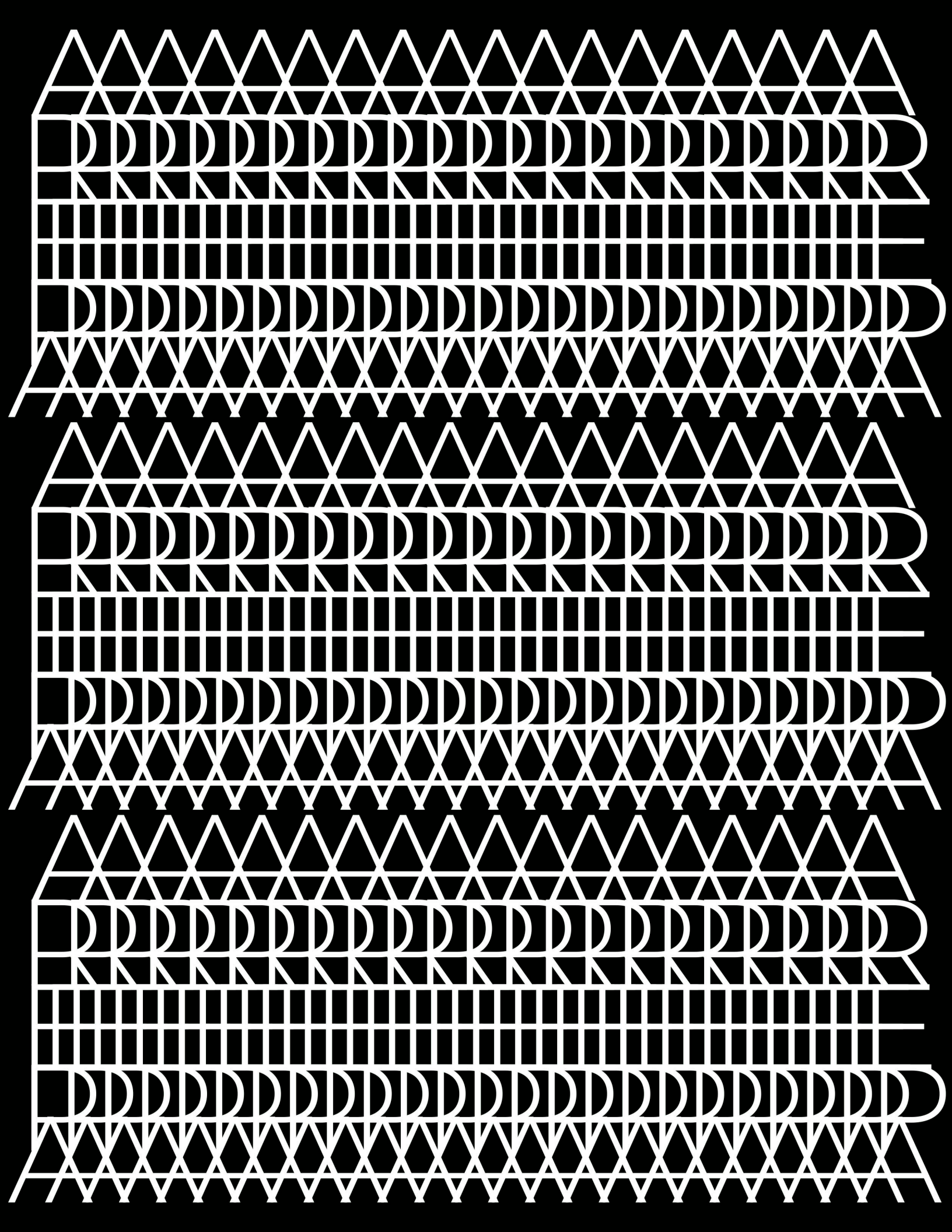




A Compilation by **Ximena Montilla**
Illustrations by Ira León

AREPAS AROUND THE WORLD







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Acknowledgments to
the Organizing Committee of
Arepas around the World:

Ximena Montilla
Chucho Rojas
Federico Tischler
Luisaury Araque
Víctor Moreno





Director of the Arepa History project and compilation:

Ximena Montilla Arreaza

@ximenamontillaarreaza

Original illustrations and Graphic Concept: Ira León

@ojodeira

Editorial Coordination: Manuela Montilla

@galacticatea.editora

English Translation:

Jenny Y Lam Chowdury

IG: @eating_with_my_five_senses

IG: @jenny_y_lam

Ronin Metsa

X roninmetsa@gmail.com

English Proofreading:

Gloria Rodriguez Montilla

@g2rm2002

Layout and Graphic Design: Reinaldo Acosta

@racostav141

Marketing Strategy, Content Creation and Social Media Design:

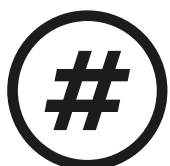
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And how do we celebrate?

