

THE BOCA RATON observer



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Well-Seasoned Journey

The Global Empire Of Chef Richard Sandoval
By **Alona Abbady Martinez**

CHEF RICHARD SANDOVAL IS A FORMIDABLE FORCE in the culinary world. After all, his success extends across 60 locations and four continents. His list of accolades is endless. Among them are Mexico's "National Toque d'Oro," *Bon Appétit* magazine's "Restaurateur of the Year," Cordon d'Or's "Restaurateur of the Year," one of *Inc. Magazine's* "10 Most Inspiring Business Leaders" and a James Beard Semifinalist for "Outstanding Restaurateur." Yet, ask him the secret ingredient to his soaring success, and he'd tell you it's simple: people.

"First and foremost, it's about people. As we start to open abroad and go to the Middle East and Europe, it was always my

position that we have a Latin general manager and a Latin chef to really stay true to the flavors and to the culture. They could train and expand with our waiters and our cooks and it was very important to have someone ... that really understood our culture. It was actually part of our DNA. Anybody can buy a book and copy and paste a recipe from the internet, but you have to understand the profiles, the 'whys' and where it came from to really be able to transmit it to your guests and to your staff," explains the 55-year-old.

Growing up in Mexico, Sandoval spent significant amounts of time at his grandmother's house. There, he'd find himself gravitating toward the heartbeat of the home, which was inevitably the kitchen.

"Everything around Latin culture evolves around family gatherings and around food," he says.



He was fascinated by the house cooks, who were all women. “I was always seeing all these ladies cooking and tasting — they were not just following recipes but really tasting recipes as they were cooking. That had a big impact on me — learning that they were creating with their palates,” Sandoval says.

After moving to the United States as a teen, his first encounter with cafeteria “Mexican tacos” — served in hard-shell tortillas he had never seen before — only intensified his desire to share the authentic flavors of his homeland.

“Even at that time I remember telling myself, ‘How I wish people would understand a little more about where I come from, my culture, my food,’” he says.

Fast forward three decades and Sandoval has done just that. With a prestigious CIA (The Culinary Institute of America) degree in hand, he set out to change American perceptions of Mexican cuisine, which, in the late ‘90s, mostly consisted of fast-casual Tex-Mex. His philosophy of “Old ways, new hands” propelled him to blend classic culinary techniques with the rich heritage of his childhood meals.

“It was my goal to modernize it, lighten it, do a white tablecloth

place so that people could appreciate it and really understand it.”

His New York eatery, Maya, emerged as a hotspot and has remained so for 27 years.

Now, with restaurants throughout the U.S. and as far away as Serbia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates, Sandoval serves Pan-Latin, Latin-Asian and Mediterranean cuisine. His Miami location, Toro Toro opened in 2012 and speaks specifically to the city’s demographic.

“I wanted to give other cultures a lens. I don’t think people knew that much about Brazilian, Colombian or Venezuelan [cuisine]. Miami is a big melting pot of a lot of cultures, so we thought Toro gave these other cultures a platform.”

It’s this mission that inspired Sandoval to call Toro Toro “Latin cuisine without borders.”

The focal point is the grill, most notably steaks: a central player in Latin American tables, heightened by favorite dishes from countries



Toro Toro Filet



Truffle Mishima Beef Tiradito



Chef Special Tomahawk

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like Peru (Amarillo Ceviche), Venezuela (Short Rib & Bone Marrow Arepa) and Mexico (Guacamole Chilindron).

It's not just about the food — Sandoval deeply believes in giving back. He offers a mentorship program where he nurtures the next generation of chefs.

“A lot of chefs today come in and they just see chefs on TV and they're celebrities and that's what they want to be, but they have to understand, behind this there has to be a plan to be sustainable, to be able to maintain — and to grow,” Sandoval says.

He's also reaching even younger generations with his children's book, “Viva Abejas,” (“Long Live Bees”) aimed at cultivating food consciousness.

“If we don't take care of it now, these future generations are going to suffer tremendously.”

And he continues celebrating his homeland, launching a “Dia De Los Muertos” global campaign where he partners with artists, musicians and culinarians to celebrate the popular Mexican Day of the Dead holiday at the end of October and beginning of November.

It's a well-seasoned journey. When asked if he could go back and give his younger self advice, he chuckles and offers, “find some balance,” noting that he overlooked spending precious time with family. He's making up for it now — his 25-year-old son (also a CIA graduate) and 22-year-old-daughter recently came onboard to work with their dad.

“I think my future work is about getting them engaged in the company — teaching them how I did what I did and hopefully pass the torch onto them over the next two years.”



Apple Pear Salad

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

For the Nogada Dressing:

2½ cups chopped walnuts
 2½ cups milk
 ¾ cup soft goat cheese
 1 tablespoon white sugar
 1 teaspoon sherry
 1 (1-inch) piece cinnamon stick

FOR THE SALAD:

1 pear (thinly sliced)
 1 apple (thinly sliced)
 ½ cup heirloom beets
 2 cups mesclun salad greens
 ¼ cup crumbled goat cheese
 2 tablespoons pomegranate seeds
 1 teaspoon kosher salt

PROCESS

For The Dressing:

Add all ingredients to a blender and blend until you get a soft creamy dressing.

OPTIONAL: For a more flavorful dressing, add the ingredients to a bowl and let rest overnight before blending.

Assemble The Salad

• Toss all ingredients together, top with salad dressing and extra pomegranate seeds and goat cheese, if desired.