



SPANISH · BASQUE (GIPUZKOAN COAST – SAN SEBASTIÁN / GETARIA TRADITION) · MAIN · CENTERPIECE · TXIKITEO-CLUB CANON

Merluza en Salsa Verde

Thick hake steaks settled into a flour-bound green sauce of parsley, garlic, and fish stock, finished in the oven at 180 °C for eight minutes. The trick is the pan-rocking emulsion — the Basque cocinera's technique — where you gently agitate the pan in circles until the collagen from the hake and the flour in the sauce marry into a single glossy, green, silken gravy.

Protein Hake (merluza) – thick-cut steaks from the back third, 2.5 - 3 cm thick

Serves 4 steaks · one per guest

Difficulty Intermediate

Active 30 min (all hands-on – this is an active cook)

Total 45 min (5 min mise · 12 min sauce build · 8 min oven · 5 min)

THE STORY

The Basque Pan-Rock — Why Hake and Salsa Verde Are Not Just an Ingredient List

If you order merluza en salsa verde in a serious Basque restaurant — a txoko in Getaria, a sidrería outside San Sebastián, an old-school tasca in Bilbao's Casco Viejo — you will watch the cocinera do something that looks, at first glance, like a pointless theatrical gesture. She will hold the pan off the flame, grip the handle in two hands, and rock it slowly in circles. Sometimes for thirty seconds. Sometimes for two minutes. She is doing the most important step in the recipe.

The rocking emulsifies. Hake, when cooked gently in a green-parsley-garlic-broth, releases a specific collagen — a delicate, temperature-sensitive gelatin that will bind with the flour-thickened sauce IF and only IF the pan is agitated to keep the emulsion

moving. Without the rock, the fat separates and the sauce breaks. With the rock, executed patiently, the sauce transforms from a thin green liquid into a glossy emulsion the color of wet moss, clinging to the fish in a way that no other Spanish sauce does.

This is the single most important technique in Basque cooking, and it has almost no equivalent in other Spanish regions. It is called *ligazón* — the binding. In older cookbooks it is described as *mecer la cazuela* — rocking the cazuela. Done right, the sauce looks like a cloudy, unctuous green velvet. Done wrong, it looks like green water with flour lumps. The difference is three minutes of patient wrist work.

The Bosch oven is not the traditional Basque earthenware cazuela on a gas burner, but the technique translates. Sear the hake briefly in an ovenproof All-Clad or cazuela, build the green sauce, slide into a 180 °C oven for 8 minutes, pull out, and do the rocking on the counter for 90 seconds. You will feel the sauce change under your hands. It will go from loose to clingy. That is *ligazón*. That is *merluza en salsa verde*.

Specs

<p>PORTIONS</p> <p>4 hake steaks · 4 guests (one each)</p>	<p>KEY TECHNIQUE</p> <p>Ligazón — pan-rocking emulsion</p>	<p>CUT</p> <p>Merluza rodajas — thick steaks from the back third, 2.5 - 3 cm, bone-in</p>	<p>OVEN PHASE</p> <p>180 °C convection, 8 min</p>
<p>SAUCE BASE</p> <p>Parsley + garlic + fish stock + flour + EVOO</p>	<p>DIFFICULTY</p> <p>Intermediate</p> <p>●●●○○</p>	<p>ACTIVE TIME</p> <p>30 min (hands-on throughout)</p>	<p>VESSEL</p> <p>Ovenproof All-Clad or cazuela (26-28 cm)</p>
<p>CUISINE</p> <p>Spanish Basque — Gipuzkoan coastal</p>	<p>PAIRING</p> <p>Txakoli de Getaria (chilled, poured from height)</p>	<p>RULE</p> <p>Rock the pan. No rocking, no salsa verde. Only flour-coated fish. No stirring.</p>	<div style="background-color: #d9c9b8; height: 100%;"></div>

UMAMI ADAPTATION

What Changed & Why

Two tiers, one Basque doctrine. Everyday uses thick-cut Atlantic cod or Pacific hake from a decent fish counter (true European merluza is hard to source stateside). No Limits gets actual European merluza shipped from a specialty source + a scratch

fish stock built from the cod/hake frames. The scratch stock is the biggest single quality lever — shop-bought fish stock is rarely good enough for this sauce.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI	VERSION	WHY
undefined	undefined	undefined	undefined	undefined

INGREDIENTS

What You Need

Everyday

undefined

- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]

undefined

- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]

undefined

- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]

No Limits

undefined

- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]

undefined

- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]

undefined

- [object Object]
- [object Object]

