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BASQUE VINEGAR

Makes 1 Quart

After I graduated from Santa Monica High School, I packed up and moved to Paris to embark on my culinary career and learn the art and rigor of traditional French cuisine. I landed a job in the kitchen of one of the best fine-dining restaurants in the city, and like most places in Paris, the restaurant closed during the month of August for vacation. I took a surfing trip down to Biarritz in the Basque region of Southwest France, famous for its beautiful sandy beach and big waves. A friend of mine, who was a local, took me to a great little tapas bar called La Tantina de Burgos. They had a bottle of this incredible infused vinegar on every table and I fell in love with the elevated flavors. A perfect condiment to cut the richness of steak and fatty meats, my version can now be found on every table at Charcoal. Serve with your favorite meat in small side bowls for dipping, as a salad dressing, or in place of plain vinegar in recipes. You'll see this recipe utilized throughout the book, such as in Oysters with Shallots and Basque Vinegar (page 86) and Smoky Grilled Chicken Wings (page 211) (*recipes not included*).

- 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns
- 1 tablespoon whole fennel seeds
- 1 tablespoon whole coriander seeds
- 4 fresh thyme sprigs
- 2 fresh rosemary sprigs
- 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
- 3 garlic cloves, skin on
- 2 small shallots, peeled and quartered
- 1 small lemongrass stalk, tough outer layer removed and smashed
- 1 small carrot, cut into thin strips
- One 1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and cut into thin strips
- 1 dried red chili, such as chile de arbol (*see Note below*)
- 2½ cups distilled white vinegar

1. Heat a dry sauté pan over low heat. Place the peppercorns, fennel, and coriander in the pan. Toast until fragrant, shaking the pan periodically to prevent scorching, about 5 minutes.
2. Transfer the toasted spices to a glass bottle with a spout (I like to use a recycled whiskey bottle). Add the thyme, rosemary, bay leaves, garlic, shallots, lemongrass, carrot, ginger, and chili—if they don't fit down the neck of the bottle, cut them down a little smaller. Pour in the vinegar and ½ cup water. Secure the spout and set aside at room temperature for 3 to 5 days to infuse the vinegar with the aromatics. The flavor will become stronger as it sits. After using, refill with vinegar to keep the aromatics submerged. The vinegar may be stored, covered, in the refrigerator for up to 6 months

Ingredient Note: Chile de Arbol

Chile de arbol are small dried red chilies that have about the same heat level as cayenne, which may be used as a substitute.

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