



SPANISH · BASQUE · LIVE-FIRE TRADITION · WILD SALMON · MAIN ·
DINNER-PARTY CENTERPIECE · LIVE-FIRE STATEMENT

Copper River King Steaks · Kamado Reverse-Sear · Refrito a la Vasca

Bone-in cross-section steaks of wild Copper River King — the same six-week-per-year Chinook that defines the loin recipe, but cut into the geometric form that the kamado was built for. A two-zone reverse sear: slow-cook over indirect heat at 95-100 °C dome temp with a single chunk of cherry or apple wood for whisper-smoke until the internal temperature reaches 38-40 °C, then a 90-second direct sear on the skin perimeter to crisp the entire ring of skin around the steak. The sauce is a refrito a la Vasca: thin-sliced garlic browned to faint gold in good Arbequina olive oil, a dried Basque guindilla pepper hissed in the oil for 20 seconds, sherry vinegar added off-heat, finished with flat parsley. Hot sauce spooned generously over the rested steak — toasted garlic chips, chile rings, sherry's bright acid, parsley's green chord. Same fish as the loin; opposite register. Where the SV plate is Japanese-French refinement, this plate is Basque coastal provocation — fire, salt, vinegar, smoke. The version a grandmother on the San Sebastián coast would cook if a wild Chinook ever showed up at the dock.

Protein Wild Copper River King steaks (bone-in cross-section) · Tier A: wild Pa

Serves 4 (1 steak per guest at 300-340 g) · scales to 6-8 with ste

Difficulty Advanced

Active 35 min active (10 min mise + 20 min kamado management + 5 min

THE STORY

Same Fish, Different Statement

A whole wild Copper River King fish is a gift that arrives in two halves. The loin half — the geometric muscle that runs the length of the spine, removed in two clean fillets — is the cut that sous-vide protocols and Japanese omakase counters have spent fifty years optimizing. That fillet is treated in the companion recipe ([Copper River King SV with Brown-Butter Dashi](#)): cooked at 46 °C in a precision bath, served with a fusion sauce that amplifies the fish's own character. Refined, precise, technical. The summit-tier salmon plate that the wild Chinook season exists to enable.

The other half of the fish arrives in a different geometry. A salmon *steak* is a cross-section cut — perpendicular to the spine, including bone, skin around the entire perimeter, and two lobes of flesh on either side of the central bone. Steaks are asymmetric (thicker at the center, tapering at the edges), they cook differently from loins (bone-in versus boneless), and they reward fundamentally different techniques. The bone is a heat conductor (carries warmth into the center) and a flavor source (releases minerals during cooking). The skin around the entire perimeter is a crisping opportunity that boneless fillets don't offer. The shape itself — round, geometric, the silhouette of an old fishing-town dish — invites a rustic register that the loin's refinement never quite permits.

The kamado is the instrument this cut was built for. Not the sous-vide bath, not the cast iron skillet, not the oven. Salmon steaks want fire — real lump charcoal, real wood smoke, real radiant heat — and the kamado is the only home cooking instrument that delivers all three with precision. The two-zone reverse sear protocol mirrors what live-fire Basque kitchens have done with whole fish for centuries: slow-cook over indirect radiant heat first, then finish with a direct-flame sear that crisps the perimeter and concentrates the surface. Internal temperature for the slow phase tops out at 38-40 °C — the fish is still mostly raw when it leaves the indirect zone, which is the entire point. The high-heat sear in the direct zone then takes the perimeter from cold-smoked to crisp-amber in 90 seconds while the interior climbs only 8 degrees during the sear and

rest combined. Final internal: 46-48 °C, exactly the warmed-sashimi register that the sous-vide protocol delivers in a more refined form. Same destination, different journey, completely different result on the plate.

The sauce is a refrito a la Vasca — one of the most leveraged sauce-foundations in Spanish cooking. The architecture: hot olive oil + thin-sliced garlic browned to faint gold + a dried guindilla pepper hissed for 20 seconds + sherry vinegar added off-heat + flat parsley. It takes less than two minutes to build, hits the fish in a flavor layer that cost-per-minute outperforms every other sauce in cooking, and is the thing that turns 'grilled fish' into 'Basque grilled fish.' The pairing logic with the salmon steak is direct: the kamado provides the smoke and crust, the refrito provides the alliaceous-acid-pepper finish, and the fish itself is the unmistakable wild-marine sweetness of Chinook. Three components, one statement: Basque coastal cooking applied to a North Pacific summit ingredient.

This is the second statement the Wild Chinook season permits. If the loin plate is the gift's refined half — the one that demonstrates what precision instruments and Japanese technique can do with the world's most prized salmon — this is the rustic half. The plate that smells of smoke and garlic and vinegar from across the room. The plate that gets eaten with crusty bread on a side plate and the bones get picked clean. The plate that a grandmother in Pasajes or Hondarribia would cook if a wild Chinook ever showed up at the dock instead of the merluza she expected.

Specs

<p>YIELD</p> <p>4 steaks (one per guest at 300-340 g each) · scales 1:1 with guest count</p>	<p>KAMADO · SLOW PHASE</p> <p>9 5 - 1 0 0 °C dome temp / two-zone indirect with 1 chunk cherry or apple wood</p>	<p>KAMADO · SEAR PHASE</p> <p>2 8 0 - 3 0 0 °C direct grate temp · 9 0 sec on skin perimeter + 3 0 - 4 5 sec each flat side</p>	<p>PULL TEMPERATURE</p> <p>Slow phase: pull at 3 8 - 4 0 °C internal · Final: 4 6 - 4 8 °C after sear + 2 -min rest</p>
<p>DRY-BRINE</p> <p>1 % salt by weight · 3 0 min uncovered on rack · same protocol as the loin recipe</p>	<p>REFRITO</p> <p>8 0 g Arbequina EV00 + 6 sliced garlic cloves + 1 dried guindilla + 1 5 g sherry vinegar (off-heat) + parsley</p>	<p>DIFFICULTY</p> <p>Advanced</p> <p>●●●●○</p>	<p>ACTIVE TIME</p> <p>35 min total (10 min mise + 20 min kamado management + 5 min refrito)</p>



TOTAL TIME

60-75 min
(kamado
preheat +
slow-cook +
sear + refrito
+ rest)

KEY RULE

Wipe grate
clean and oil
JUST before
fish goes on
(within 10
sec). Do NOT
pre-oil hot
grates — oil
carbonizes
and fish
sticks worse.