EQUIPMENT

Your Kit

- Bosch oven with convection (Pablo ✓)
 - Heavy ovenproof pan — All-Clad D3 sauté pan 26-28 cm, or Basque-style clay cazuela of same diameter
 - Fish spatula or wide thin spatula (essential for lifting delicate hake)
 - Chef's knife (for parsley and garlic)
 - Cutting board
 - Kitchen scale (for flour and protein)
 - Fine-mesh strainer (if making scratch stock)
-

- Small saucepan (for warming stock)
- Shallow plate + small sieve or whisk (for flour dredge)
- Warmed serving platter or four warmed plates

MISE EN PLACE

Before You Start

- Pat the hake steaks VERY dry on both sides with paper towels. Moisture = no sear, no good crust for ligazón to grip.
- Salt the fish lightly on both sides — 30 min ahead if possible (a light cure firms the flesh and helps the ligazón).
- Stem the parsley and chop finely — you want about 30 g chopped parsley. Keep 1 tbsp aside for finishing garnish.
- Slice the garlic thin (1-1.5 mm) across the clove face.
- Measure the fish stock into a small saucepan and warm gently to 60 °C — cold stock added to hot oil will crash the emulsion. Warm stock blends.
- Blanch the peas (3 min boiling water, then ice bath) and drain. If using asparagus, blanch the same way.
- Boil the eggs: drop into boiling water, 9 minutes, ice bath, peel, quarter. Do this FIRST — they can sit while you cook.
- Pre-heat oven to 180 °C convection.

MAKE-AHEAD

Timeline

- 30 min
undefined

- 1 0 min
undefined

0 : 0 0
undefined

+ 0 : 0 3
undefined

+ 0 : 0 5
undefined

+ 0 : 0 7
undefined

+ 0 : 1 5
undefined

+ 0 : 1 6
undefined

+ 0 : 1 8
undefined

+ 0 : 2 0
undefined

METHOD

The Cook

1 Phase 1 — Build the Green Sauce Base

1. Heat the ovenproof pan on medium-low flame. Add EVOO, let it warm for 60 seconds but do NOT let it shimmer — this is a gentle cook, not a sear.
2. Add sliced garlic. Cook 90 seconds, stirring, until fragrant and just barely golden at the edges. **Do not brown.** Browned garlic is bitter and the sauce will taste like cheap tapas bar.
3. Add the chopped parsley. Stir. The oil turns bright green within 30 seconds.
4. Sprinkle the flour across the surface (3 tbsp). Stir constantly with a wooden spoon for 60 seconds — you're making a green roux. The flour should absorb the oil without lumps.
5. Add the white wine. Stir to incorporate. The roux will seize briefly — keep stirring.
6. Add the warm fish stock gradually, whisking to emulsify. The sauce should now be a smooth green liquid, the consistency of heavy cream. If lumpy, whisk harder or strain through a fine mesh.

2 Phase 2 — Nestle the Fish + Oven

1. Dust the hake steaks on both sides with a thin coat of flour — shake off the excess. This thin layer is what the ligazón will bind to.
2. Gently place the steaks into the sauce, skin-side down if skin-on, otherwise either side. The sauce should come about halfway up the sides of the fish — not submerged, not floating.
3. Scatter the blanched peas and asparagus pieces around the fish (not on top). They braise in the oven.
4. Slide the pan into the 180 °C oven. **8 minutes** for 2.5 cm steaks; 10 minutes for 3 cm.
5. Do NOT open the oven during the bake. The sauce is settling; disturbance can cause it to break.

3 Phase 3 — Ligazón (The Pan Rock)

1. Pull the pan from the oven with dry oven mitts. Rest it on the counter (a heat pad, NOT a trivet — you want the pan accessible and still warm).
2. Using **both hands on the pan handle + the opposite side**, lift the pan slightly off the surface and begin to rock it in gentle circular motions. Small circles, not wild sloshes. Think: 'waltzing the pan.'
3. Continue for **60-90 seconds**. You will feel the sauce change. It goes from loose to clingy. The color deepens slightly as the gelatin from the fish + flour + collagen marry.
4. When the sauce has visible cling — drag a spoon through it, the trail should hold for a beat before closing — you have ligazón.
5. If it doesn't thicken after 90 seconds: the oven phase may have dried out your liquid. Add 30 ml warm stock, rock again for 30 seconds.

