



SPANISH · ANDALUSIAN (CÁDIZ ALMADRABA TRADITION) · KAMADO
TRANSLATION · MAIN · CENTERPIECE · SUMMER FISH COURSE · SPECIAL-
OCCASION GRILL

Ventresca de Atún a la Brasa

Bluefin tuna belly, the richest cut on the fish, grilled over screaming-hot kamado embers for seventy seconds a side and no longer. Sliced into thick coins, dressed with only Arbequina, flaky salt, and a single squeeze of lemon. The Andalusian coastal technique — when you have a cut this perfect, you cook it this fast, and you stop.

Protein Bluefin tuna ventresca (belly cut) — 600 g to 1 kg, sashimi-grade

Serves 4 - 5 from 800 g · this is a luxury cut, portion small

Difficulty Intermediate (easy to cook, hard to source)

Active 10 min (fire check + grill + plate)

Total 25 min (15 min fire bring-up + 10 min cook+rest+plate)

THE STORY

The Almadraba Tradition — And Why Ventresca Is the Cut That Teaches You Restraint

In the Strait of Gibraltar, each spring, Atlantic bluefin tuna migrate from the Atlantic into the Mediterranean to spawn. They are intercepted — as they have been for over three thousand years — by the *almadraba*, a maze of nets anchored to the seabed that channels the fish into progressively narrower enclosures, culminating in the levanto, where they are killed by hand. The *almadraba* was used by the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Moors, and the Andalusians of modern Cádiz. It is one of the oldest continuously-practiced fishing methods on earth.

A bluefin tuna caught in almadraba is butchered the next day on the docks of Zahara de los Atunes or Barbate, and what emerges from the animal is a map of cuts. The *ventresca* is the belly cut — the richest, fattiest portion, streaked with white marbling that makes it taste almost like wagyu if you close your eyes. It is the most prized cut on the most prized fish, and when the almadraba is in season in May, restaurants from Cádiz to Tokyo will pay any price for it.

You will not be buying almadraba-caught tuna in Miami. But you can buy sashimi-grade bluefin ventresca from a handful of premium fishmongers — Honolulu Fish Co can source it when in season, Regalis stocks it occasionally, and some high-end Miami sushi importers carry it for off-menu sale to restaurants. If you can find it, at the right price, this is what to do with it.

The cook is trivial. Hot kamado, direct heat, 70 seconds a side. Salt, oil, lemon. Stop. The entire discipline of this recipe is *not doing too much*. You can ruin ventresca by overcooking it (goes from buttery to leather in 15 seconds). You can ruin it by over-seasoning (salt + oil + lemon is all it needs). You can ruin it by saucing it (you would not sauce sashimi; this is grilled sashimi). The cut does the work. You set the fire, you time the flip, you get out of the way.

Specs

<p>PORTIONS</p> <p>600-1000 g ventresca · serves 4-5</p>	<p>KEY TECHNIQUE</p> <p>Hot-fast direct kamado grill, rare-seared</p>	<p>KAMADO TEMP</p> <p>450 - 500 °C dome, direct over ember bed</p>	<p>GRILL DURATION</p> <p>70 sec/side – NO LONGER. Interior stays rare.</p>
<p>INTERNAL TARGET</p> <p>40 - 45 °C center (rare) – this is a rare-seared fish</p>	<p>DIFFICULTY</p> <p>Intermediate ●●●○○ (timing) / Advanced (sourcing)</p>	<p>ACTIVE TIME</p> <p>10 min</p>	<p>VESSEL</p> <p>Kamado direct heat over open ember bed</p>
<p>CUISINE</p> <p>Spanish Andalusian — Cádiz coastal</p>	<p>PAIRING</p> <p>Fino sherry (En Rama ideal) · OR aged Manzanilla · OR Rioja Blanco Reserva</p>	<p>RULE</p> <p>70 seconds per side. Do not baste, do not sauce. Salt-oil-lemon. Stop.</p>	

UMAMI ADAPTATION

What Changed & Why

Two tiers, same doctrine. The everyday version substitutes bluefin ventresca (rare to source) with high-quality sashimi-grade ahi (yellowfin) belly or bluefin akami (lean cut — technically wrong, but cooks similarly and tastes excellent if you can't find ventresca). The No Limits version sources actual almadraba bluefin ventresca from

Honolulu Fish Co when in season, or import-grade Spanish ventresca from a premium fishmonger. The difference is meaningful — ventresca is marbled like wagyu and yellowfin is not.