UMAMI ADAPTATION

What Changed & Why

Two tiers. ● **Everyday** uses **wild Pacific salmon steaks from Whole Foods** (Wild Alaskan, sockeye, or coho in cross-section cut — ask the fishmonger to steak from a whole fish if pre-cut steaks aren't available), good supermarket Arbequina, dried árbol chiles or crushed red pepper flakes as guindilla substitute, standard sherry vinegar (Reserva grade), and local garlic. ● **No Limits** uses **wild Copper River King steaks** cut from a fresh half-fish during the May-June run, **Castillo de Canena Family Reserve Picual** or **Rincón de la Subbética Arbequina** for the oil, **Basque guindilla de Ibarra** for the pepper, **Capirete VORS sherry vinegar** (or another aged sherry from Jerez), and **Las Pedroñeras DOP purple garlic**. The fish quality is the largest single variable; the oil and sherry-vinegar quality are second and third. The kamado technique is identical at both tiers — fire is fire, the protocol does the work.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
TECH	Grill salmon steaks over direct medium-high heat for 4-5 minutes per side, flipping once	Two-zone kamado reverse sear: slow-cook over indirect heat at 95-100 °C dome temp until 38-40 °C internal, then 90-sec direct-heat sear on the skin perimeter at 280-300 °C grate temp	Direct-heat grilling of salmon steaks is the home-cook default and the home-cook disappointment. The thick center (2.5-3.5 cm at the bone) and the thinner edges (1.5-2 cm at the perimeter) cook at different rates under direct heat; by the time the center reaches 48 °C, the edges are at 65 °C and rendering fat into the grates. The skin around the perimeter, which is the steak's geometric reward, sees direct heat from one side only and curls without crisping uniformly. The reverse-sear protocol fixes both problems. The slow-phase indirect cook brings the interior to a uniform 38-40 °C with no temperature gradient (the kamado's radiant-heat environment surrounds the steak with even warmth). The high-heat sear is then applied directly to the skin perimeter — the entire ring — for the brief window that the perimeter alone needs to crisp. Final internal lands at 46-48 °C uniformly. The result is a steak with crackling skin around the entire circumference and warmed-sashimi-textured flesh throughout the interior. The texture and visual difference

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
			<p>between this and conventional direct-grilled salmon is dramatic.</p>
<p>TECH</p>	<p>Cook salmon steaks in a cast iron skillet, butter-basted</p>	<p>Kamado, lump charcoal, single chunk fruitwood (cherry or apple) — never the indoor pan</p>	<p>A salmon steak in a cast iron skillet is competent home cooking and the wrong tool for this cut. Three reasons. First: cast iron's even heat conduction means the bone area cooks at the same rate as the flesh, which destroys the bone's role as a slower-conducting feature that protects center texture. Second: indoor pan cooking has no smoke, and a salmon steak treated with kamado-smoke + Basque-refrito has a flavor depth that no skillet preparation reaches. Third: the geometry of the steak — round, perimeter skin — wants live-fire radiant heat that conducts evenly to all surfaces simultaneously, which the kamado provides and the pan does not. The kamado is the instrument this cut was built for. Salmon steaks pan-seared are a different (lesser) dish entirely.</p>

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
TECH	Add 2-3 chunks of hickory or mesquite wood for serious smoke flavor	1 small chunk cherry or apple wood — ONE chunk, light-smoke register	Salmon's natural sweetness rewards mild fruitwood smoke and is overwhelmed by aggressive smoke. Hickory and mesquite — the standards for BBQ pork shoulder and brisket — are too aggressive for salmon and produce an acrid bitter overlay that competes with the fish's character. Cherry and apple are the correct smoke woods for salmon: gentle, slightly sweet, with a quiet ham-pink color contribution on the surface. One chunk is enough for a salmon steak; two chunks crosses into competition with the fish itself. The kamado's efficient airflow means that small amounts of smoke wood go further than they do in offset smokers; do not overload.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
<p>TECH</p>	<p>Brush the grates with oil before placing the fish to prevent sticking</p>	<p>Wipe the grates clean with a folded paper towel and oil the grates with a separate oiled towel IMMEDIATELY before the fish goes on — within 10 seconds</p>	<p>Pre-oiled grates at kamado sear temperatures (280+ °C) carbonize the oil within seconds, leaving a sticky polymerized layer that grips fish skin and makes the sticking problem worse, not better. The correct sequence: scrape the grate clean of any residue from the slow-cook phase, fold a paper towel into a thick pad, douse it with olive oil, hold with long tongs, swipe the grate surface to apply a thin oil film, place the fish on the grate within 10 seconds. The oil is applied at the moment of contact, lubricates the skin-to-metal interface, then begins burning off — but by then the skin has already begun setting against the hot grate and the Leidenfrost effect has begun. This is the single most important technique detail for direct-fire fish cookery and the most common home-cook mistake. Reference: /recipes/whole-fish-kamado Phase 3 for the canonical protocol.</p>

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
TECH	Standard pan-fired refrito made on the stove in the same skillet where the fish cooked	Kamado-fired refrito built in a small heavy skillet held over the direct-heat zone of the kamado for the final 90 seconds — picks up subtle smoke and runs at higher temperature than indoor burners	The refrito made on an indoor burner is excellent. The refrito made in a small skillet placed directly on the kamado grate during the final sear phase is better. Two reasons: the kamado's higher ambient temperature and direct radiant heat run the oil hotter than indoor burners (the garlic browns faster and the vinegar evaporates more dramatically off-heat, both producing more concentrated flavor), and trace wood smoke from the lump charcoal infuses the sauce as it cooks (subtle but real depth that aligns the sauce's character with the fish's). If you don't want to manage the second pan on the kamado, the indoor refrito works fine — but the outdoor version is the dinner-party-grade move.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
ADD	—	Rest the steak 2 minutes after the sear, BEFORE spooning the refrito over	Thick salmon steaks (300-340 g, bone-in) continue cooking for 60-90 seconds after leaving the grate — captured heat in the crust and bone radiates into the center. Internal temperature rises 3-5 °C during rest. This means pulling the steak at 46-48 °C internal lands at 50-52 °C after rest. The 2-minute rest is also the moment when the refrito gets built; spooning hot refrito onto a still-resting steak (rather than a hot-off-the-fire one) lets the sauce land on a stabilized surface and bind cleanly. Apply refrito to a still-cooking fish and the flavor doesn't penetrate cleanly. Apply to a 2-minute-rested fish and the sauce becomes part of the dish rather than sitting on top of it. This rest-then-sauce sequence is the universal Basque grilled-fish protocol.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
ADD	—	Spoon the refrito generously — let liquid pool on the plate around the steak as a sopping zone	A typical home refrito application is a few teaspoons drizzled over the protein. The Basque approach is generous — pool the oil-and-vinegar-and-garlic-chips around the steak so there is liquid for crusty bread to sop. The plate-pool is the most-loved part of the dish for most guests; the bread becomes the vehicle for the refrito between bites of fish. Plan for 30-40 g refrito per portion (not the 10 g a fine-dining drizzle might apply). The economics work: 80 g olive oil + 6 garlic cloves + 15 g vinegar costs \$2 for the recipe at Tier A, and the resulting sauce upgrades the plate from 'grilled fish' to 'Basque grilled fish.'