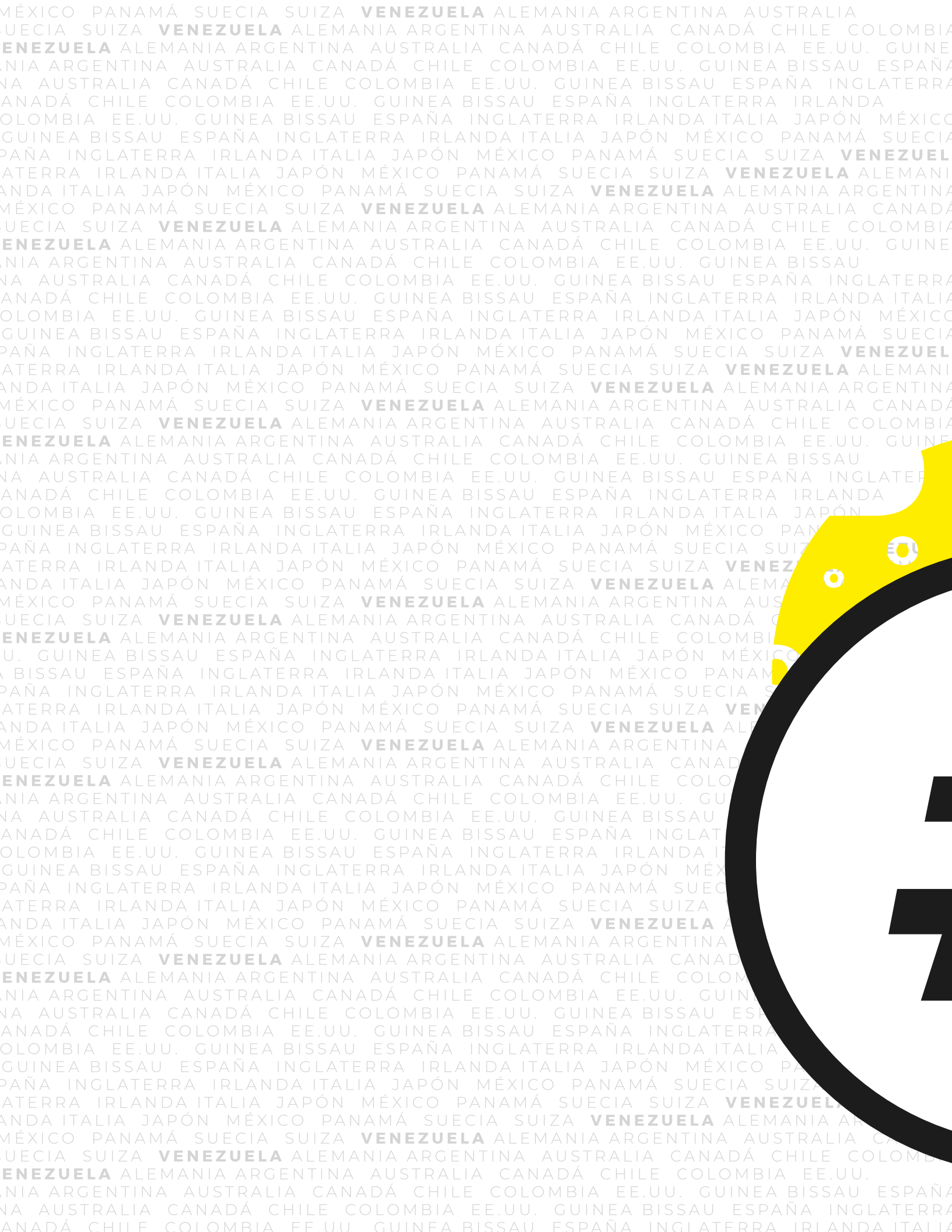
The #WorldArepaDay has been celebrated for 12 years, every second Saturday of September in hundreds of cities around the world. Who invented the World Arepa Day? It was the initiative of Rafael Mourad, Luisana La Cruz and Tony de Viveiros, founders of the Venezuelans in the World Organization (VenMundo).

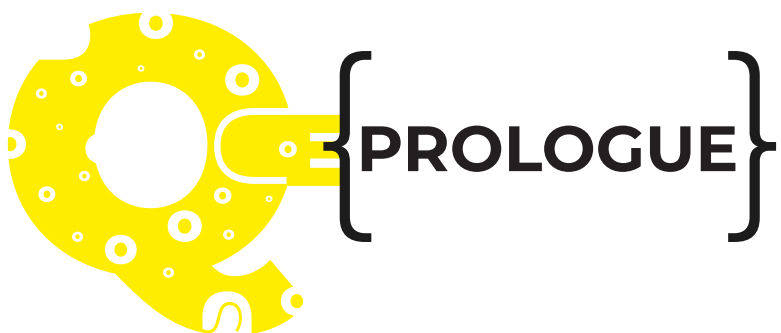
Why is World Arepa Day celebrated?

- To unite our community of Venezuelans inside and outside the country.
- To pay homage to our arepa, ancestral tradition and our daily bread.
- To value, preserve and promote our traditions and culture.
- Support Venezuelan entrepreneurs linked to our gastronomy and other areas.
- Encourage civil responsibility, actively participating in solidarity actions to support social projects inside and outside the country.

How can you celebrate World Arepa Day this year?

- By making some arepas at home and celebrating with family, friends or alone, the important thing is to celebrate.
- Taking the role of coordinator and organizing an event in your city.
- Finding out if there is a fair or event to celebrate this day in your city and attending it.
- Informing yourself and participating in workshops, in-person and/or virtual master classes, lectures, talks, webinars and live presentations about the arepa, its history and recipes.
- Organizing aid and donations to Venezuelan social projects.
- Ordering arepas to take away, in areperas, restaurants as a way to support our Venezuelan entrepreneurs: Ambassadors of the arepa.
- If you have a restaurant, arepera or food store, during the month of September you can make promotions, offers, discounts and contests to celebrate this day.
- Donating or collaborating with an NGO or refugee foundation.
- Signing the Change.org petition for World Arepa Day to be recognized in the official UN Calendar of international days.

