Ghosts of Holiday Repasts
Celebrate the season with a casual family brunch, south-of-the-border style.
By Robert Siegmann.

My fondest memories of the holiday season have always revolved around food and family. In our family, there has always been a strong correlation between the two — whenever there's a family reunion, there's food. Or maybe those reunions happen because of the food, and we're talking comfort foods: pancakes and waffles, eggs, compotes, muffins, and other goodies, all of which seem especially appealing on those chilly winter mornings. Perhaps those culinary experiences are why I now have a weakness for holiday brunches. While brunches can be as formal as any elaborate dinner party, my preference is for the more casual, where the presence of pajamas and bare feet won't raise eyebrows of disapproval.

Having been raised in Mexico, I always find it interesting to include a Mexican twist on the menu. One of my favorites is chilaquiles or enrijaditas, both simple enough to make and very memorable. Combining different food styles, such as traditional American fare with Mexican favorites, can make for a very sophisticated brunch.

I find that first cup of coffee to be one of the keys to any successful brunch. I don't recommend flavored coffees; they tend to disguise the robust taste of a well-roasted bean. Besides, there will be plenty of flavors to enjoy a short while later. Go for a blend of dark and medium roasts with a fine grind. You won't be disappointed. Here are a couple of recipes that I have enjoyed over the years.

Robert Siegmann, owner of the Ice Box Cafe, a cafe and catering company on Miami Beach, came south after 17 years in New York City, where his gourmet catering firm worked closely with Martha Stewart Living.

Chilaquiles

Ingredients:
- 2 dozen corn tortillas
- 3 tomatoes, peeled
- 1/2 onion
- 1 serrano pepper (seeded)
- Small bunch of cilantro
- Garlic to taste
- Pepper

Soak tomatoes in boiling water for several minutes to facilitate peeling. Once peeled, blend them in food processor along with garlic, onion, serrano (depending on how spicy you want it, you may want to add only half) and cilantro. Process until smooth. Add salt to taste.

Cut tortillas into quarters. Fry in vegetable oil until crisp and brown. Remove from oil and drain on paper towels. When all tortillas have been fried, pour sauce into large saucepan and place over medium heat. Add 1/2 cup water and bring to boil. Add all crisp tortillas to sauce and mix from the bottom, being careful not to break the chips. Once they have absorbed most of the sauce, add grated Monterey Jack cheese and a side of refried black beans. Serve hot.