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
ELEV	Wild sockeye or coho salmon steaks from Whole Foods or a quality fishmonger	Wild Copper River King steaks cut from a fresh half-fish in the May-June run window	Same upgrade logic as the loin recipe — Copper River King in season is the Pacific salmon ceiling, and the kamado-refrito treatment honors it differently than the SV-dashi treatment. The bone-in cross-section steak of a Copper River King is particularly beautiful: the visible marbling in the high-fat flesh, the deep ruby color visible at the cut surface, the perimeter skin with its characteristic silver-gray sheen that crisps to amber under heat. The Tier A wild Pacific salmon (sockeye, coho) is excellent in its own right — perfectly fine for learning the protocol — but Copper River King is the fish this dish exists to celebrate.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
ELEV	California Olive Ranch Arbequina EVOO for the refrito	Castillo de Canena Family Reserve Picual or Rincón de la Subbética summit Arbequina	The refrito's olive oil is half the sauce's character. Tier A Arbequina is light, grassy, accessible — a good baseline. Tier B Picual (Castillo de Canena Family Reserve) is peppery, herbaceous, structured — drives a more aggressive refrito; aligns with the Basque-coastal register. Tier B Rincón de la Subbética Arbequina is the summit-Arbequina path — delicate, floral, complex — drives a more refined refrito; aligns with the salmon's natural sweetness. Either is correct for the Tier B version; the choice depends on whether you want the sauce to dominate (Picual) or harmonize (Arbequina). For a first-cook of this recipe, Arbequina is the safer choice.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
ELEV	Standard sherry vinegar (Reserva grade, ~\$10-15/375 ml)	Capirete VORS sherry vinegar or another aged single-bota sherry vinegar from Jerez (~\$25-50/375 ml)	Sherry vinegar quality is the second variable for this refrito. Reserva-grade vinegar (3-5 years aging in solera) is a fine baseline — bright acid, clear character. VORS (Vinagre de Jerez Viejo Reserva Selección, minimum 30 years aging) is a different category — deeper, more complex, with caramel and walnut notes that pair specifically well with grilled fish. The Tier B vinegar in this refrito doesn't just provide acid; it provides flavor depth that competes for attention with the fish itself. For a special-occasion version of this dish, the VORS vinegar is the third upgrade after the fish and the oil.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
SUB	Dried guindilla pepper	Dried árbol chile or 1/4 tsp crushed red pepper flakes (acceptable Tier A substitutes when guindilla unavailable)	Basque guindilla peppers (dried, mild-medium heat, slightly sweet) are the canonical refrito chile. They're available via Spanish specialty imports (La Tienda, Despaña Brand Foods, Marky's specialty case). When unavailable, dried árbol chiles (slightly hotter, similar profile) work as a substitute; crushed red pepper flakes work in a pinch (less complex, more aggressive heat). The chile's role in the refrito is aromatic-warming rather than spice-hot — you want the chile to register as a back-note, not as the dominant flavor. Use one whole guindilla (or árbol) cut into 4-5 rings; use 1/4 tsp red pepper flakes if substituting. Pull the chile rings out of the refrito before spooning over the fish if you don't want them in the final plate (the oil has been infused; the visible chiles are optional).

What You Need

● Everyday

The Fish

- 4 × 300-340 g **wild Pacific salmon steaks**, bone-in cross-section cut, skin-on perimeter, 1.5-2 cm thick at the bone. Species: wild Alaskan sockeye, coho, or king salmon (whatever's available — Whole Foods Brickell, Casablanca Seafood, Marky's Aventura). *Ask the fishmonger to cut from a whole fish into steak cross-sections* if pre-cut steaks aren't available; this is a standard cut they should know.

The Salt-Cure

- 12-14 g **fine sea salt** (1 % of ~1.3 kg total fish weight for 4 steaks) — Maldon flake or any fine sea salt

The Kamado Setup

- **Lump charcoal** — a 3-quart-pile is enough for this cook (60-90 minute total burn). Your usual house brand or any quality lump (Fogo, Royal Oak, B&B)
- **1 chunk cherry or apple wood**, fist-sized — Western Premium BBQ or Whole Foods has chunks. NOT hickory or mesquite (too aggressive for salmon)
- **Deflector plate or pizza stone** for the indirect zone (or natural two-zone with charcoal banked to one side)

The Refrito

- 80 g (about 1/3 cup) **good Spanish Arbequina EVOO** — California Olive Ranch Spanish (Whole Foods, ~\$15/500ml) or Casa de la Solana Hojiblanca (La Tienda)
- 6 cloves **garlic**, peeled and sliced thinly into 1 mm coins (NOT minced — slices stay intact and visible in the final sauce)
- 1 **dried guindilla pepper** (or 1 dried árbol chile), cut into 4-5 rings · Substitute: 1/4 tsp crushed red pepper flakes
- 15 g (1 tbsp) **sherry vinegar Reserva** — JR Reynolds, Páez Morilla, or any quality Jerez Reserva
- 2 tbsp fresh flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped
- Pinch sea salt
- **Scaling:** the refrito scales linearly with portion count. For 6 portions: 120 g EVOO + 9 garlic cloves + 22 g sherry vinegar + 3 tbsp parsley. For 8: 160 g EVOO + 12 garlic + 30 g vinegar + 4 tbsp parsley. The single 80 g build covers 4 plates with the generous Basque-coastal pool the dish is designed around.

The Grate Treatment

- 1 tbsp **EVOO** + 2 thick-folded paper towels (one for cleaning, one for oiling) + long tongs

Service

- **Crusty country sourdough or pan de payés**, sliced thick — for sopping the refrito pool
- Warm plates (50 °C oven for 10 min before service)
- Optional finish: a flake of Maldon on the steak surface at the table

No Limits

The Fish — Tier B Summit

- 4 × 300-340 g **wild Copper River King (Chinook) steaks**, bone-in cross-section, skin-on perimeter, cut fresh in the May-June run window. Source: **Vital Choice** (Alaska-direct mail-order), **Wild for Salmon**, **Sitka Salmon Shares**, or **Casablanca Seafood Miami** during peak run (call ahead). Ask for steaks cut at 1.5-2 cm thick, with the bone left in and the skin around the entire perimeter intact

The Olive Oil — Tier B

- **Castillo de Canena Family Reserve Picual** (more aggressive, peppery refrito — drives the Basque-coastal register) OR **Rincón de la Subbética summit Arbequina** (more delicate, floral refrito — harmonizes with the salmon's natural sweetness). Pick one based on the register you want; Arbequina is the safer first-cook choice

The Chile — Tier B

- **Dried guindilla de Ibarra** (Basque-grown, mild-medium heat, slightly sweet) — via La Tienda Spanish import, Despaña Brand Foods, or Marky's specialty case. Substantially more complex than generic dried guindilla

The Vinegar — Tier B

- **Capirete VORS sherry vinegar** (Vinagre de Jerez Viejo Reserva Selección, min 30 years aging) — the summit single-bota sherry vinegar; deep, walnut and caramel notes; competes with the fish for attention
- Alternative: **Páez Morilla Reserva 25 años** (more accessible mid-summit option) or **Forvm Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva vinegar** (Cabernet-vinegar, oaky-deep alternative)

The Garlic — Tier B

- 6 cloves **Las Pedroñeras DOP purple garlic** (DOP-protected Spanish purple garlic from Cuenca; more complex, less harsh than commodity garlic) — via La Tienda Spanish import

The Bread — Tier B

- **Pan de payés Catalan country bread** (see [pan-payés-catalan](#) in this collection, or any quality Catalan country loaf from a serious Miami bakery — True Loaf, Edge Bakery)

The Finishing Salt — Tier B

- **Fleur de sel de Guérande** or **flor de sal de Ibiza** — Spanish coastal fleur-de-sel pairs naturally with the Basque register

EQUIPMENT

Your Kit

- Kamado-style ceramic grill (Kamado Joe, Big Green Egg, or equivalent)

- Lump charcoal (Tier A workhorse or premium brand)

- Deflector plate or pizza stone for the indirect zone (or natural two-zone)

- 1 fruitwood chunk (cherry or apple) — quality matters less than choosing the right wood

- Probe thermometer (Thermoworks Thermapen, Inkbird, or kamado-integrated probe) — for verifying internal temperatures during the slow phase

- Long tongs for fish handling

- Fish spatula (thin, slotted, flexible metal) for the perimeter sear flip and edge balance

- Small heavy skillet for the refrito (cast iron or carbon steel, 18-20 cm) — can be made on the kamado or indoor burner

- Sharp paring knife for the garlic slicing

- Heavy-duty wire grate brush for cleaning the kamado grate between phases

- Paper towels (thick-folded, multiple) for grate oiling

- Warm plates (4 — pre-heated in 50 °C oven)

MISE EN PLACE

Before You Start

- T-60 min: portion fish into steaks if not pre-cut (300-340 g per steak, bone-in cross-section, perimeter skin intact). Dry-brine 1 % salt by total weight, on a rack uncovered in the fridge.

