an event.

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Phase 4 · Kamado Finish + Plate — 15 minutes

1. Confirm kamado at 230-260°C. Add 1-2 small pecan or oak chunks directly on the coals (they'll smolder fast at this temp; you want a brief smoke pulse, not an extended smoke).
2. Slide the foil tray of shredded meat onto the kamado grates (or directly on a perforated grilling pan if you have one). Close the lid.
3. 10 minutes exact — set a timer. Don't lift the lid (lets out smoke). At 5 minutes you can briefly check; at 10 minutes pull regardless.
4. Pull the meat off. Transfer immediately to a warm serving dish (a Dutch oven pre-warmed in a 60°C oven works well). Toss the meat with 2-3 tablespoons of the reduced consomé to glaze + re-moisten — the kamado heat will have lightly dried the surface.
5. Pour the remaining consomé (about 90-100 ml after glazing) into 6 small espresso cups or sake cups — one per guest. The consomé is served as a soup-course before the tacos.
6. Plating: place the warm serving dish of glazed meat in the center of the table. Surround with: stack of warm tortillas (wrapped in clean towel to retain heat), a small bowl of chopped white onion + cilantro mix, lime wedges in a small dish, salsa(s) in small bowls. Each guest's place set with one small bowl of consomé + one regular plate.
7. At service: instruct guests to drink the consomé first (with a squeeze of lime + a pinch of the onion-cilantro stirred in if they like — some prefer it pure). Then proceed to assembling tacos: warm tortilla, generous spoon of meat (1 ½ - 2 tbsp), pinch of onion-cilantro, splash of salsa, squeeze of lime.



WHY THIS WORKS

10 minutes at 230-260°C with smoke is enough to deposit a smoke layer + create light surface caramelization on the shredded meat without drying it (the moisture in the strands evaporates fastest from the outside; 10 minutes is short enough that the interior moisture doesn't migrate out). Pecan + oak are the appropriate woods for slow-meat finish — both have moderate smoke output + sweet/nutty profile that complements beef. Mesquite is too aggressive for this brief application. Hickory works but is slightly stronger than ideal.

Timing Cheat Sheet

STEP	TIME	CUE
Toast chiles	Day - 2 · 4 : 0 0 pm	30-45 sec/side; aromatic, not burnt
Rehydrate chiles	Day - 2 · 4 : 0 5 pm	200 ml hot stock, 15 min steep
Blend adobo + rub cheeks	Day - 2 · 4 : 3 0 pm	Smooth paste; rub every surface
Cure overnight	Day - 2 · 4 : 4 5 pm	18-24 h refrigerated
Bag + submerge	Day - 1 · 2 : 0 0 pm	65°C bath stable; T-48 h start
Verify bath mid-cook	Day 0 · 8 : 0 0 am	65°C; top up water if needed
Light kamado	Day 0 · 1 2 : 3 0 pm	Target 230-260°C in 60 min
Mise + tortillas warm	Day 0 · 1 : 3 0 pm	Onion-cilantro, lime, salsa, tortillas in towel
Pull bag at 48 h exact	Day 0 · 1 : 4 5 pm	Strain liquor; start reducing
Shred + spread	Day 0 · 1 : 5 0 pm	Two forks; foil tray, 1 cm spread
Kamado finish	Day 0 · 1 : 5 5 pm	10 min exact; pecan/oak smoke
Glaze + plate	Day 0 · 2 : 0 5 pm	Toss with 2-3 tbsp consommé; warm dish

STEP	TIME	CUE
Serve consommé first	Day 0 · 2 : 0 8 pm	Espresso cups; lime + onion alongside