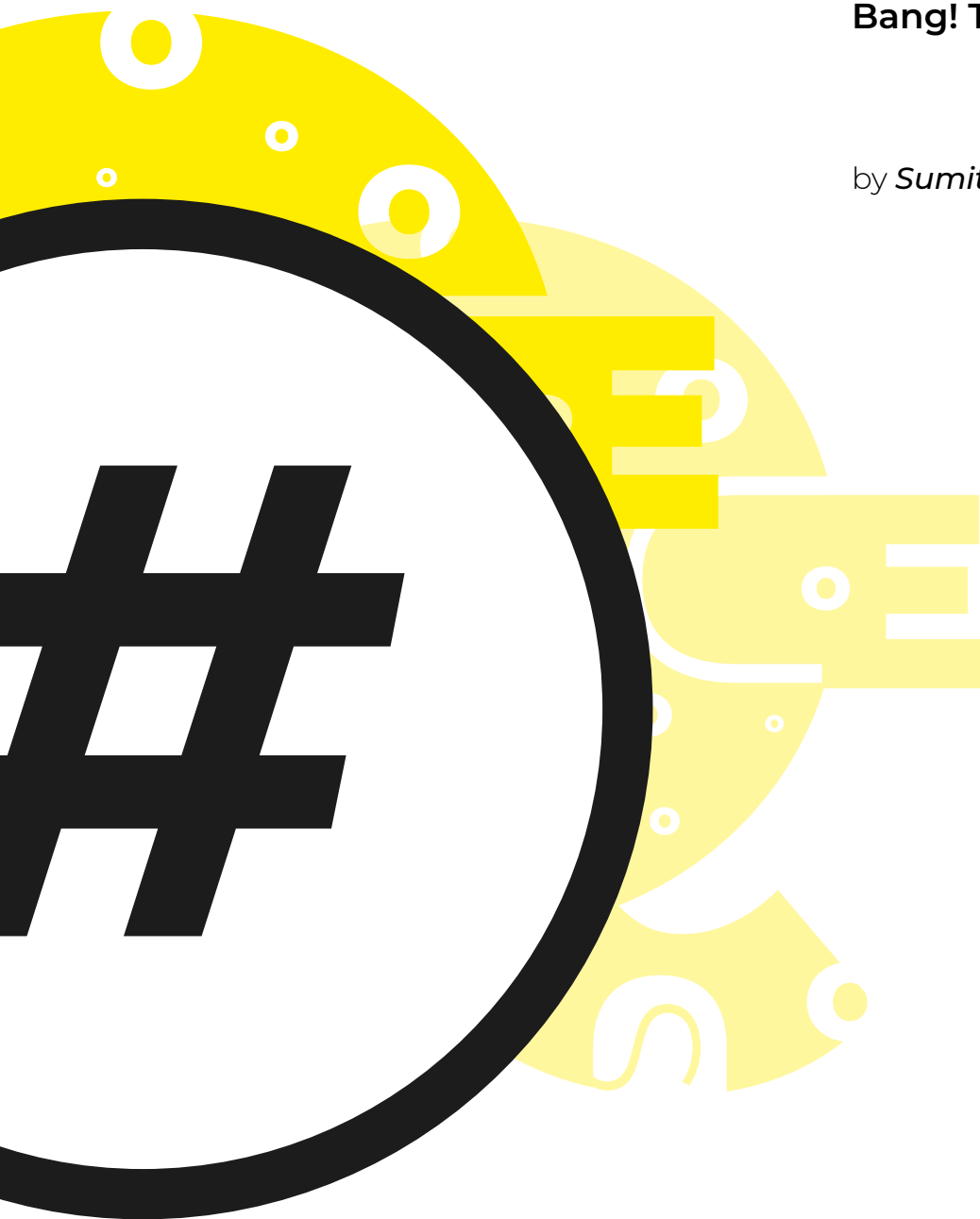


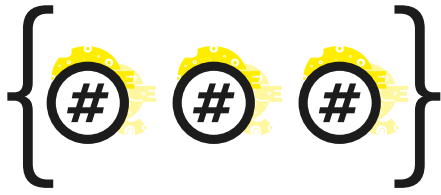


A arepazos¹...

Bang! The wall falls

by *Sumito Estévez*





I

A wall rises between them. Those friends he has made since he came to do postgraduate school are nice, but they don't invite him to their house and rarely to go out, perhaps because in relaxed moments the language barrier is a serious matter, because they speak quickly in slang. One day he sees on the networks that World Arepa Day is approaching, and he dares to invite them, using the event as an excuse. To his surprise, one of his friends offered his own house because it was more comfortable. That day, everyone looks on with a mixture of amazement and envy at his expertise in manipulating that piece of corn dough into a perfect flying saucer. Not ten minutes have passed when everyone is practicing. They laugh at their own clumsiness.

And bang! A arepazos that wall comes tumbling down. They are part of the same thing. The same complicity.

There is a wall between them and her. The girl was 4 years old when they arrived in this country, so far north, so different, so many seasons. Ten years have passed. They see her distant, she speaks Spanish with a television accent and prefer sweet popcorn. One day, one of her mothers tells her to invite her group to a Sunday lunch. The teenager accepts. The mother makes arepas. Half of them stuffed with insane things like black beans with white cheese or fish tinted yellow. Others have more normal fillings. The girl reveals her-self as a foreigner in front of her boyfriend. Her group is happy after a while. They eat with unfaked gusto. They laugh as they mispronounce the words *pelua* and *sifrina*.

And bang! A arepazos that wall comes tumbling down. They are part of the same thing. The same complicity.

