

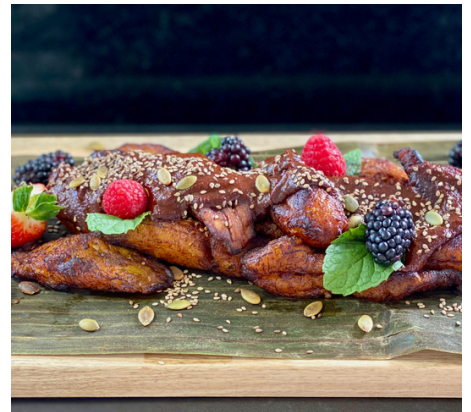
# DISHES INSPIRED BY LATIN AMERICAN HERITAGE



# GUATEMALA

## Mole de Plátano by Amalia Moreno-Damgaard

When Chef Amalia Moreno-Damgaard is missing home, she heads straight for the kitchen. There, the smells and tastes bring her right back to her native Guatemala. Now she's on a mission to share the delicious cuisine she grew up with. "When I left Guatemala, I felt that I had lost part of myself," Moreno-Damgaard reflects. "For me, that fire about sharing about food, cooking and so on was really ignited when I moved to the United States. Not being with my family, I found that comfort for me came through the food."



Guatemalan cuisine is rooted in the seasonality and availability of ingredients. Many dishes contain staples native to the region, like corn, squash and beans, which are combined with fresh ingredients picked up at the local market. "The markets in Guatemala are a feast to the senses," Moreno-Damgaard recalls. "The spread is absolutely wonderful because you are going to see a lot of different textures and a lot of different colors, a lot of different varieties of the same vegetable that you don't see anywhere else."

Moreno-Damgaard wants to get people into the kitchen. She shares her Guatemalan culture and recipes through her cookbooks, cooking classes and speaking engagements. "I love to use food as a common denominator, but also as a teaching platform, because when you tell a story behind a dish, behind the cuisine, it makes more sense. It makes it more interesting, and I think it makes it more fun," Moreno-Damgaard says.

# YUCATÁN

## Poc Chuc by Jorge Guzman

It all started with a sheet pan of nachos. That's the first meal Jorge Guzman prepared for his family as a young, budding chef. Decades later, Guzman has earned a national reputation for his memorable creations in the kitchen, earning a James Beard Foundation nomination for Best Chef Midwest in 2017.

Guzman's passion for food blossomed during summers spent with his father in his native Yucatán, Mexico. "I just fell in love with all the food we would eat there," he says. It's a region with a varied cuisine, with influences from many corners of the globe.



"The food from the Yucatán is savory, it's picante, it's spicy. It kind of runs the gamut because of all the influence," Guzman says. "There's a lot of variation in the cuisine, depending on if you're on the coast, inland, more toward Guatemala or Belize."

After a three-year break, Guzman is back at the helm of a Twin Cities restaurant – this time as a co-owner and head chef at Petite León. The menu is very personal for Guzman, reflecting a wide variety of foods he loves to eat and prepare, but it's not a Yucatecan restaurant. "For me, if I was to cook Yucatecan food, I would really want to focus on that and kind of introduce it slowly to people. This is something that's really dear to me and I don't want to put it out there for someone to say, 'I don't understand, I don't get it.'"

# MEXICO

## Mexican Tortas by Manny Gonzalez

Fresh off culinary school in 1982, Manny Gonzalez moved to the United States to spend four months learning English at Hamline University in Saint Paul. After that, he planned to head back to his native Mexico. But 40 years later, he still calls Minnesota home and has made a name for himself, literally, in the local food scene.

One of the things Manny misses most about his home was the food he grew up eating, especially the delicious sandwiches his mom made for him as a kid. "When I moved to the United States, nobody knew what tortas were. I missed them so much, so I thought, 'I'll just start making my own!'"



In 1997, developers were opening Mercado Central, a marketplace designed to create business opportunities for the Latinx community in Minneapolis. Manny was one of 20 people who applied for five available restaurant spaces in the market. He remembers knowing exactly what he would propose: "I'm going to make tortas because I know somebody is going to do tacos, enchiladas, burritos."

In 2006, Manny's Tortas made the move to a brand new marketplace called Midtown Global Market. And in 2008, they snagged a coveted spot in the Food Building at the Minnesota State Fair. "I'm so glad I made this, and people can try it and see the real Mexican torta. I'm so lucky that I'm able to do this," he says.

# MEXICO

## Tamales by Gustavo Ramero

Armed with a culinary degree in classic French cooking, Gustavo Romero began his career in Italian restaurants. But after a dozen years, he found himself longing for a taste of home. "It gets to the point where you have to decide what kind of chef you want to be. And you have to decide if you want to keep doing what [others] tell you to do, or you look inside of yourself to pull out memories," he explains. "And for me, cooking Mexican food, that's what it's all about. The memories, they come to my head - the smells, the sensation, that's why I like to cook."



Romero's food is not only about capturing the flavors of his past, it's also about preserving traditions of Mexican culture. For Romero, that means using heirloom corn. Romero is one of a growing number of chefs that are seeking out the specialty corn and working with farmers to make sure these varieties are not lost. "[Corn] is the base of Mexican cooking. So if we lose this, we lose everything," Romero reflects.

When Romero moved to Minnesota, he realized that none of the tortillerias were making corn tortillas from scratch. So he set out to change that. Importing heirloom corn from Mexico, Romero takes the raw corn and turns it into masa through nixtamalization, which removes the tough outer layer of the kernels. It's a process that dates back centuries. Originally, Mexicans used wood ash to remove the hull. Nowadays, people use limestone to complete the process.

# MEXICO

## Heirloom Maize by Jose Alarcon

When a young Jose Alarcon knocked on the door of a Twin Cities restaurant asking for a dishwashing job, little did he know that, just a few years later, he'd sit at the helm of two bustling restaurants. After arriving in the U.S. from Mexico at the age of 19, Alarcon spent time in a variety of kitchens, learning the techniques of French and Italian cooking. "At that time, I hadn't defined what kind of cuisine I wanted to do. I was interested in doing pastas because I love working with my hands. But then I thought about it for a minute and I started realizing, I want to make the cuisine that I remember eating, but in terms of how I like to eat it - and that's when the freedom comes to me," he says.



That sense of community Alarcon found in the restaurant business has fueled his inspiration from the beginning. "You will see South American people working in kitchens. Asians, Native Americans, Americans, people all over the world work in the industry. And then for me, it's every time they make a family meal, they will make something differently, you know, and that's unique and everybody has something to tell you. You know, 'This is where I'm from and this is how we cook,'" he reflects.

One of the dishes Alarcon serves his restaurant guests comes from memories of his mom's kitchen. He shares, "It's a green mole. And I was tasting it and tasting it and tasting it. I finally got to the moment where it tasted right [and] I said, 'Oh man, my mom will be so proud of me!'"