TROUBLESHOOTING

Emergency Protocols

 UNDEFINED

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Technique Notes

● **Universal: 65°C × 48 h — The Slow-Meat Collagen Window**

SOUS-VIDE PROTEIN SCIENCE · UNIVERSAL

Beef cheek, oxtail, brisket, lamb shank, pork shoulder, goat shoulder, short rib — every collagen-dense slow-meat cut converges on the same SV protocol: 60-68°C internal target for 36-72 hours. 65°C × 48 h is the central recipe for cuts in the 800g-1.5kg whole-piece range; thicker cuts (whole brisket) extend to 60 h or longer; smaller cuts (oxtail rounds) shorten to 36 h. The principle is the same: collagen-to-gelatin conversion accelerates above 60°C and runs to completion over the long hold; muscle proteins denature gently at the same temperature without expelling moisture. Pull at any point in the 36-72 h window and you have pulled-meat texture; pull before 36 h and the collagen hasn't fully converted (chewy patches); pull after 72 h and the muscle starts to over-soften (mushy texture, less structural integrity in the strands). This recipe sits at the optimal-result midpoint. Reference: *Sous Vide Mastery* §Slow-Meat Tables; *Modernist Cuisine* Tables A.18.

● **Universal: The Toasted-Chile Adobo Architecture**

MEXICAN FOUNDATION · CROSS-RECIPE

Mexican adobo paste is the foundational chile-rub that goes on everything from cochinita pibil to barbacoa to mole-base. Architecture: 2-3 dried chile varieties (one fruity-medium like guajillo, one sweet-deep like ancho, one heat-bringer like chile de árbol or pequín) + garlic + cumin + Mexican oregano + a small amount of acid (vinegar or citrus) + salt. The toast-then-rehydrate-then-blend sequence is non-negotiable for flavor depth. This same paste, with minor variations, applies to pibil pork (add achiote + bitter orange), mole rub (add cinnamon + clove), pollo asado (add lime + oregano-heavy). Mastering the adobo opens the entire Mexican slow-meat + braised-meat repertoire. Reference: *Mexican Foundations* §Adobo and Marinades; *Pibil Encyclopedia* §Achiote Variant.

● **Universal: Avocado Leaves — The Mexican Cooking Aromatic**

AROMATICS · CROSS-CUISINE

Avocado leaves (hojas de aguacate) are central to Mexican slow-cooking, particularly in Oaxacan and central-Mexican traditions. They contain estragole + anise-pine essential oils that release slowly under heat, infusing braised + steamed dishes with a vegetal-anise note that no other ingredient replicates. Used: in barbacoa wraps (substituting for or supplementing maguey), in mixiote (paper-wrapped slow meats), in black-bean pots (1 leaf per pot adds anise depth), in Oaxacan moles (1-2 leaves in the simmering chocolate-chile base). Source dried from any Mexican grocery; fresh from Florida-grown trees (any Miami-yard cook can supply). The dried leaf is reduced potency vs fresh but still highly effective. Always toast briefly before adding to a dish (15 sec on a comal) to release the oils. Reference: Mexican Aromatics §Avocado Leaves; Hoja Santa + Avocado Comparison Notes.

● **Universal: The Three-Element Plate (Meat + Sauce + Vehicle)**

PLATING DISCIPLINE · CROSS-CUISINE

From the Spanish gilda (sardine + olive + pepper) to the Japanese chirashi (rice + fish + nori) to the Mexican taco (meat + tortilla + onion-cilantro), the deepest food traditions converge on the three-element plate: one protein, one sauce or condiment, one starch or vehicle. Adding more (cheese, sour cream, guacamole, multiple salsas, pickles, slaw) is the American restaurant pattern, not the tradition. The three-element plate respects each ingredient by giving it space to be tasted. This recipe enforces the discipline: meat (cheek), sauce (consomé glaze + salsa), vehicle (tortilla + lime+onion+cilantro garnish counts as part of the vehicle). Reference: Plating Encyclopedia §Three-Element Discipline; Cross-Tradition Plating Notes.

● **Universal: The Consomé-First Service — Two-Course Slow-Meat**

SERVICE SEQUENCING · CROSS-CUISINE

Slow-meat cuisines around the world share a service principle: serve the cooking-liquor first, the meat second. Mexican barbacoa serves consomé in a small bowl before the tacos. Vietnamese phở serves the broth as the dominant element with meat as garnish. Korean galbi-tang serves the bone-broth as the soup with meat optional. French pot-au-feu traditionally serves the broth as the first course, the meat + vegetables as the second. The principle: long-cooked meat liquor is the most concentrated form of the dish's flavor; serving it first sets the palate, signals the seriousness of the meal, and reduces the volume of meat needed per guest (people are partly satisfied by the soup). For Pablo's hosting: this turns 800g of meat into a 6-8 person meal that feels like an event. Reference: Service Encyclopedia §Consomé-First Patterns; Slow-Meat Cross-Cuisine Notes.

