

A GIRL AND HER GRILL

Set aside the burgers and dogs. One of Mexico's (and SF's) best chefs, **GABRIELA CAMARA**, will now school you on the art of MEXICAN GRILLING. Would you just look at that gorgeous red (and green) snapper?



by NILS BERNSTEIN
photographs by MARCUS NILSSON



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**GABI'S
GRILL TIP**

Never let your fish stick to the grill again! Pat the skin side dry, which will encourage it to sear, not steam. And make sure your grill grates are hot, clean, and lightly oiled. (A grill basket also works.)

RECIPE

**Contramar's Red and
Green Grilled Snapper**



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► **GABRIELA CÁMARA'S ROOFTOP** terrace in Mexico City sits like a treehouse overlooking the green canopy of the tony Condesa neighborhood. At its center is a massive hand-hewn dining table loaded with Casablanca lilies whose intense perfume mixes with smoldering mesquite from the nearby barrel grills. It's an intoxicating ambience even before the mezcal palomas start flowing.

The opportunity to cook for friends and family doesn't come around much these days for the 40-year-old chef and restaurateur, who splits her time between the perpetually packed Contramar, which opened in 1998, and her second restaurant, Cala, which was an instant success when it debuted in San Francisco last fall. It's an empire that started with a simple grilled fish: Cámara and her friends loved eating *pescado a la talla* on the beach while vacationing in Zihuatanejo on the Pacific coast. "I wanted to bring that feeling of leisure from a beach shack to an unpretentious, fresh, urban setting," she says. Indeed, Contramar (which translates to "against the sea") manages to reflect that breezy nature while also being a see-and-be-seen power lunch scene. It also launched the raw-tuna tostada craze in the city, which shows no signs of abating. Up north at



THE FISH THAT LAUNCHED AN EMPIRE

Pescado a la talla, which doesn't readily translate to English, simply refers to grilled whole fish. To make it, Cámara butterflies a 4–5-lb. snapper, removing the spine and scoring the flesh. Then she makes two salsas—a green one with parsley and garlic, and a red one with five kinds of chiles and tomatoes—that she spoons on each half of the fish. The whole thing goes into a heavy iron grill basket called a *zaranda* and cooks skin side down over high heat for about 10 minutes before it's flipped, giving the red-and-green side a light char. (Our recipe, above,





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Cocktails and wine with friends on Cámara's roof; grilled cactus paddles and spring onions; fresh guacamole and chips; who wants a michelada?; grilled squid toasts; Cámara's famous *pescado a la talla* getting its char on.



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**GABI'S
GRILL TIP**

Throw a griddle or large cast-iron skillet on a hot grill, brush with a little oil, and wait a few minutes. Then you can heat quesadillas like they do on the street corners in Mexico.



RECIPE

Grilled Greens and
Cheese Quesadillas



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RECIPE

Avocado-Tomatillo
Salsa Verde



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GABI'S GRILL TIP

Let pork tenderloin come to room temperature before cooking, about 1 hour. Then grill over medium-low heat, turning only once, until an instant-read thermometer registers 145°, 35-45 minutes total.

PREP SCHOOL

Tap for our fave grapefruit soda

RECIPE

Grilled Pork Tenderloin in Charred-Chile Adobo



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RECIPE

Mezcal Paloma



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RECIPE

Grilled Salsa Roja





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RECIPE

Watermelon Granita