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PHOTOS BY JINGYU WAN
DESIGNED BY JESSIE HANCOCK

Anchovies Maisor: keeping local traditions alive

BY COLLIN CURRY



Top left: Anchovies Maisor store manager Michael Bazaes with his customer. Anchovies Maisor is a local anchovy store in the fishing town of Getaria. Top right: Silvia Aranguren, an employee of Anchovies Maisor, puts olive oil in the anchovy can. Bottom left: Michael Bazaes stocks shelves at Anchovies Maisor. Bottom right: Fish products Anchovies Maisor sells in the store.

In the tiny coastal village of Getaria, the fishing industry is present in nearly every facet of life. In the local port, which is dominated by large fishing boats and the Salanort Fish Factory, it is easy to miss the tiny gourmet fish shop off to the side.

Sorkunde Iribar began Anchovies Maisor 15 years ago to keep alive the Getarian tradition of hand-preparing anchovies.

Michael Bazaes, the store manager at Anchovies Maisor, said that in the early 20th century, Sicilian fishermen were looking for the best quality anchovies, and their search brought them to Getaria and the Cantabrian Sea.

"They came here and to other small towns along the coast, and they brought this way to everyone," Bazaes said.

He said over the years the process has become more industrialized, and people were leaving the tradition behind.

"We make the anchovies like the people used to make," Bazaes said.

The fleet of Getarian boats only fishes for anchovies once a year in the Spring, after the fish have laid their eggs.

Bazaes said this is when the anchovy meat is softest and most tender.

The anchovies are brought to a warehouse next to the shop and put into barrel with layers of salt, where they are left to cure for

up to seven months.

"When the anchovy is mature, usually around November or December, it has that characteristic smell and a red-brown color" Bazaes said.

After the anchovies have matured, they are brought to the tiny shop where they are cleaned, filleted and dried.

"We clean every inch of them, one by one, by hand," Bazaes said.

After the fish are cleaned, they are dried in a spin machine, filleted and bottled.

Bazaes said every part of the process is done by hand except for the drying of the fish and placing lids on the bottles.

"It is a very simple process, but a very hard process," Bazaes said. "There are usually only four or five people working in the shop and they have to clean the anchovies one by one, and then fill each anchovy one by one."

Once they have been packaged, many of the anchovies are sold over the Internet to restaurants around Europe and, more recently the United States. Most of their products go to restaurants in Getaria, though.

"All of the best restaurants in town use our anchovies," he said. "They know our quality and our know how."