● **No Limits: Wagyu Cheeks — Why the Premium Path Matters Here**

INGREDIENT QUALITY · CROSS-TIER

Wagyu beef cheeks (BMS 6-9 / A4-A5 grade, from Japanese imports or US wagyu programs like Snake River Farms or Mishima Reserve) have intramuscular fat content 3-5× higher than commodity beef cheeks. During the 48 h SV cook, this fat melts slowly and basts the muscle fibers from the inside, producing a finished texture that's distinctly more silken + lush than the commodity-tier version. The flavor is also more pronounced — wagyu fat has higher concentrations of monounsaturated + polyunsaturated fatty acids (which carry more flavor compounds) than standard beef fat. For a celebration / dinner-party version, the upgrade is worth the cost (+\$50-70 over the standard ingredient bill for 6 servings). Source: Marky's Aventura, House of Tampa imports, or via specialty mail-order (Crowd Cow, Holy Grail Steak Co). Reference: Wagyu Encyclopedia §Beef Cheek + Slow-Cut Applications; Ingredient Tier Notes.

● No Limits: Hand-Pressed Nixtamal Tortillas — The Tortilla Gap

INGREDIENT · QUALITY · TEXTURE

There is no greater quality jump between supermarket and hand-made in any everyday food than tortillas. Commodity supermarket tortillas (Mission, La Banderita, even Whole Foods 365) are made from dehydrated masa harina + stabilizers; they're flexible but flavor-thin + often gummy when warmed. Nixtamal tortillas (made from corn that has been lime-cooked + ground fresh) have a distinct corn aroma, a slightly chewy texture that holds up to wet fillings, and a subtle alkaline-mineral note that's missing from commodity tortillas. The accessible upgrades (Mi Rancho, Vista Hermosa, La Banderita Authentic) cost \$1 more per pack and are dramatically better. The summit is making them yourself: Maseca for Tortillas (the brand-name dehydrated-masa product) + warm water + a tortilla press = 30 minutes of work for a stack of 16 fresh tortillas that cost \$0.20 each in materials but eat like restaurant standard. For a dinner-party flex with this barbacoa, the home-pressed path is the move. Reference: Mexican Foundations §Corn + Tortilla Mastery; Plating Encyclopedia §Vehicle Quality.

PAIRING

What to Drink

🍷 Wine — The Mexican-Tradition Pair

A bright Spanish or Mexican Garnacha — Garnacha de Aragón (Spanish: Las Rocas, Borsao Tres Picos) or a Mexican-grown Garnacha from Valle de Guadalupe (Bichi Wines, Casa de Piedra)

Long-cooked beef + chile + smoke needs a red with bright fruit + low tannin to refresh between bites. Garnacha (Grenache) is the textbook match — strawberry/raspberry forward, peppery, low tannin, high acidity. Spanish Aragón Garnacha is widely available + excellent value (\$15-25 range). The Mexican-Garnacha route adds geographic authenticity; Bichi Wines (Valle de Guadalupe) imports to a few US specialty shops + is increasingly available in Miami. Avoid: heavy Cabernet (tannin clashes with chile heat), Pinot Noir (too delicate for the rich meat), white wines entirely.

Beer — The Mexican Casual Pair

A Mexican lager (Modelo Especial, Pacífico, Bohemia) or a German-style Pilsner (Jever or any well-made craft Pilsner)

Beer is the traditional Mexican barbacoa accompaniment; the casual-Sunday brunch context calls for it more often than wine. Mexican lager has the right balance — clean malt, mild hops, refreshing carbonation that resets the palate between rich bites. Squeeze of lime in the bottle or glass is standard. Bohemia (the Mexican craft lager equivalent) is the most flavorful of the supermarket Mexican lagers. German Pilsner is the upmarket-Sunday alternative — drier + more hop-forward, also clean.