The stall is small but efficient and very beautiful. It is a food truck. The place is a fair of the kind that brightens up the summer in all of Europe. We are specifically in Sardinia. Neighboring stalls were filling up, while his arepas stall remained part of a cultural ghet-to. It was like seeing the Italians on one side of the wall and feeling like they were on the other. The local people smiled, but they were afraid to try those *focaccine croccanti di forma circolare dove il mais bianco viene macinato e mescolato con acqua e sale²* and incidentally stuffed with *pollo cotto a basse temperature*,

avocado, succo di limone, un pizzico di maionese, senape, pepe³ which is the description of our Reina Pepiada⁴ with some licenses to fit better. But that was before. After the leading gastronomic critic magazine named them one of the best food trucks in Italy, everything changed. People bring people, and the row gets longer and longer.

And bang! A arepazos that wall came tumbling down. Now they are part of the same thing. Of the same complicity.

II

A lot has been attached to our arepa. It is called an ambassador, or Trojan horse, that introduces one culture as a stowaway in another. We are grateful that it can be a generator of entrepreneurship or a flagship; but in the face of a reality in which 26% of Venezuelans emigrated in the last decade (not counting their sons and daughters born in the new host countries), little is said about one fact: the arepa is the stone with which we are breaking down cultural walls, and it is the sailboat on which we are being well received in other ports.

In your hands, you do not have a chronicle of the look that is given to the arepa in 15 countries, but the account of 27 ventures that break down walls...

And bang! They fall, and we become part of the same thing.

¹ A arepazos: by means of arepa strikes

² Little round crispy cakes in which white corn is ground and mixed with water and salt

³ Chicken cooked at base temperature, avocado, lemon juice, a dash of mayonnaise, mustard, and pepper

⁴ Reina Pepiada: name of the recipe

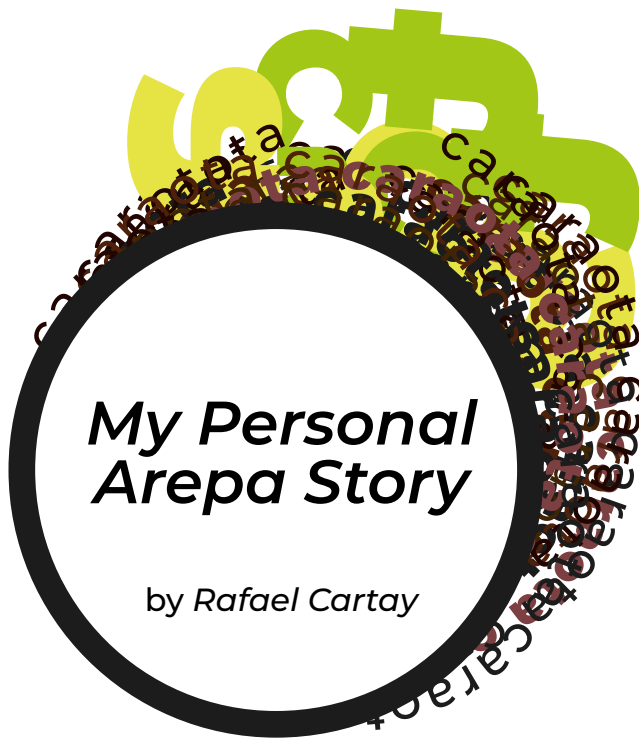


The Venezuelan chef **Sumito Estévez** is one of the most important and renowned chefs in Latin America. Multifaceted, he has been able to balance his public roles as a teacher, businessman, television personality and writer. He is constantly involved in social entrepreneurship projects because he considers gastronomy a fundamental vehicle for building self-esteem, prosperity and integration.

 @sumitoestevezchef

 @sumitoestevez

Translated by Ronin Metsa



1.

The arepa has always been linked to my personal story. I belong to a culture, to a territory, to a tradition, to a community, and to a family, in which the arepa, as a heritage, has always been the food that has marked my identity.

Since the beginning of my time and long before that, since the most remote times of my American culture, corn has been the cereal par excellence: a sacred food. In the culture I come from, myths say that human beings were made from corn dough.

At least in my case, I feel that corn is imprinted in my DNA. That “haughty chief of the lanky tribe”, sung by Andrés Bello, in 1826, for me “(he) swells his grain”.

I grew up with corn. Since I was a child, my essential food has been arepa.

I can see myself when I was seven

years old, around 1948, holding my father's hand on my way to the *pesa*¹ in my village, where meat was sold. He would go to the *pesa* very early in the morning. My father, perhaps to thank me for my unusual company, would buy me a sweet fry *arepita*² bulging and flavored with aniseed. That *arepita* was not so casual. Perhaps it was my first lesson in tasty street food.

I can also see myself, at the age of twelve, grinding cooked corn at a forced rhythm in a Corona³ machine with my brother. It was a morning ritual so that our mother could make us breakfast before we left for school.

At seventeen, in all the student pensions I lived in, breakfast never lacked fried eggs, grated cheese or its perfect companion: the arepa.

I can see myself at the age of twenty, around 1962, hastily preparing an arepa before entering the classrooms of the Central University of Venezuela. I ate arepa at all hours, for breakfast or dinner, spread with butter and accompanied by a fried egg and grated cheese. Or with a sauce called Cheez Whiz, or with Diablitos⁵, maybe stuffed with cheese, white or yellow, and ham. I can also see myself, after the exhausting days of study, at the stroke of midnight, walking around laughing with my classmates, with my extension chair on my shoulder, going to an *arepera*⁶ to calm my nightly hunger.