 - T-45 min: light the kamado — lump charcoal banked to ONE side (deflector plate optional but recommended for cleaner indirect heat), add 1 chunk cherry or apple wood directly on the charcoal. Lower vent half-open, top vent half-open. Allow 20-25 min to reach dome temp 95-100 °C and stabilize.
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- T-30 min: refrito mise — peel garlic, slice into 1 mm coins. Cut guindilla into 4-5 rings. Measure sherry vinegar into a small pre-pour cup. Chop parsley. Place all mise on a small tray near the kamado (or near the indoor burner if making refrito indoors).

- T-20 min: pull fish from fridge — let temper at room temperature 10 min so the surface is ~10 °C instead of 4 °C. Pat surface bone-dry with paper towels.

- T-15 min: kamado at 95-100 °C dome, stabilized. Verify with the dome thermometer (or a probe inserted into the dome). Steaks onto the indirect side of the grate. Probe inserted into the thickest center-flesh area (away from bone) of one steak.

- T-10 min: ambient watch — internal climbing from cold (~10 °C) toward 38-40 °C. Process takes about 12-18 min at this dome temp.

- T-5 min: prepare for sear phase — when probe reads 35 °C, open the bottom vent fully and crack the dome to spike grate temp to 280-300 °C. The grate will reach sear temperature in 3-5 minutes while the slow-phase continues.

- T-2 min: at 38-40 °C internal: pull steaks to a holding platter. Move deflector aside (or move steaks to the direct-charcoal side). Grate is now at 280-300 °C.

- T-1 min: scrape grate clean with a stiff wire brush. Fold a paper towel into a thick pad, douse with EVOO. With long tongs, swipe the grate surface to apply oil film. Steaks back on the grate within 10 seconds — perimeter-skin-side DOWN (stand each steak on its outer rim, using tongs to balance).

- T-0: 60-90 sec rotating the steak around its perimeter to crisp the entire skin ring. Then 30-45 sec per flat-side (each lobe of flesh).

- T+2 min: steaks off to warm plate, perimeter-skin-up, rest 2 minutes. Meanwhile build the refrito.

- T+2 min · refrito: 80 g EVOO in a small skillet (on the kamado grate over the direct side, OR indoor burner at medium). Add sliced garlic, bring up slowly to faint gold (45-60 sec) — DO NOT brown past gold. Add guindilla rings, hiss 20 sec. KILL HEAT. Add sherry vinegar OFF-HEAT (it will hiss dramatically). Add parsley + pinch salt. Stir.

- T+4 min: spoon refrito generously over each steak — garlic chips visible, chile rings included (or pulled if you prefer), oil pooling on the plate around the steak. Crusty bread on a side plate. Serve immediately.

MAKE-AHEAD

Timeline

- T- 6 0 min · Dry-brine + light kamado
Portion fish 300-340 g per steak; 1 % salt on rack; lump charcoal lit, banked one side, 1 fruitwood chunk added
- T- 4 5 min · Kamado preheating
20-25 min to reach 95-100 °C dome temp, stabilize, vents half-open
- T- 3 0 min · Refrito mise
Garlic sliced 1mm coins, guindilla rings, vinegar measured, parsley chopped
- T- 2 0 min · Temper fish
Pull from fridge, 10 min on counter to ~10 °C surface, pat bone-dry
- T- 1 5 min · Steaks onto indirect zone
Kamado 95-100 °C dome, probe inserted in thickest flesh of one steak
- T- 1 0 min · Slow phase climbing
Probe rises from ~10 °C toward 38-40 °C, dome stable
- T- 5 min · Spike for sear
Probe at 35 °C: open bottom vent, crack dome, grate climbs to 280-300 °C
- T- 2 min · Pull at 38-40 °C internal
Steaks to holding platter, deflector aside, grate at sear temp
- T- 1 min · Clean grate · oil grate · steaks on
Wire brush, oiled paper towel within 10 sec, steaks perimeter-skin-down
- T- 0 · The sear
60-90 sec rotating perimeter, then 30-45 sec each flat side
- T+ 2 min · Rest + build refrito
Steaks resting skin-up; 80 g EVOO + garlic to gold + guindilla + vinegar off-heat + parsley
- T+ 4 min · Plate + serve
Refrito spooned generously over steaks, oil pooling on plate, crusty bread alongside

METHOD

The Cook

1 Phase 1 · Dry-Brine + Kamado Light · 30 minutes passive

1. Place the salmon steaks on a cutting board. Each steak should be a clean bone-in cross-section: round-to-oval shape, perimeter skin intact, central bone visible, two lobes of flesh on either side of the bone.
2. Weigh the total: 4 × 300-340 g steaks = ~1.3 kg fish. Calculate 1 percent salt: 13 g.
3. Dredge each steak in the calculated salt — both sides, including the perimeter skin. Use the full calculated amount.
4. Place steaks on a wire rack set over a rimmed tray. Refrigerate uncovered for 30 minutes.
5. While the fish brines: light the kamado. **Bank lump charcoal to one side** (the other side will be the indirect zone). Use a chimney starter or electric igniter; chemical starters leave acrid residue on the metal that you'll later taste in the fish.
6. Once the charcoal is glowing red-orange (no black bits): add **one chunk of cherry or apple wood** directly on the hot coals. One chunk is enough for the whole cook.
7. Place the deflector plate over the unlit side (the indirect zone). Close the dome. Set bottom vent half-open, top vent half-open.
8. Allow 20-25 minutes for the kamado to reach **95-100 °C dome temp** and stabilize. Verify with the dome thermometer or a probe inserted into the dome's vent.

WHY THIS WORKS

The dry-brine math is identical to the loin recipe: 1 percent salt by weight produces noticeable seasoning that integrates rather than reads as salty on the surface. For bone-in steaks the salt has slightly more surface area to work across (skin perimeter plus two flesh faces) and the 30-min window is the same. The kamado preheat is the slow load of thermal energy into the ceramic walls. A kamado is fundamentally a heat-storage device: lump charcoal lit in the firebox heats the surrounding ceramic to a stable equilibrium temperature, which then holds steady for hours. Reaching 95-100 °C takes 20-25 minutes from cold; trying to rush it produces unstable temperature swings during the slow-cook phase. The one fruitwood chunk added to the hot coals burns slowly (15-20 min) and releases its smoke during the early portion of the slow-cook phase — exactly when the fish surface is still cool and most receptive to smoke deposition. Reference: Kamado Mastery §Two-Zone Setup; Live-Fire Cooking §Wood Selection for Fish.

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Phase 2 · The Indirect Slow-Cook · 12-18 minutes

1. Pull the dry-brined steaks from the fridge 10 minutes before placing on the kamado. The fish should temper to ~ 10 °C surface temperature (not the fridge's 4 °C) — this reduces the time-to-target during the slow phase and prevents excessive condensation on the meat surface when it first hits the warm dome environment.
2. Pat each steak bone-dry with paper towels (both sides, perimeter skin too).
3. Kamado at 95-100 °C dome temp, stabilized. Open the dome briefly, place all steaks on the **indirect side** of the grate (above the deflector plate, opposite the charcoal bank).
4. Insert a probe thermometer into the **thickest center-flesh area** of one steak — away from the bone (the bone is a heat conductor that gives misleading high readings).
5. Close the dome. **Do not open it.** Every dome-open drops the internal temperature 10-15 °C and adds 2-3 minutes to the cook.
6. Monitor the probe temperature. The internal climbs from ~ 10 °C (tempered) to 38-40 °C over 12-18 minutes at this dome temperature, depending on steak thickness.
7. During this phase: the wood chunk smolders and infuses the surface with light fruitwood smoke; the kamado's radiant heat surrounds the steak from all sides, producing a uniform temperature gradient through the muscle (the entire interior reaches near-target together); the perimeter skin softens and absorbs some smoke aroma but does not crisp; the surface develops a faint ham-pink color from the cherry wood.
8. **Pull when the probe reads 38-40 °C.** The fish is still substantially raw at this point — the slow phase is intentionally a controlled warm-up, not a cook.