Cocktail — The Brunch Pair

Paloma — fresh grapefruit juice + good blanco tequila (Fortaleza, Siete Leguas, Don Julio Blanco) + lime + a pinch of salt + sparkling water + grapefruit slice

If serving as Sunday brunch (the traditional barbacoa moment), the cocktail of choice is the Paloma — Mexico's everyday tequila highball. The grapefruit + lime acidity cuts the rich meat + chile; the tequila vegetal-mineral notes complement the smoke; the bubbles refresh between bites. Use blanco tequila (not reposado or añejo — the wood notes don't fit barbacoa). Real grapefruit juice (not Squirt or grapefruit soda — that's the casual version).

Vehicle — The Tortilla Choice

Hand-pressed nixtamal corn tortillas (Tier B) OR Mi Rancho / Vista Hermosa nixtamal-style tortillas (Tier A)

Tortilla quality matters as much as the meat. The vehicle is half the dish. Avoid commodity Mission / La Banderita / store-brand tortillas — they're stabilized + flavor-thin. Spend the extra \$2 for nixtamal-style brand or the extra 30 minutes to press fresh.

Side — Spare and Acidic

Pickled red onions (cebollas encurtidas) + a small bowl of salted radishes — that's it

The dish is rich + chile-heavy. Sides should be acidic + crunchy + minimal. Pickled red onion (15 min in vinegar + sugar + salt) is the classical Mexican accompaniment; salted thinly-sliced radishes (fresh, not pickled) add cool crunch. Avoid: rice (carb-redundant with tortillas), beans (too heavy alongside the meat), guacamole (avocado fat duplicates the consomé richness).

Menu Context — The Sunday Brunch Event

Open: small plate of guacamole + chips + Paloma. Main: this barbacoa with consomé-first service + tacos. Close: tres-leches cake or sliced fresh papaya + lime

This dish as the centerpiece of a Sunday brunch / late lunch for 6-8 friends. Guacamole-first is the right opener (sets the Mexican context, gives guests something to graze while the meat finishes). Dessert is light because the main is rich. Tres-leches is the regional-tradition match; tropical fruit + lime is the Miami-spring alternative. Total event: 2-3 hours at the table.

CONTEXT

Menu Ideas

Sunday Brunch • 6-8 guests

1. Guacamole + chips + paloma (arrival, 30 min). 2. Barbacoa consomé in small bowls (this recipe's first course). 3. Barbacoa tacos with all garnishes + warm tortillas (this recipe's main). 4. Tres-leches or sliced fresh fruit (dessert). 2-3 hours; the Sunday afternoon centerpiece. Around \$80-100 for 6 (Tier A); \$150-180 for 6 (Tier B with wagyu).

Mexican Dinner Arc • 8 guests

1. Aguachile de camarón (raw shrimp + lime + chile + cucumber, opener). 2. Barbacoa consomé. 3. Barbacoa tacos. 4. Frijoles refritos with queso fresco (side). 5. Flan or paletas (dessert). Full-Mexican identity dinner; 3-hour evening meal. Pair throughout with Mexican lager or Garnacha.

Slow-Meat Cross-Cuisine Tasting · 6 guests

1. Rabo de toro Spanish-style (Batch 5 oxtail). 2. Barbacoa SV (this recipe). 3. Brisket kamado-style (Batch 6 brisket). Each protein in small portions (3-4 oz per guest); the dinner is a cross-cultural tour of long-cooked beef. Educational + impressive; for serious-eater friends only — 2 hours of pacing required. Wine: Spanish Garnacha or Tempranillo throughout.

Casual Game-Day · 4 guests

Halve the recipe (1 cheek instead of 2). Serve as casual taco-bar — meat in a slow-cooker insert to keep warm, tortillas + garnishes spread on the counter, beer in a cooler. The relaxed-version application; the same flavor + technique but with no plating ceremony.

YOUR NOTES

Cook Log

Session Notes

Date: _____ · Serves: ____ · Rating: __ / 5

Use this space to record what you changed, what worked, and what you'd do differently next time. Your future self will thank you.