



HELMI SMEULDERS

SPICE GIRLS

# MODERN CARIBBEAN FLAVORS

FRESH AND HEALTHY RECIPES



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# INTRODUCTION

It all started with a passion for cooking. More than fifteen years ago I left the Netherlands and found my home on a beautiful island in the Caribbean called Curaçao, where I started working as a lawyer. I was stuck in a nine to five secure job, until it was time to follow my heart and turn my passion into a professional career. Building a successful catering business, launching a food blog and now also writing a cookbook is hard work, but it's also been an incredible fun and fulfilling journey.

Where I live many people still eat and cook traditional Caribbean food. With the access to so many fresh ingredients and spices in the region, I believe that the Caribbean kitchen has a lot of potential to develop itself into a healthy and modern cuisine. So I've taken the challenge to cook differently, adding a modern twist to traditional recipes.

This book includes new, modern Caribbean recipes made with fresh, healthy and colorful ingredients. Travel with me and enjoy the hidden treasures of our region. Let's add some color to your taste buds and fall in love with our delicious Caribbean flavors!

*Helmi Smeulders*



# CARIBBEAN FLAVORS

The Caribbean is one of the most diverse and enchanting regions in the world. Exotic combinations of landscapes, history, architecture and culture offer a unique experience. The relaxing atmosphere, warm climate, and cool breezes have made it one of the top travel destinations in the world.

Food plays an integral part of our culture. From the way the crops are harvested to spices, sauces and cooking techniques passed down from one generation to another. Whether it is the grandmother preparing a large family meal or the famous chef experimenting in his kitchen, food is part of life. Though the typical vision of a Caribbean restaurant comprises of a fishing shack by the sea or a sumptuous BBQ on a pier, there is a vast amount of cooking done in the kitchens of those that call the islands home and in modern restaurants frequented by the locals. Whether you are eating okra soup in Curaçao, ropa vieja in Cuba or yuca chips in Cozumel, dinner will be a feast.

## THE INFLUENCES

More than just the pristine waters and white beaches, the region is marked by its history, colonialism and its crops that made it so valuable. In its music, dance, food, languages and festivals you will notice the blend of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Indigenous; one island introducing you to the Dutch and the other to the English or Spanish. The French have left an incredible mark on the cuisine of the islands of

Guadeloupe and Martinique. The Creole cuisine of the islands is a dream for food lovers. Salt fish fritters known as Accras de Morue, Poulet Boucane and Matoutou, a curry filled with crab meat, are local favorites. Fly off to the British Virgin Islands and you will unmistakably be feasting on johnnycakes, mutton and goat stew.

It is not surprising that there is a strong African influence in the Caribbean cuisine. Mixed with the European flavors, the Caribbean was left with a unique array of recipes, cooking techniques and traditions. Okra stews and soups found on most islands are one of the main African food legacies.

The East Indians brought with them their distinct and colorful flavors of chutney, roti and curry. Trinidad and Tobago are two islands that exemplify East Indian cooking with a Caribbean twist. From the Americas came beans, corn, potatoes and varying types of peppers and spices. Especially Peru, now emerging as a gastronomic epicenter of Latin America, contributed greatly with its innovative cooking and local ingredients and recipes such as quinoa, choclo (corn) and ceviche.

# Meat





Don't get confused by the name "pork butt". It is actually meat from the shoulder and doesn't come from the rear end of the pig at all. The word "butt" has its roots in old English and means "the widest part". The pig's widest part is the shoulder.

# CARIBBEAN PULLED PORK

Originating from the deep South of the United States, pulled pork has made its way back to menus in New York, London and Amsterdam. So why stay behind? Time to create our own Caribbean version and put us on the "pulled pork map"!

## Serves 4

2.2 lbs. (1kg) pork butt, cut into 2 pieces	2 tablespoons (25 g) brown sugar
2 tablespoons (30 ml) extra virgin olive oil	1 teaspoon (5 ml) Worcestershire sauce
1/3 cup (50 g) yellow onion	1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
1 garlic cloves, finely chopped	1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup (125 g) papaya	1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1/2 (10 g) jalapeño	1 bay leave
1/4 cup (60 ml) pineapple juice	salt & pepper
2 tablespoons (30 ml) dark rum	pickled jalapeños, to serve
1/4 cup (60 ml) ketchup	fresh cilantro, to serve
2 tablespoons (30 ml) molasses	

Season the pork with salt and pepper. Heat the oil over medium-high heat and brown the pork on all sides. Remove from the pan.

Add the onion, garlic, papaya and jalapeño to the pan and gently fry on medium heat for 5 minutes. Add the pineapple juice and rum and deglaze the pan scraping of the browned bits from the bottom. Add the ketchup, molasses, sugar, Worcestershire sauce and allspice. Bring to a boil. Add the pork, reduce the heat, cover and let simmer for 2,5 hours or until the meat is fork-tender. Let stand until cool enough to handle, then pull apart the meat with a fork. Serve with pickled jalapeños and fresh cilantro.

## Wine pairing

Soft meat asks for a soft wine: think Chardonnay from Italy.





The story goes that a lionfish escaped from a sea-aquarium in Florida. This marked the start of the lionfish explosively spreading itself throughout the entire Caribbean. This beautiful but highly unwelcome fish has no natural predators and poses a real threat to our coral reefs and fish. This led to lionfish hunting by professional divers, but also as a recreational activity with friends. The filet of the lionfish is tasty and tender. Eating this delicious tropical ingredient actually serves a good cause; the environment!

# GRILLED LIONFISH

*in banana leaves*

**Grilling fish in banana leaf parcels seals in the moisture and flavor and infuses the fish with a subtle, grassy aroma. If you don't have banana leaves, you can use aluminum foil.**

## Serves 4

- 1 freshly picked banana leaf, spine removed and cut into 4 squares of 10" / 25 cm
- 1.1lb. (500 g) lionfish filet, divided in 4 portions
- 3 tablespoons (45 ml) extra virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon lime zest
- ¼ teaspoon jalapeño, finely chopped
- salt and pepper to taste
- 4 slices of lime

In a bowl, make a marinade with the olive oil, zest and jalapeño. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

To make the banana leaves flexible for folding, pass them briefly over a low flame on the stove until glossy, about 15-20 seconds. Wipe with a damp kitchen cloth or paper towel. Spread the leaves on a cutting board, put a piece of fish in the lower middle of each leaf and spoon on a marinade. Top with a slice of lime, then wrap the fish in the banana leaves and close the parcel with a toothpick.

Meanwhile, heat a BBQ or griddle pan. Grill the fish parcels on medium-high heat until the fish is just done, about 3-4 minutes on each side. To serve, place the fish in the center of a plate and remove the toothpick, exposing the fish. Serve with Mango Sauce (see recipe in Sauces & Spices).

*Wear a glove or use a kitchen towel when handling and cleaning lionfish. Its sharp spines inject a poison that is very painful.*

## Wine pairing

Pair the lionfish with a white Burgundy from France, delicious!