WHY THIS WORKS

The reverse-sear protocol is a thermodynamic discipline. The slow phase brings the entire muscle to a uniform near-target temperature without temperature gradients (the indirect-heat environment at 95-100 °C surrounds the steak with even warmth, so the center reaches 38 °C while the perimeter is at ~50 °C — both still below cook-completion). The high-heat sear phase then takes the surface from cold-smoked to crisp-amber in 90 seconds while raising the interior only 8 °C during rest. The math: starting at 38 °C internal, surface sear adds ~5 °C carry-over during cook + ~3 °C carry-over during rest, landing at 46-48 °C final. This is exactly the warmed-sashimi register that the SV protocol achieves at 46 °C — same destination, different journey, completely different surface character (sear-crust vs SV-clean). The probe placement away from the bone is critical: the bone conducts heat differently than flesh and gives readings 2-5 °C higher than the actual flesh temperature, which would cause early pulls and undercooked centers.

Reference: Live-Fire Cooking §Reverse Sear Protocol; Kamado Mastery §Two-Zone Cookery; Protein Encyclopedia §Salmon Temperature Tables.

3

Phase 3 · Grate Spike + Skin Sear · 5 minutes

1. When the probe reads 35-36 °C (about 90 seconds before the pull target of 38-40 °C): **open the bottom vent fully and crack the dome 3-4 cm**. This floods the firebox with oxygen; the lump charcoal flares and the grate temperature climbs rapidly to 280-300 °C.
2. Wait for the probe to hit 38-40 °C. Pull all steaks to a warm holding platter, perimeter-skin-up.
3. Remove the deflector plate with tongs or oven mitts (it's very hot). Set aside on a heatproof surface — the kamado is now a single-zone direct-fire grill.
4. **Clean the grate** with a stiff wire brush (vigorous brushing for 20-30 seconds — remove all char and residue from the slow-cook phase). The grate must be clean for the oil film to apply uniformly.
5. **Oil the grate** — fold a paper towel into a thick pad, douse with EVOO, hold with long tongs, swipe the grate surface to apply a thin oil film. This is a one-pass swipe; you're not painting, you're lubricating.
6. **Steaks back on the grate within 10 SECONDS** of the oil pass. The oil applied to a 280 °C grate begins polymerizing immediately; if you wait 30 seconds, the oil layer has carbonized and the fish will stick.
7. Place each steak on its **perimeter-skin-edge** (the outer rim) — stand the steak up on its skin ring, using tongs to balance. The skin ring will hiss dramatically against the hot grate.
8. Rotate the steak around its perimeter every 15-20 seconds — full circle in 60-90 seconds. The entire skin ring crisps to amber lacquer; smoke wisps rise from the grate; the steak interior climbs from 40 °C toward 44 °C.
9. Tip the steak onto each flat side (the flesh face) for 30-45 seconds. Light sear marks build on each face; the interior climbs to 46-48 °C internal.
10. Pull all steaks to a warm plate. Perimeter-skin-up, displaying the crisp ring.



WHY THIS WORKS

The spike-to-sear phase is direct-radiant Maillard reaction at controlled temperature. At 280-300 °C grate temperature, the Maillard reaction completes a mahogany crust on the skin perimeter in 90 seconds; below 240 °C the reaction would take 3+ minutes and the interior would over-cook before the surface finishes. The perimeter-first sear sequence is the geometric discipline for this cut: the steak's skin runs around the entire circumference, so the sear must address that entire ring. Standing the steak on its rim with tongs accomplishes this; tipping to flat-sides afterward adds light sear marks to the flesh faces without over-cooking the interior. The 10-second oil-to-fish window is the most critical timing detail in fire-fish cookery: the oil's smoke point at 280 °C is approached in seconds, and the difference between 'lubricated grate' and 'carbonized grate' is the difference between clean fish release and stuck-then-torn skin. Reference: Live-Fire Cooking §Reverse Sear Direct Phase; Kamado Mastery §Grate Management; Protein Encyclopedia §Maillard Reaction Kinetics on Fish Skin.

4

Phase 4 · Rest + Build the Refrito · 2 minutes

1. Steaks resting on warm plates, perimeter-skin-up, 2 minutes. Do NOT move them, do NOT cover with foil. Foil traps steam and softens the skin crisp you just earned.
2. Refrito in parallel. Choose: small heavy skillet on the kamado grate (high-temperature direct heat, picks up trace smoke — the dinner-party-grade move) OR small heavy skillet on indoor burner at medium heat (cleaner control, fully acceptable).
3. **80 g good Arbequina EVOO** in the skillet. Add the **6 thinly-sliced garlic cloves immediately** — cold oil + cold garlic together. Bring up slowly. This slow rise lets the garlic infuse the oil as both heat together; dropping garlic into already-hot oil produces a more aggressive browning and less depth.
4. Watch the garlic. After 45-60 seconds it reaches faint gold. **Do NOT brown past gold.** Past gold is bitter and ruins the refrito.
5. Add the **guindilla pepper rings**. They hiss for 20 seconds, releasing color and aroma into the oil.
6. **KILL THE HEAT.** Slide the pan off the burner (or off the kamado grate to a holding platter).
7. **Off-heat: add 15 g sherry vinegar.** The pan will hiss dramatically — step back briefly. Swirl to combine. The vinegar's bright acid integrates with the oil as the pan cools from 240 °C through the 150-170 °C acid-integration sweet spot.
8. Add the **chopped parsley** + a pinch of salt. Stir.
9. The refrito is ready. Total build time: 90 seconds from cold oil to finished sauce.



WHY THIS WORKS

The refrito is one of the most leveraged sauce techniques in Spanish cooking and the sequence is precise. Garlic in cold oil + slow rise releases the fat-soluble sulfur compounds gradually — the clean aromatic side of garlic flavor. Garlic dropped into already-hot oil browns aggressively, producing more of the harsher sulfur compounds and less depth. The 45-60 sec to faint gold is the precision window: faint gold = clean garlic flavor; medium brown = bitter compounds beginning to form; dark brown = irretrievably bitter. The off-heat vinegar rule is universal Spanish cooking: vinegar added to a pan above 200 °C vaporizes its bright top-notes (acetic acid esters and aromatic alcohols) before they integrate; off-heat at 150-170 °C the acid integrates smoothly and retains its lift. The pan cools from 240 °C through that sweet spot rapidly; adding vinegar within 10 seconds of pulling the pan from heat hits the right window. Reference: Spanish Foundations §Refrito Architecture; Sauces and Condiments §Off-Heat Acid; Food Science Core §Sulfur Compounds in Allium Browning.