I also see myself, a recent university graduate in 1966, leaving the parties with my friends on my way to an obligatory early morning appearance before a plate of chicken soup, accompanied by an arepa, or surrendering to an aromatic and tasty stuffed arepa.

The arepa has always been there, guarding me, pampering me throughout my long life.

One of my biggest existential concerns when I was studying abroad was procuring the raw materials to make an arepa. It was not easy. The arepa flour could be found everywhere in faraway Venezuela, but it was difficult to get it abroad.

From the compatriots who visited us when we lived abroad, we always ordered the same things: aged rum, "Diablitos", chocolates "El Rey" and "*harina pan*". I know well that "*pan*"—short for the national food product: P.A.N.—is a commercial name, like many others, for pre-cooked corn flour. I know it, and my friends know it too. It is a very simple thing, or at least it is for many Venezuelans: "*harina pan*" is the generic name for the promise of an arepa. Besides, it's my way of thanking all those companies that turned my palate into a temple of pleasure and became entangled in my gastronomic memory.

The arepa always presided over the table where we entertained friends abroad. It was our most direct way of showing our pride in being Venezuelan.

For a long time, I acted as an improvised detective, searching in the little streets of misplaced neighborhoods in many strange cities for a packet of flour (harina pan). I had a hard time finding it, but I always found it, lost on the shelf of some Asian grocery store. That's how it happened in Mexico City in 1968, in Austin in 1974, in Paris in 1975, and in Quebec in 1984. We Venezuelans abroad were always chasing after that blessed packet of harina pan, until, to our surprise, one day, in the early 2000s, almost without us realizing it, harina P.A.N. began to follow Venezuelans wherever they went, no matter where they went. This change in perspective was due to several factors that combined to stimulate the globalization of harina pan.

2. Arepa shortcuts

Particular histories know, on the one hand, of slow evolutions, so slow that it seems that things do not change; and on the other hand, of quick shortcuts, in which things change in a substantial way. A «shortcut» is the shortest and most efficient way between two points or objectives. The Arepa in its history, has known long periods in which things seemed to stagnate in their evolution. Now and then, though, radical changes occur that initiate a new narrative born of disruption.

The scientific record, proven by archaeological evidence, teaches us that Americans have been eating corn for more than 6,250 years. When we began to populate the Americas more than 10,000 years ago, corn was waiting for us to give us its nutritious grain. At some point, we made it our own. With those grains, we proceeded in the same way as others, from elsewhere, did with all the hard grain cereals in the world. They crush or grind them to obtain a flour that is then cooked in water until a dough is obtained, which we then use to make some kind of bread. That's how we did it for a long time. A first big change, which I call, for brevity's sake, a "shortcut", came in Neolithic times, a few thousand years ago, when we stopped being nomadic and became sedentary, and developed agriculture

and animal husbandry. In those days, sitting on the ground, we found a suitable way to preserve corn and make it digestible. It is a long story in which we learned to tame and use fire, and to develop a language. Then we went back into a very slow evolution in which changes existed, but were not very noticeable.

Chroniclers point out that we have been eating bread made from corn since pre-Columbian times. The Florentine Galeotto Cei points out that, in the first half of the 16th century, around 1560, our aborigines ate a thick, rounded preparation made of corn that they called “areppas” or “fecteguas”. They roasted them on a griddle, basting them with fat to prevent them from sticking. The kernels were crushed in a rustic mortar made of stone. And so we continued to eat them until another shortcut occurred, which mainly had to do with the grinding of the grain, which had remained reduced to the use of certain stones. This technique changed with the help of a vertical wooden pestle container and mallet, introduced by the Africans who were brought to America as slaves. This was the beginning of the differentiation between the grain of corn husked and the grain of peeled maize. To obtain the *pilado*, it was used the corn “*pilón*”, a concave and tall container where the raw corn kernels were placed, and an arm, mallet or hand, also made of wood, used to remove

the husk with rhythmic blows. While we were doing this, pile by pile, we distracted ourselves by singing and dancing. For the peeling, the beans were boiled in water with ashes or lime. In this way, we made them soft and removed the husk. Another change, at the domestic level, took place much later when manual Corona-brand milling machines were used, with which many of us helped to grind the cooked corn to make the dough for the arepas.

Stuffed arepas became popular in the 1950s. In 1955, the *Reina Pepiada* arepa (with shredded chicken, mayonnaise, and peas) was invented in the arepa parlor of the Alvarez brothers in Caracas. It was made in homage to the incomparable Susana Duijm, who had won the Miss World title that year, the first international beauty title won by a Hispanic American woman. Then came other filled arepas with their own name, such as the Pelúa, the Dominó, the Sifrina, the Catira, the Rumbera, the pabellón, the perico, the queso de mano, and many more.

An important shortcut was the preparation of pre-cooked flour, which saved housewives hours of work. On June 4th, 1954, the engineer Luis Caballero Mejías patented the procedure for making dehydrated and enriched corn flour. Engineer Caballero, who made great contributions to technical education in Venezuela, set up the company La Arepera, in La Yaguara(5), with some partners and friends, to produce it. But, unfortunately, he fell ill with cancer in 1958 and died in 1959, while the company went bankrupt. In the meantime, the Polar group established the company Remavenca, in Turmero, Aragua, where it began to manufacture pre-cooked corn flour, along with another plant later established in Chivacoa, Yaracuy. The initiative of Caballero Mejías and the Polar group taught Venezuelans to use pre-cooked corn flour to prepare arepas at home in less time and with less effort. This shortcut allowed us to recover the consumption of arepas, which had been weakening as we moved from a rural to an urban society. A transition dominated, among other things, by the rush to prepare breakfast and the expansion of the sale of street food.