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]

No Limits

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

undefined

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

undefined

- [object Object]
- [object Object]

EQUIPMENT

Your Kit

- Kamado grill (Pablo ✓) — essential for the hot direct-fire cook

- Lump charcoal — 2 kg (clean hardwood for maximum heat)

- Infrared thermometer — for verifying grate temperature (non-negotiable for this cook — you must confirm heat)

- Long tongs (thin-tip, delicate — this is fish, not steak)

- Fish spatula (wide thin spatula) — for lifting the tuna off the grate intact

- Warmed serving platter — white ceramic or wood

- Sharp slicing knife (yanagiba ideal, chef's knife acceptable)

- Cutting board (wood, with a groove for catching juice)

- Timer — set for 70 seconds — the exact timing is the entire technique

- Chimney starter (for clean fire)

MISE EN PLACE

Before You Start

- 90 MINUTES BEFORE: Pull the tuna from the fridge. Let it come to room temperature (cool-room, not warm-room) in its packaging. Cooking ice-cold tuna results in raw-cold center with lukewarm-seared surface.

- Build kamado fire: 2 kg lump charcoal, direct heat (no deflector). Light from center. Burn HOT — target dome 450-500 °C. This takes 20-25 min of open flame to achieve.

- Let the fire die down to a *glowing ember bed* — no flames, just orange coals. Flames deposit soot; embers give clean direct heat.

- Verify grate temperature with an infrared thermometer aimed at the grill grate: should read 350-400 °C surface temp. If lower, your kamado isn't hot enough — add more lump, wait.

- Pat the tuna dry on both sides with paper towels. Moisture = no sear, no grill marks.

- Brush both sides with 30 ml EVOO. Season with kosher salt on both sides (not too aggressive — the finishing salt will add more). Black pepper is optional; some Andalusian cocineros consider it heresy on good tuna.

MAKE - AHEAD

Timeline



- 5 min
undefined

0 : 0 0
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+ 0 : 0 1
undefined

+ 0 : 0 2
undefined

+ 0 : 0 3
undefined

+ 0 : 0 5
undefined

+ 0 : 0 7
undefined

METHOD

The Cook

1 Phase 1 — Source the Ventresca

1. This dish lives or dies on the fish. Call your fishmonger 5 days ahead. Ask: *'Can you source sashimi-grade bluefin ventresca for Saturday?'* If they don't know what ventresca is, try a different vendor.
2. Honolulu Fish Co (honolulufish.com) can overnight it when in season — typically May-June and again September-October.
3. Regalis Foods (East Coast) stocks it sporadically. Call, don't rely on their website catalog.
4. Miami specialty fishmongers: some premium sushi importers carry it off-menu for restaurant clients. Ask around.
5. Upon receipt: the fish should be **deep red-pink** (not brown), with visible **white marbling** running through. Firm to touch. No fishy smell — should smell of clean ocean only. Use within 48 hours of receipt.

2 Phase 2 — Build the Fire Hot

1. Fill the kamado firebox with 2 kg high-quality lump charcoal. Use a chimney starter or electric starter — NO lighter fluid.
2. **Direct heat configuration** — no heat deflector. Grate directly above the ember bed.
3. Burn HOT. Vents wide open. Let the charcoal catch flame and burn for 20-25 minutes until the flames die down to a glowing ember bed — no active flame, just orange coals across the firebox.
4. Verify temperature with an infrared thermometer aimed at the grate surface: **target 350-400 °C grate temp**. Dome temperature may read 450-500 °C.
5. If not hot enough: add more lump, close lid, wait another 10 minutes, re-check.
6. A ventresca grill that's too cool produces a gray-seared rubbery result instead of the charred-exterior-raw-interior target.

3 Phase 3 — The 70-Second Sear

1. Pat tuna dry on both sides. Brush lightly with EVOO. Season with kosher salt both sides.
2. Place tuna on the grate directly over the hot zone.
3. **Start the timer: 70 seconds.** Do not touch, move, or poke the fish during this window. The contact between the oiled fish and the hot grate creates the grill marks and char.
4. At 70 seconds, use a fish spatula (NOT tongs — tongs squeeze the flesh) to lift and flip the tuna. Grill marks should be visible, the surface dark charred.
5. **70 seconds on the second side.** Same rule — no touching.
6. At 70 seconds on side 2, lift the tuna off the grate to a cool (NOT warmed) plate. **Rest 2 minutes.** The carryover will bring the center to 40-45 °C — rare.
7. The total cook is **140 seconds of heat.** This is the entire cooking doctrine. Longer = overcooked leather. Shorter = cold raw center.

4 Phase 4 — Slice + Plate with Restraint

1. After 2 minutes rest, transfer the tuna to a cutting board.
2. With a sharp slicer (yanagiba if you own one, otherwise a sharp chef's knife), slice the tuna on a 30-40° angle into **2 cm coins**. Each coin should show: charred edge + tiny cooked rim + rare-red center. This tri-color cross-section is the visual signature.
3. Arrange the coins on a warmed platter, slightly overlapping, showing the rare-red centers.
4. **Drizzle Arbequina EVOO** generously — 40 ml for the plate. Not too much (the tuna is already oily), but enough to add gloss.
5. **Finish with flaky salt** — several pinches scattered across the coins.
6. **Squeeze half a lemon once** across the plate — one pass, not aggressive. A little acid lifts, too much cooks the exterior further.
7. Serve **immediately**. Warm tuna cools to sashimi-temperature in 10 minutes; past that the dish suffers.