5

Phase 5 · Plate + Serve · 60 seconds

1. Steaks have rested 2 minutes. Internal temperature has settled to 50-52 °C (peak edibility temperature for high-fat wild salmon). Skin crisp is intact.
2. Spoon refrito **generously** over each steak — about 30-40 g per portion. Garlic chips visible on top, chile rings included (pull them off if you prefer a clean look), oil pooling on the plate around the steak.
3. The oil pool on the plate is the sopping zone. Do not under-portion the refrito; the bread-and-oil moment is what Basque diners remember from this kind of plate.
4. Optional finishing touch: a flake of Maldon or fleur de sel on the steak surface, applied at the table for the textural pop.
5. Crusty country sourdough or pan de payés on a side plate. Sliced thick (1.5 cm), 2-3 slices per guest. The bread is the vehicle.
6. Optional side: a small green salad (mixed greens + sherry vinegar + EVOO + salt) for palate-reset, OR a small plate of blistered padrón peppers as a Basque-aligned vegetable, OR nothing at all (the fish + refrito + bread is a complete plate).
7. **Serve immediately.** Walk steaks to the table within 60 seconds of plating. The dish holds eating-temperature for about 6-8 minutes before the steak cools and the skin softens.



WHY THIS WORKS

The plating sequence is service-time critical. The steak is at 50-52 °C internal after rest; the refrito is at ~150 °C when spooned (still very hot, hisses on contact with the fish, partially cooks the parsley into a hot herb-confit); the plate is at 50 °C (oven-warmed); the bread is room temperature. Together the dish holds eating-temperature for 6-8 minutes.

The hot refrito on rested fish is the right sequence — it lets the sauce land on a stable surface rather than a still-cooking one, which is why the rest period before saucing matters. Reference: Spanish Foundations §Service Temperature; Sauces and Condiments §Hot-Sauce-On-Rested-Protein; Plating Encyclopedia §Pour-Over Sauces.

QUICK REFERENCE

Timing Cheat Sheet

STEP	TIME	CUE
Dry-brine + light kamado	T- 6 0 m · 3 0 min passive	1% salt on rack; lump charcoal banked one side

STEP	TIME	CUE
Refrito mise + temper fish	T- 3 0 m to T- 2 0 m	Garlic sliced, vinegar measured; fish to room temp
Steaks onto indirect zone	T- 1 5 m · 1 2 - 1 8 min slow	Kamado 95-100 °C dome, probe in thickest flesh
Slow phase progressing	T- 1 0 m · ambient	Probe climbing toward 38-40 °C
Spike for sear	T- 5 m · 3 - 5 min	Probe at 35 °C: open bottom vent, crack dome, grate to 280-300 °C
Pull at 38-40 °C internal	T- 2 m	Steaks to platter, deflector aside
Clean grate · oil grate · steaks on	T- 1 m · 6 0 - 9 0 sec sear	Wire brush, oiled towel, 10-sec window, perimeter-skin-down
Perimeter rotation + flat sides	T- 0 · 6 0 - 9 0 sec + 6 0 - 9 0 sec	Full circle on skin ring; 30-45 sec each flesh face
Rest + build refrito	T+ 2 m · parallel	Steaks resting skin-up; garlic to gold + guindilla + vinegar off-heat
Spoon refrito + plate	T+ 4 m	Generous portion, oil pooling, bread alongside
Serve immediately	T+ 5 m	Walk to table within 60 sec

TROUBLESHOOTING

Emergency Protocols



KAMADO WON'T HOLD 9 5 - 1 0 0 °C DOME TEMP - KEEPS CLIMBING

The vents are too open. Close the bottom vent to 1/4 open (or even less); close the top vent to 1/4 open. Wait 5 minutes for the dome temperature to settle. Kamados respond slowly to vent adjustments — small changes, patience required. If the temperature is already at 130-140 °C, crack the dome briefly to dump heat, then close vents tighter.

 **SLOW PHASE IS TAKING FOREVER – PROBE STUCK AT 30 °C**

Dome temp is probably too low (below 90 °C). Open the bottom vent slightly (1/3 open instead of 1/4), give it 5 minutes. The probe should climb. If still stuck: the charcoal bank may be too small or too far from the deflector — open the dome briefly to confirm the coals are still active (glowing red, not gray). Add 3-4 fresh briquettes if needed.

 **SKIN STICKING TO GRATE DURING THE SEAR**

Most common cause: grate wasn't cleaned and oiled within 10 seconds of fish contact. For this batch: use the fish spatula at a shallow angle to lever the skin off without tearing; if you lose a small skin patch, accept it and move on. Next time: stricter clean → oil → fish sequence; verify grate is 280+ °C with an infrared thermometer.

 **STEAK FELL APART ON THE GRATE – SEPARATED ALONG THE BONE**

The slow phase ran too long (steaks above 45 °C internal at pull). The flesh has separated from the bone before the sear. Rescue: gently re-form each steak on the grate, sear flat-sides only (skip the perimeter-skin sear if it's structurally compromised), serve as a more rustic plate. Next time: probe accuracy is key; pull at 38-40 °C, not above 42 °C.

 **REFRITO GARLIC BROWNED PAST GOLD → BITTER**

Discard the refrito and start over with fresh oil and garlic. Bitter garlic poisons the entire sauce; it cannot be rescued. Next time: pull garlic the INSTANT it shows faint gold (not light gold, not medium gold — faint). The cold-oil + slow-rise start is your best friend for control.

 **REFRITO TASTES FLAT – NO ACID BRIGHTNESS**

Vinegar was added on-heat; acid aromatics evaporated. Add another tsp of sherry vinegar off-heat at plating; whisk in. Should restore the bright lift. Next time: strict OFF-HEAT rule — pan slides off burner first, vinegar in second, no exceptions.

 **WOOD SMOKE IS TOO AGGRESSIVE – FISH TASTES ACRID**

Too much wood, or wrong wood. If using hickory or mesquite by mistake: the fish is over-smoked beyond recovery for this batch. Serve with extra refrito to compensate. Next time: ONE chunk cherry or apple, never hickory or mesquite for salmon.

 SALMON INTERIOR IS OPAQUE/FIRM INSTEAD OF WARMED-SASHIMI

Over-cooked. Slow phase ran too high or sear ran too long. Texture is still acceptable but loses the warmed-sashimi distinction. Plating note: extra refrito provides moisture; serve with bread to bulk the plate. Next time: probe accuracy, strict 38-40 °C pull, sear time 60-90 sec on perimeter + 30-45 sec on flats.

 NO GUINDILLA AVAILABLE

Use a dried árbol chile (slightly hotter, similar Spanish character) cut into rings. Or 1/4 tsp crushed red pepper flakes (less complex, more aggressive heat — start with less, taste). The chile's role is aromatic-warming, not spice-hot.

 IT'S RAINING AND I CAN'T RUN THE KAMADO

The kamado-refrito plate cannot be properly replicated indoors — pan-searing salmon steaks loses the smoke and the perimeter sear is impossible without grates. Two options: (1) postpone the cook to the next clear day (vacuum-seal the steaks, hold 1-2 more days on ice in the fridge), or (2) shift to a completely different protocol — pan-sear flat-side only at 240 °C in cast iron with clarified butter, 60-90 sec per side, then plate with the refrito over the top. The pan version is a different dish and worth doing well; don't try to pretend it's the kamado plate.