Over time, the corn arepa became a strong competitor to the consumption of wheat bread, whose flour we imported in large volumes. Since the arrival of the 21st century, arepa consumption has surpassed wheat bread consumption. At that time, we received a master class in “food sovereignty” around the arepa, taught by our mothers, the wonderful women of our people.

At that time, you could get harina pan anywhere in the country. “Everywhere”, but not abroad, except in a few places where Venezuelan residents were concentrated. Until the great shortcut that led to the globalization of Harina P.A.N. Other companies producing pre-cooked corn flour emerged in Venezuela. In other countries, such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia and Ecuador, there were also producing companies at the same time as the production of harina pan in Venezuela. But the globalization of pre-cooked flour that we are witnessing was the result, on the one hand, of a successful international marketing operation for flour, initiated by a young and talented Venezuelan businessman from that entrepreneurial family who took the reins of the company and projected it abroad, knowing how to read the signs of market changes worldwide.

The other part of the story is linked to the explosive growth of the diaspora of Venezuelans all over the world, who left the country, most of the time driven out by poverty, seeking opportunities in other latitudes that were now denied to them at home. More than seven million Venezuelans emigrated with great difficulty, often risking their lives, as if someone or something of great power had set out to create another Venezuela out there.

The Polar Group set up large plants abroad in Colombia, the United States and Italy to meet the growing demand for the product in places where Venezuelan migration is concentrated. And new marketing methods (P.A.N., Snack On and P.A.N., Store restaurants). The ingenuity of the Venezuelan emigrants, sharpened by the need to continue their lives and those of their families did the rest: they established restaurants and areperas in the places where people passed through. There, they offered arepas with the traditional fillings to which we were accustomed, and new fillings were added to the arepa with the emblematic products of the host countries.

It has not been an easy task, and it has often been a risky, distressing and painful operation, but the crusade has borne good fruit. The arepa has been internationalized, becoming a gastronomic ambassador for our country.

The arepa, the humble arepa, was the formidable battering ram that broke down the wall of ignorance, opening a promising path for the rest of Venezuelan gastronomy.

Now, thanks to this combination of factors, a new shortcut has been created, guided by the entrepreneurial and culinary talent of Venezuelans, who have made it possible to obtain pre-cooked corn flour and enjoy Venezuelan stuffed arepas everywhere. Now, wherever the arepa goes, the name of our beloved Venezuela travels with it.

¹ Butcher's shop

² Small arepa

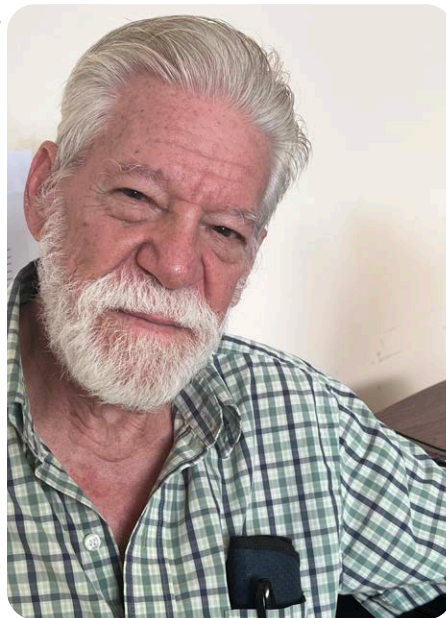
³ Mill Brand

⁴ Spreadable ham brand

⁵ Arepa store

⁶ Neighborhood in Caracas

Translated by Ronin Metsa



Rafael Cartay

rafaelcartay@hotmail.com

Economist, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas; M.Sc. in Agricultural Economics (Colegio de Postgraduados, Chapingo, Mexico; Instituto Iberoamericano de Ciencias Agrícolas, IICA, Turrialba, Costa Rica). Dr. en Economie et Droit des Pays Étrangers (Université de Paris I-Pantheon-Sorbonne, Paris); retired professor at the Universidad de los Andes, Mérida, Venezuela. Research Professor, Universidad Técnica de Manabí, Portoviejo, Ecuador. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5870-5658>.



The Woman behind the Arepa

by *Chef María Antonieta
Pérez Mendoza*

The arepa is the force of the feminine. Historically, from pre-Columbian times, the woman has been in charge of growing and taking care of corn: harvesting, boiling, peeling it in the *pilón*¹ or grinding it in the metate², to make the white dough, working with salt, water and a lot of kneading, and then with the hands giving the shape of a full moon —the representation of feminine power par excellence³—; because it has been knowledge that was passed down for millennia from woman to woman and survived the Conquest thanks to them who continued making it. There are testimonies of it from the Colonial period, the 14th century, which make historians think that it was done long before the arrival of the Spaniards. These testimonies show that it was the indigenous women who, after all the work involved in cultivating and processing the corn and making the arepas, offered them to the diners⁴.

I come from an Andean family of women. My grandmother was the matriarch, a very intelligent, gorgeous and powerful woman. She would make the arepas and give us a little bit of dough so that we could make our own, *chirriquiticas*⁵ and crooked ones, and she would roast them in the *budare*⁶ and serve them to us on the plate next to her perfect arepa.

Although I had uncles, it was the women who always made the decisions. My mother raised us, five girls, and even while working as a public official, she had time to teach us how to make the *arepitas*: “The arepa is not square, it’s round, make it again!” And she would give me one of those mini-horrible pinches. Ouch! She didn’t accept them crooked, that’s what my grandmother was for.

