Soused Mackerel – A Fine Pickle

One of the best ways to prepare an oily fish like mackerel is to pickle it. The liquid and flavourings used for soused mackerel can also be applied to sardines. Soused mackerel make an excellent appetizer or open sandwich and if you could image yourself in Spain it is the sort of tapa you could be nibbling on with a glass of Manzanilla while watching the sun go down. Dream on. Now back to chilly Melbourne. Mackerel are inexpensive and for just a gold coin and 15 minutes of preparation you can make this. The lovely silvery fillets need only be placed in a shallow dish and then drowned in a simmered mixture of vinegar, sugar, salt and herbs and left to steep overnight. During the steeping the flesh is essentially “cooked” by the acid vinegar, turning a soft pink colour. I recommend using a vinegar that is not too harsh, such as apple cider vinegar.
The flesh can then be scraped off the skin (there are no bones) and eaten on little toasts as is or served on buttered rye bread or mixed with some mayonnaise and fresh dill. You could also mix it with some crème fraîche. How easy is that!

- 1 fresh mackerel fillet
- 300 ml apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbs sugar
- pinch salt
- 1 shallot, finely sliced
- 8 juniper berries or allspice berries
- 1 strip of lemon peel
- 2 bay leaves

Place the fillet skin side down in a shallow dish that just fits the fish. Put all the other ingredients in a small saucepan and simmer gently for 5 minutes. Take off the heat and allow to cool for a couple of minutes. Pour the pickling mixture over the the mackerel fillet, cover with cling wrap and refrigerate overnight. The next day remove the fillet and
dry with paper towel. Remove the flesh from the skin and flake into small pieces. Serve as is or drizzled with a little extra virgin olive oil or mixed with mayonnaise or crème fraîche. Garnish with dill, capers and/or lemon zest. The fillet can also be sliced and eaten with the skin intact.