4 Phase 4 — Service

1. Garnish with the hard-boiled egg quarters (arranged around the fish, not on top), the reserved tablespoon of chopped parsley, and optional lemon wedges on the rim of the serving vessel.
2. Serve **from the cooking pan if it's beautiful** (All-Clad looks restaurant-proper; cazuela is traditional and gorgeous). Otherwise transfer to a warmed oval platter.
3. At the table, plate each guest's portion — one fish steak plus a generous spoonful of the green sauce. Pour plenty of sauce; the sauce is the point as much as the fish.
4. Pour the Txakoli from a height of about 30 cm (the traditional Basque service — the height oxygenates the slightly-spritzzy wine). Guests' glasses should always have some.

QUICK REFERENCE

Timing Cheat Sheet

STEP	TIME	CUE
undefined	- 3 0 min	undefined
undefined	- 1 0 min	undefined
undefined	0 : 0 0	undefined

STEP	TIME	CUE
undefined	+ 0 : 0 5	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 0 7	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 1 5	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 1 6	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 1 8	undefined

TROUBLESHOOTING

Emergency Protocols

UNDEFINED

You overheated. Remove from heat entirely. Take 2 tbsp of the sauce into a cool bowl, whisk in 1 tbsp cold water and 1 tsp flour. Return to pan off-heat, rock 60 sec. Usually repairs. If not, strain the oil off and serve the sauce under the fish.

UNDEFINED

Extend the rock to 2 minutes. If still thin, whisk in 1 tbsp softened butter or a slurry of 1 tsp flour in 1 tbsp warm water.

UNDEFINED

Too much flour or overcooked. Thin with 30-60 ml warm stock, rock briefly. If really bad, serve the fish with the sauce on the side as a 'gravy' rather than integrated.

UNDEFINED

Return to 180 °C oven for 2 min. Do NOT microwave. The sauce will handle the extra time.

UNDEFINED

The oven was too hot or too long. Serve with extra sauce. Next time: probe at 6 min mark; target 55 °C internal, pull at 55, carryover to 60.



UNDEFINED

Sauce will taste bitter at the edges. Too late to fix. Add 1 tsp sherry vinegar at the end to brighten; serve with extra lemon. Next time: lower heat, watch the pan.



UNDEFINED

Build the sauce and sear the fish in the nonstick on stovetop. Transfer everything to a preheated ceramic baking dish for the oven phase. Less elegant but functional.

DEEP DIVES

Technique Notes

undefined

TECHNIQUE

undefined

undefined

TECHNIQUE

undefined

undefined

TECHNIQUE

undefined

undefined

TECHNIQUE

undefined

undefined

TECHNIQUE

undefined

undefined

TECHNIQUE

undefined

PAIRING

What to Drink

Wine — Traditional

Txakoli de Getaria — Txomin Etxaniz, Ameztoi Getariako, or Gaintza

The only correct pairing. Txakoli is the Basque fish wine. Tart, saline, very slightly fizzy, low-alcohol (11-12%), fresh and bright. The bright acid and saline minerality mirror both the parsley-garlic green sauce and the sea-flavored fish. Serve 8-10 °C, poured from height. Pour generously; guests will drink more than they expect.

Wine — Alternate Spanish

Albariño from Rías Baixas — Pazo Señoráns Colección, Do Ferreiro Cepas Vellas

If Txakoli isn't available: mature Albariño has the same saline-mineral character with slightly more body. Works perfectly with the slightly heavier flour-bound sauce.

Wine — Non-Spanish

Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine sur lie — Jo Landron, Luneau-Papin, or Domaine de l'Ecu

If French wine is the guest preference: Muscadet sur lie has a similar saline-yeasty character (from the lees aging) that works with Basque green sauces. Less traditional but an elegant alternative for a Franco-Basque menu.

CONTEXT

Menu Ideas

This as Main

The center of a Basque dinner. Plan 4 steaks, 4 guests. The pan-rock is theater; position guests where they can see it.

Opener (Basque pintxo)

Gilda pintxo (olive + anchovy + guindilla on a skewer) with Txakoli. Classic Basque bar opener; sets the Basque mood and gets the wine flowing before the main.

Opener (seafood continuity)

Gambas al ajillo (UMAMI-4 #?) — different preparation, different seafood. Creates a 'two-cazuela' rhythm where both courses arrive bubbling.

Side (Basque tradition)

Small dish of boiled baby potatoes in their jackets, dressed only with Arbequina and flaky salt. Or a plate of roasted piquillos. Don't overload — the hake sauce is rich.

Downstream — Dessert

Goxua (Basque custard-and-sponge), Idiazabal cheese with quince paste, or simply espresso + a slice of Basque cake (gâteau basque with black cherry jam). Keep dessert traditional.

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.



Stop following recipes. Start understanding food.