It is a sign of maternal love: when I go to Caracas, my mother welcomes me with “*arepa pelá*” or “*pelada*”, which she herself makes from start to finish, with that ancestral wisdom that so naturally coexists in our daily lives. I don’t think there is a Venezuelan mother who is not concerned about making her children eat their *arepita* before leaving the house.

Arepa “*pelada*” and arepa “*pilada*”? I have only made them peeled, I haven’t had the opportunity to make them *piladas*, but I’m not giving up hope, and here I’ll explain them to

you: The “*pelá*” (*pelada*) arepa differs from the “*pilada*” in that to husk the corn, it is boiled in water with lime or ashes until the husks come loose and float in the water, and when the corn is cooked, it is left to cool, and then it is washed many, many times until the water is very clean. It is ground twice and then it is kneaded with water, little by little, and salt. Eighteen hours of work. This process is very similar to what the Mexicans do, the “nixtamalisation” of corn.

For the arepa *pilada*, the corn is peeled in the *pilón*, a large, tall and narrow mortar made in the hollowed trunk of a savannah tree, from the Venezuelan plains, and the woman, with the help of the “pilón’s hand”, a thick stick, beats with rhythms from which our beautiful *Cantos del Pilón*⁶ were born, by which they gossiped, singing in verse, everything they had heard about what was going on in the village. In this way, the hitting of the corn kernels make the husk come off, and then the process of cooking and elaboration of the dough follows⁸.

These ancestral arepas take longer to cook, so they have a double process: one in the thick clay *budare*, where they are cooked on the inside, and then in the ember or in a metal *budare*, so that the crust is toasted and soft on the inside. It is the best thing in the world!

My great-aunt Emérita made them so perfectly that the day came when I asked my mother for permission to stay with her for a few days at her house so that she could teach me how to make them. That's why my particular way of preparing them is: the dough is soft and thin like my aunt's; I squirt them with water to work them into the Luna shape, as if they were clay, like my mom does; I bake them in stages: first inside, then the crust, then I puff them up, like my aunt; and like her, I get them with a shiny, toasted crust.

I have lived long enough to remember that when we ate arepas and *hallacas*⁹, it was my mother, my grandmother and my aunts who processed the corn. In 1960, the invention of inventions, P.A.N. flour, by Juan Lorenzo Mendoza and the master brewer Carlos Roubicek¹⁰, became, together with female perseverance, the salvation of the Venezuelan breakfast, at a time when we were already so many little sisters and my mother's world had become small - and so to thousands, if not millions, of Venezuelan women who already had a double day work, home and profession or job. And it is also the example of "millenary cuisine" that I am most proud of, because I can say that I learned to prepare arepas before I could have recollections, thanks to the strength of the culture of Venezuelan women.

So let others sing of love and wine
and celebrate its glories night and day;
let them sing of Troy's wretched fate,
of Achilles the might and bizarre.
I will sing, perhaps, with better sense
of the white bread, the support of poverty:
I want, reader, that to me the glory may fit,
of sustaining the forces of the arepa.

El Canto a la Arepa
Ramón Isidro Montes to Cacaseno ¹¹

¹ A type of wooden or metal mortar used for pounding grain or other things.

² Stone on which corn and other grains are ground by hand.

³ *La Luna y la mujer en el arte, la literatura y la mitología* (The Moon and Women in Art, Literature and Mythology), www.epoje.es

⁴ *History of Food in Venezuela*, Prof. José Rafael Lovera, p. 35.
Caribbean Gastronomy, Prof. José Rafael Lovera, p. 31.

⁵ Tiny

⁶ A circular, slightly concave, earthenware or iron griddle used to cook or toast foods.

⁷ Traditional chants

⁸ What is the pylon? What is it used for? Orlando Amaya, @orlandoj, www.steemit.com.

⁹ Corn flour cake, filled with a stew made with various kinds of small pieces of meat and other ingredients, and wrapped in banana leaves, which is made especially for Christmas.

¹⁰ EL Origen de la Harina P.A.N, www.origenonline.es

¹¹ *History of Food in Venezuela*, Prof. José Rafael Lovera, p. 227.

