**_Horchata_ French Toast**
***Torrejas Sabor a Horchata***

Serves 4

1 good-quality French baguette (about 15 inches long by 4 inches wide), preferably day-old
OR 1 good-quality loaf of ciabatta (about 12 inches long by 4 inches wide), preferably day-old
8 to 12 tablespoons (4 to 6 ounces) butter, divided use
1 ½ cups almond milk
3 tablespoons uncooked white rice
A 2-inch piece of cinnamon stick, preferably Mexican *canela*, broken up
OR 1 to 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
3 egg yolks
¼ cup sugar
1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract, preferably Mexican
Salt
Toasted slivered almonds (optional)
About a cup warm *Piloncillo* Syrup or maple syrup, for serving

If using a baguette, slice off and discard the end pieces. Holding your bread knife at a 45-degree angle to the loaf, cut off one 1-inch-thick slice (it should be roughly 4 inches long). Repeat until you have eight similar slices. If you're using ciabatta, no need to slice on the diagonal—simply discard the end pieces and cut eight 1-inch slices. If the bread is very fresh, arrange the slices on a baking sheet and place in a 300-degree oven until they feel slightly hard and stale, about 30 minutes.

Place *4 tablespoons* of the butter in a microwave-safe bowl and melt it in the microwave at 50% power for 30 seconds. Combine the almond milk, rice and cinnamon in a blender and process for several minutes, until the rice no longer feels very gritty when the liquid is rubbed between your fingers. Add the egg yolks, sugar, vanilla, melted butter and ½ teaspoon salt to the rice mixture and blend again, covered, until everything is well combined. Pour the mixture through a fine-mesh strainer into a 9 x 13-inch baking pan. Lay in the bread and let it soak until the bottom of the bread feels heavy with liquid but isn't disintegrating, 10 to 15 minutes. Flip the bread and soak the other side. (If it's more convenient, cover the pan with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.)

Heat a very large (12-inch) heavy skillet (cast iron is perfect for this) over medium. Add *2 tablespoons* of butter and swirl it around the pan a few times until it has completely melted and the foaming has subsided. Use a spatula to transfer three slices of bread to the hot skillet. When they are richly browned underneath (about 5 minutes), flip the slices and cook until

browned and crispy but custardy on the inside (about another 5 minutes). Transfer to a baking sheet and keep warm in a low oven. Add more butter to the pan (you'll usually need another 2 tablespoons per batch) and cook the remaining slices the same way. Top your French toast with slivered almonds if you like, and serve right away with warm syrup.

**Piloncillo Syrup:**
2 cups chopped Piloncillo (Mexican Raw Sugar)
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

In a medium saucepan, combine the piloncillo and 1 cup of water over medium heat. Cook, stirring regularly, until the sugar has completely dissolved and the mixture has thickened to the constancy of a real maple syrup, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat, let cool to room temperature, then stir in the vanilla. Serve warm.