QUICK REFERENCE

Timing Cheat Sheet

STEP	TIME	CUE
undefined	- 5 days	undefined
undefined	- 9 0 min	undefined
undefined	- 2 5 min	undefined
undefined	- 5 min	undefined
undefined	0 : 0 0	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 0 1	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 0 2	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 0 3	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 0 5	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 0 7	undefined

TROUBLESHOOTING

Emergency Protocols



UNDEFINED

Normal for previously-frozen tuna. Serve as is — still delicious, just softer. Next time: insist on fresh-never-frozen sashimi-grade from your fishmonger.



UNDEFINED

Didn't come up to room temp before cooking, or resting wasn't done. Briefly return to kamado 20-30 sec per side. Do not fully cook — still aim for rare.

 **UNDEFINED**

Grate was too cool OR cook time too long OR flip was too gentle. Slice thin and serve as a 'grilled tuna salad' with EVOO + capers + parsley. Unrecoverable as intended dish. Next time: hotter fire, 70 sec firm.

 **UNDEFINED**

Fire wasn't hot enough. Lift the fish briefly, close kamado lid to build heat, re-grill 30 sec each side. Real grill marks require 400+ °C grate contact.

 **UNDEFINED**

Usually: insufficient oil on fish or grate wasn't clean. Lift carefully with a spatula — even stuck-and-torn tuna is edible if you're gentle. Next time: oil the grate with a paper towel dipped in EVOO before putting fish on.

 **UNDEFINED**

Perfectly fine substitution, and honestly most Miami cooks will end up here. Yellowfin cooks identically in timing; texture is leaner and less buttery but still great. Serve with same plating. Upgrade to bluefin when available.

 **UNDEFINED**

Cut into 3 cm thick portions before grilling. Cook each portion 70 sec/side. The 70-second rule is for 3-4 cm thickness. Thicker = different recipe.

 **UNDEFINED**

Squeeze lemon only on the plate, not on the tuna directly. At service, the lemon oils the surface; it shouldn't sit in juice. Replate if possible, use lemon zest instead of juice next time.

Technique Notes

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TECHNIQUE

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PAIRING

What to Drink

Wine — Andalusian Classical

Fino En Rama or Manzanilla En Rama — Valdespino Inocente En Rama, Tío Pepe En Rama, La Guita En Rama

The canonical Andalusian pairing. En Rama sherries are fresh, unfiltered, minimally-aged versions of the classical Fino/Manzanilla — they have more yeasty complexity and salinity than standard releases. The saline edge + bone-dry finish + flor-aged character create an almost-magical pairing with bluefin. Serve 6-8 °C in copitas. 60-90 ml per guest.

Wine — Still White

Rioja Blanco Reserva — López de Heredia Viña Tondonia Blanco (6+ years) or Bodegas Muga Blanco Fermentado en Barrica

Oxidatively-aged white Rioja has nut, oak, and oxidative notes that mirror the oily-fatty character of ventresca. An unusual pairing that works brilliantly. López de Heredia 6-year Tondonia Blanco is the gold-standard bottle here.

Wine — Japanese Alternative

Premium daiginjo sake — Hakkaisan, Dassai 23, Born Tokusen Junmai Daiginjo

If you're embracing the grilled-sashimi aspect: chilled (12 °C) daiginjo works brilliantly with raw-seared bluefin. Pour in small ochoko cups. Not traditional Spanish but technically perfect.

Menu Ideas

This as Light Main (Summer)

A summer patio dinner with wine. 200 g per guest is a main course portion. Paired with a light salad + crusty bread. Fino sherry in the glass.

Tapa (Smaller Portion)

150 g serves 6 as a starter — each guest gets 2-3 coins on a small plate. Opens a multi-course Andalusian dinner.

Dinner Party Flow (Seafood-forward)

Opens with kanpachi crudo (UMAMI-2) — another raw fish course. Then ventresca a la brasa. Then paella valenciana or fideuà. All-fish menu. Fino throughout. Aged Rioja Blanco for the paella. Tocino de cielo for dessert.

Side

Escalivada (UMAMI-7) — roasted vegetable plate with smoky sweetness works beautifully with the rare tuna. Or a simple plate of blanched asparagus with Arbequina.

Downstream — After Tuna

A wedge of aged Manchego (24+ months) + Marcona almonds + fig jam. Or a simple plate of fresh Mediterranean fruit. Keep dessert light; the tuna is still on the palate.

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.