Technique Notes

● **The Reverse-Sear Protocol for Live-Fire Fish**

KAMADO COOKERY · UNIVERSAL FOR THICK CUTS

The reverse-sear protocol — slow-cook over indirect heat to near-target internal temperature, then finish with a direct-heat sear — is the universal technique for thick cuts of fish (bone-in steaks, whole side portions, large fillets) on a kamado or any two-zone grill setup. The thermodynamic logic: the indirect slow phase brings the entire muscle to uniform near-target temperature without temperature gradients (the radiant heat environment surrounds the cut with even warmth); the direct sear phase then takes the surface from cold-smoked to crisp-amber in 60-90 seconds while raising the interior only 8 °C during rest. Same destination as the sous-vide bath, different journey, different surface character. Applies to: salmon steaks (this recipe), salmon whole-sides (mid-summer salmon parties), thick tuna loin steaks (1+ kg cuts), whole snapper or grouper (cross-cuisine), bone-in pork chops on the same principles. Internal targets vary by protein — salmon at 38-40 °C pull / 46-48 °C final; tuna at 35 °C pull / 42 °C final; whitefish at 45 °C pull / 52 °C final. The probe is the only reliable indicator across all of these. Reference: Live-Fire Cooking §Reverse Sear; Kamado Mastery §Two-Zone Protocols; Protein Encyclopedia §Temperature Tables.

● **Why One Fruitwood Chunk — Smoke Restraint for Fish**

WOOD SELECTION · LIVE-FIRE UNIVERSAL

Salmon and most other fish reward mild fruitwood smoke (cherry, apple) and are overwhelmed by aggressive smoke (hickory, mesquite). The chemistry: hickory and mesquite produce high concentrations of phenolic compounds (guaiacol, syringol, eugenol) that read as 'BBQ smoke' on pork and beef but as 'acid bitter overlay' on fish. Cherry and apple produce lower concentrations of phenolics plus higher concentrations of sweet-aldehyde compounds (vanillin, hydroxymethylfurfural) that complement the natural sweetness of salmon and other delicate fish. One chunk (fist-sized, maybe 60-80 g) is enough for a 60-90 minute cook with 4 steaks; the chunk smolders for 15-20 minutes and contributes its smoke during the early phase of the cook when the fish surface is still cool and most receptive to smoke deposition. Two chunks crosses into competition with the fish itself; never go above one for salmon. Reference: Live-Fire Cooking §Wood Chemistry; Kamado Mastery §Wood Selection by Protein.

● The Grate-Clean-and-Oil-in-10-Seconds Rule

LIVE-FIRE TECHNIQUE · UNIVERSAL FOR FISH

The single most important technique detail in fire-fish cookery: wipe the grate clean of all residue from the slow-cook phase, oil the grate with a paper-towel-and-tongs pass, and place the fish on the grate within 10 SECONDS. Pre-oiled grates at sear temperatures (280+ °C) carbonize the oil layer within seconds, leaving a sticky polymerized film that grips fish skin and tears it on flip. The correct sequence is non-negotiable: clean (no residue), oil (thin film, applied at the moment of contact), fish on within 10 seconds (before the oil layer carbonizes). This rule applies to: salmon steaks (this recipe), whole fish on the kamado, any direct-grilling of fish or shellfish. The 10-second window is genuine; do not test it. Reference: Live-Fire Cooking §Grate Management; Kamado Mastery §Fish-Specific Grate Protocols; whole-fish-kamado Phase 3.

● The Refrito Architecture — A Sauce Made in the Last 90 Seconds

SPANISH FOUNDATION · UNIVERSAL SAUCE-TECHNIQUE

The refrito is one of the most leveraged sauce-foundations in Spanish cooking. Template: (1) good olive oil in a small heavy skillet, (2) thin-sliced garlic added cold + brought up to faint gold, (3) optional dried chile (guindilla, árbol) hissed for 20 seconds, (4) off-heat acid (sherry vinegar, lemon, pickled-pepper liquor), (5) fresh herb (parsley, chives). Built in 90 seconds; built late (parallel to the protein resting); served hot over the rested protein. Applies to: seared salmon steaks (this recipe), seared white fish (merluza-a-la-plancha-refrito), grilled vegetables, roasted chicken, bean stews, even pasta. The two non-negotiable rules: garlic must reach faint gold and not past (past gold is bitter and ruins the sauce); vinegar must go in OFF-HEAT (on-heat vaporizes the acid top-notes). Master this template and you have a sauce that upgrades dozens of other dishes. Reference: Spanish Foundations §Refrito; Sauces and Condiments §Pan Sauces; merluza-a-la-plancha-refrito Phase 4.

● Rest Before Sauce — Universal for Hot Pan-Sauces on Cooked Protein

REST PHYSICS · CROSS-PROTEIN

Thick proteins (steaks, salmon steaks, pork chops, bone-in chicken) continue cooking for 60-90 seconds after leaving the heat source — captured heat in the crust and bone radiates into the center. Internal temperature rises 3-5 °C during rest. Applying a sauce immediately means the sauce lands on a still-cooking surface — flavor doesn't bind cleanly, the protein continues to change underneath the sauce, and the final result is less integrated than it should be. Resting 2 minutes BEFORE applying a hot sauce (refrito, beurre noisette, salsa verde, chimichurri, brown-butter-dashi) lets the cook finish, the protein stabilizes, and the sauce binds onto a stable surface. Apply refrito to a rested steak and the sauce becomes part of the dish rather than sitting on top of it. This is universal across hot pan-sauces. Reference: Protein Encyclopedia §Rest Timing; Sauces and Condiments §Hot-Sauce-Application Protocol.

● Off-Heat Vinegar — Universal Spanish Sauce Chemistry

SAUCE CHEMISTRY · SPANISH UNIVERSAL

Every Spanish cook knows: vinegar goes in the pan OFF-HEAT. The science: acid aromatics (acetic acid, esters, alcohols) are volatile at moderate temperatures (above ~120 °C, most of them flash off within seconds). Adding vinegar to a 240 °C pan wastes the vinegar — you get the sour backbone without the bright aromatic top-notes. Pull the pan from heat, let it cool briefly (to ~150-170 °C, the sweet spot for acid integration), THEN add the vinegar. The finished sauce tastes bright, balanced, layered. This principle extends to: sherry vinegar in refritos (this recipe), lemon juice in salsa verde finishes, red-wine vinegar in escabeche liquids, citrus in any warm sauce. Universal rule. Reference: Sauces and Condiments §Acid Chemistry; Spanish Foundations §Off-Heat Finishing.

● No Limits: Copper River King + Castillo de Canena Picual

INGREDIENT QUALITY · TIER UPGRADE

The Tier B version of this dish pairs the Copper River King fish with Castillo de Canena Family Reserve Picual olive oil — both are at the top of their respective ingredient categories. The Copper River King provides the fish character (high-fat wild Chinook, marbled, deep ruby color). The Picual provides the oil character (peppery, structured, herbaceous — the most assertive of the major Spanish olive varieties). The refrito built with Picual rather than Arbequina is a different sauce: more aggressive, more pepper-forward, more Basque-coastal in register. For the Copper River King this works because the fish itself is strongly flavored and rewards a sauce that competes; for farmed Atlantic substitutes a more delicate Arbequina is the safer pairing. Castillo de Canena Family Reserve Picual is available via La Tienda Spanish import or specialty olive oil retailers; the bottle is \$25-35 and the difference is genuinely tasteable in the finished refrito. Reference: Sourcing §Spanish Pantry §Olive Oil Varieties; Spanish Foundations §Oil Selection by Dish.

