

CULTURE

# A Merry and Bright Filipino-American Christmas

Chef Angela Dimayuga's family-filled, flavor-packed, all-hand-on-deck holiday feast is one for the books.

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I have five brothers and sisters and we're all food nerds, so when we get together for Christmas, we're always showing off for each other (though we totally pretend we're not). Our mother, Sarah, is the same way with her eight siblings, and she gets it from her mother, Josefina, who always refused to share her recipes. When my mom was growing up in the Philippines, Josefina stole the show every year with her *ensaimadas* (sugary, Parmesan-y, buttery rolls) before church on Christmas morning.

When I was a kid, my family always opened presents at midnight on Christmas Eve so we could just cook and eat our way through Christmas Day. The menu spans Filipino classics to sous vide experiments. I've made everything from arroz caldo, a porridge traditionally slurped in the days leading up to Christmas, to fancy leaves of puff pastry as a complement (but also a challenge) to my sister Astrid's beef Wellington.

The menu changes from year to year, but for Christmas to feel like Christmas, we always need a showstopper, like the whole pig (*lechón*) my grandmother requested last year. Filipino food is incredibly eclectic because the islands' history is full of traders, occupiers, and missionaries, each of whom brought their own ingredients and dishes—from soy sauce to macaroni salad. When our extended family moved to the Bay Area before I was born, they brought all of those international flavors with them in a combination that reflects the Pampanga province but also their individual tastes and talents.

My grandmother Josefina is 99 now, and she can't cook anymore, but she's still super-serious about food. A few years ago I finally convinced her to teach me how to make her famous *embutido*-stuffed whole chicken. (We made my version of her dish at Mission Chinese Food, and she loved the idea that New Yorkers ate "Josefina's Chicken," but she scolded me for not including her beloved chorizo Bilbao.) Now that I'm cooking more Filipino dishes at Christmastime, I realize just how much technique goes into her recipes—it's so easy to overcook the onions on the *bistek!*—and how her ways work better than the "right" ways I've learned in restaurant kitchens.

creations. I want my family to keep circling back to the buffet table looking for another helping of Josefina's Chicken or Angela's Pork Belly. In our family, seconds are the sincerest form of flattery.