● No Limits: VORS Sherry Vinegar as Sauce Backbone

INGREDIENT QUALITY · SPANISH FOUNDATION

Sherry vinegar quality spans a vast range. Reserva-grade (3-5 years aging in solera) at \$12-15 per 375ml is a fine baseline and works perfectly well in this recipe. VORS (Vinagre de Jerez Viejo Reserva Selección) is a different category entirely: minimum 30 years aging in solera, deeply caramelized, walnut and dried-fig notes, with an acid bright enough to cut but a depth that competes for attention with the fish itself. Capirete VORS, Páez Morilla 25 años, or any single-bota artisan-house VORS at \$25-50 per 375ml drives a refrito with significantly more complexity than the standard version. For a dinner-party version of this dish, the VORS vinegar is the third upgrade after the fish and the oil; together they produce a refrito that reads as 'serious Basque grilled-fish kitchen' rather than 'good home grilled-fish.' Source: La Tienda Spanish import, Despaña Brand Foods, Marky's specialty case. Reference: Spanish Foundations §Sherry Vinegar Hierarchy; Sourcing §Spanish Pantry §Vinegars.

● No Limits: Guindilla de Ibarra — Basque Pepper Specificity

INGREDIENT QUALITY · REGIONAL SPECIFICITY

Generic dried 'guindilla' peppers are available at most Spanish-import retailers and work fine for this recipe. The Tier B upgrade is specifically guindilla de Ibarra — Basque-grown, dried in a particular Basque tradition, with a flavor profile that aligns with the regional register of the dish. Mild-medium heat, slightly sweet, with a distinct vegetal undertone that generic guindilla lacks. Available via La Tienda Spanish import or Despaña Brand Foods. The difference is subtle but real and aligns the chile component of the refrito with the dish's Basque-coastal identity. For most home cooks this is a refinement; for a region-aligned dinner-party version it matters. Reference: Spanish Foundations §Regional Peppers; Sourcing §Spanish Pantry §Dried Chiles.

PAIRING

What to Drink

🍷 Wine — The Basque Pour

Tier A: Martín Códax Albariño (grocery, Rías Baixas) · Tier B: Txomin Etxaniz Txakoli de Getaria — the regional match, naturally petillant, served cold

Direct-fire fish with an acidic-garlic-pepper refrito wants a bright, high-acid, slightly saline white. Albariño gives the citrus-saline profile; Txakoli adds petillance that cuts the olive-oil-heavy refrito and refreshes the palate between bites. Both are under 12% ABV, crisp, low-intervention — the correct register for this dish. Serve at 8-10 °C (very cold for Txakoli). Avoid: oaky whites, heavy reds, anything over 13.5% ABV.

🍷 Wine — The Contrarian Red

Chilled young Mencía (Bierzo) — Raúl Pérez Ultreia or Dominio do Bibei Lapola · OR a chilled Navarra Garnacha rosé

A chilled light red or serious rosé works surprisingly well with the refrito's red-pepper content and sherry vinegar acid. The rosé option is the insider Basque pick — Navarra rosé with a guindilla-driven refrito is a regional echo. Serve cold (10-12 °C). Avoid: warm reds, anything heavily oaked.

Wine — The Splurge

Tier B option: Tinto Pesquera Reserva (Ribera del Duero) — Spanish Tempranillo, structured, mature

For a special-occasion Tier B version where the fish, oil, vinegar, and bread are all summit-grade: a serious Spanish Tempranillo holds its own against the refrito's intensity and the salmon's high-fat character. Pesquera Reserva is structured enough to stand up without overwhelming. Decant 30 min before service. Serve at 16-18 °C (slightly cool of room temp).

Bread — The Refrito Vehicle

Crusty country sourdough or pan de payés (Catalan country bread)

The refrito's oil-vinegar-garlic pool on the plate is the most-loved part of the meal for most guests. Good bread with an open crumb sops everything up. Slice thick (1.5 cm), serve on a separate small plate, room temperature. Avoid: ciabatta (too soft), focaccia (over-flavored, competes), seeded breads (visual and texture clash). True Loaf, Edge Bakery, and Smith & Wollensky bakeries are reliable Miami options.

Side — Optional, Spare

The dish is complete alone with bread. If adding: very simple green salad (mixed greens + sherry vinegar + EVOO + salt), OR a small plate of blistered padrón peppers, OR pan-fried morcilla slices (small, just 2-3 per plate)

The fish + refrito + bread is a full plate on its own. Any side should be restrained — palate-reset role, not flavor competitor. Padrón peppers blistered on the kamado after the steaks come off is the right side if you're already running the kamado; morcilla slices add a Basque-aligned charcuterie element. Avoid: tomato-based sides (the chile handles the red note), creamy sides (nothing in the main is creamy), starch-heavy sides (bread handles the starch).

Dessert — The Contrast

Burnt Basque cheesecake OR olive-oil-and-Maldon ice cream OR a simple flan de huevo

After the bright refrito and the live-fire fish, the palate wants something rich and cool. Burnt Basque cheesecake is the Basque-aligned dessert that completes the regional arc. Olive-oil-and-Maldon ice cream echoes the oil theme (same family, opposite temperature). Flan's egg-cream-caramel profile contrasts without overwhelming. Skip chocolate (too heavy after the refrito), skip citrus sorbet (redundant acid).

Starter — Build the Basque Coastal Arc

Gildas (pintxo arrival), then a small plate of mejillones en escabeche or bonito escabeche suave

Escabeche + plancha-or-fire seared fish + refrito = all three stages of Basque coastal cooking in one meal (preserved → live-fire → condiment-finished). A natural Basque dinner-party arc with zero redundancy. The gildas are arrival pintxos with sherry; the escabeche is the first plate; this fish is the centerpiece.

CONTEXT

Menu Ideas

Saturday Centerpiece • 4-8 guests • Basque Coastal Arc

1. Gildas (arrival pintxo, 1 per guest). 2. Mejillones en escabeche (small plate, 2-3 mussels per guest). 3. Copper River King steaks kamado-refrito (this recipe, centerpiece, 1 steak per guest). 4. Burnt Basque cheesecake (dessert). The full Basque coast from preservation to live-fire to dessert. 2-2.5 hours total. Wine: Albariño through the savory courses; sweet sherry (Pedro Ximénez) with dessert.

The Two-Register Salmon Dinner · 8-10 guests · Both Sides of the Fish

If you have both a loin half and a steaks half from a whole Copper River King fish (the gift scenario): plate the loin first as the refined first main course ([Copper River King SV + Brown-Butter Dashi](/recipes/copper-river-king-sv-brown-butter-dashi), Japanese-French fusion register), then this dish as the second main (Basque coastal register, rustic). Same fish, two completely different statements — purity / amplification first, provocation / smoke second. The arc teaches every guest what wild Chinook is capable of across the spectrum of technique. 3-hour dinner with arrival appetizer and one dessert. The summit demonstration of summit fish.

Kamado Outdoor Dinner · 6-8 guests · Live-Fire Night

Run the entire dinner outdoors on the kamado. 1. Padrón peppers blistered on the grate (arrival snack). 2. Mussels grilled in the half-shell with garlic butter (light starter). 3. This Copper River King kamado-refrito (centerpiece). 4. Wood-fired peach galette or grilled stone fruit (dessert). The full kamado Saturday-night arc — the summertime Miami version of this dish. Wine: chilled Txakoli + a light Mencía through the savory courses.

Weeknight Variation · 2-4 guests · 60 minutes

The dish is weeknight-capable if the kamado is in the rotation — 60 minutes door-to-door. Serve with bread + a glass of Albariño. No appetizer, no dessert, just the fish and the refrito. Tuesday-night elevated cooking that takes serious technique but no marathon time.

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.