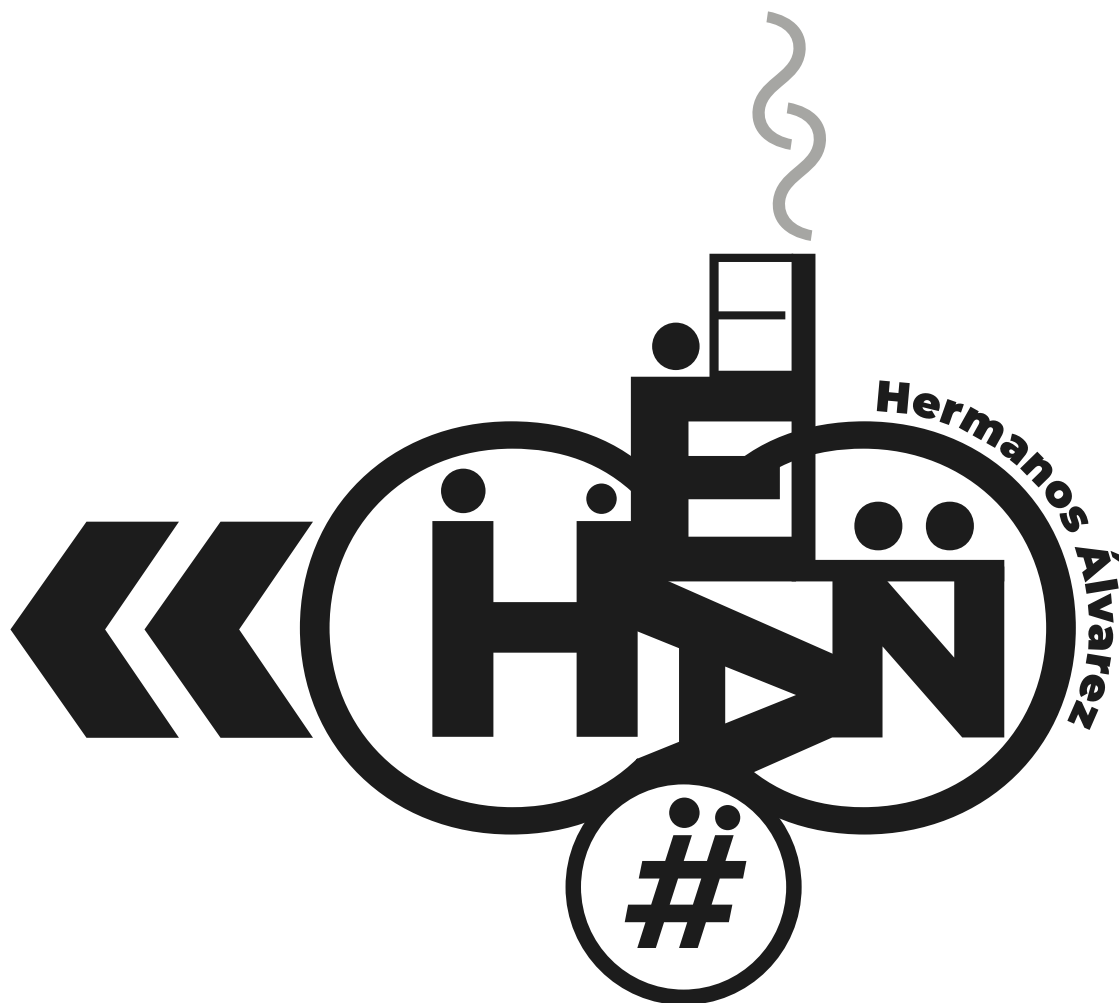


**Chef María Antonieta
Pérez Mendoza**

 [@mariantocook](https://www.instagram.com/mariantocook)

Professional cook, from Caracas. She took her first cooking course at the age of 10. Graduated from the IV promotion of CEGA, Centro de Estudios Gastronómicos in Caracas, under the direction and guidance of Prof. José Rafael Lovera; chefs Víctor Moreno and Miguel Alfonzo and Mrs. Alicia Allas. She was an instructor of Venezuelan Cuisine at CEGA. For 23 years she has been living in Tuscany, Italy, and has dedicated herself to continuing to learn our cuisine and the Tuscan cuisine, always applying the techniques of French and Italian cuisine, cooking private dinners and teaching cooking on social networks with passion, knowledge and total respect for the ingredients.

Translated by Ronin Metsa



The Álvarez and a Country's Chance

by *Ximena Montilla and
Roberto Bernal Dagüiz*

We cannot talk about the history of the Venezuelan arepa nor pay homage to the arepa ambassadors without mentioning the Álvarez family.

This Andean family native of Trujillo, besides starting to stuff the arepas with different flavors, gave them a characteristic that made arepas very Venezuelan: All our arepas are “baptized” at birth with a pseudonym that represents them and tells—with that cheekiness and humor that characterize us—part of our people’s history or events that have occurred in the political, social, and entertainment arenas. In short, Venezuelan arepas invite us to taste the delicious filling combinations born in this generous land, while we talk and celebrate life.

The combination of original ideas from this hardworking family of humble origins, the high quality of the products used, their well-thought working method, the quality of their customer service and, of course, their innate audacity for marketing, among other variables, gave shape to a business concept that in Venezuela is known as *arepera*¹, and 70 years later, this model has been replicated successfully in so many places around the world.

The Álvarez siblings took the already famous stuffed arepas of our country to a new level. They appeared on counters with several trays of different fillings adorned in colors and creative combinations, along with fruit juice and comforting soups. This innovative kind of business venture duplicated all across our red-tiled roofs city, which, for decades, have witnessed many stories and important national and international events that were immortalized with the name of a Venezuelan arepa.



The real Queen of the Arepas

We are not talking about the *Reina Pepiada*, but we are referring to Doña María de los Santos Álvarez, a woman with a vision and was the pillar of this great business venture that changed the way a whole country eats arepas. Doña María, a single mother of seven children, knew that “even though every child is born with an arepa in their hands,” it is necessary to work hard and persevere to keep that arepa stuffed.

Her grandson, Dr. Fredy Morales, in a special interview for *Arepas around the World*, describes her like this: “Doña María was a woman of few words, strict, but also affectionate with her children and grandchildren; she had a sharp tongue and exerted power over the entire family. In my case, as she told me, she would hang me from her neck in a sort of light hammock and would start to work on her stoves. She never stopped being authentic. In our last house, she had coffee trees in

the garden, her chickens would walk by the corridor... plus, she had a great passion for dogs and local poultry, which was common to have at home at that time.”

Doña María de los Santos Álvarez raised all her seven children by herself: Josefa Antonia, Victor Manuel, Hernan Antonio, Heriberto Ramon, Rodolfo Ramon, Ada Luisa, and Luis. During the first years, they lived in Trujillo, in Las Araujas neighborhood, where they made a living by selling coffee, arepas, and empanadas. Later, they moved to Maracaibo where her sons worked as stevedores at Palmarejo Port.

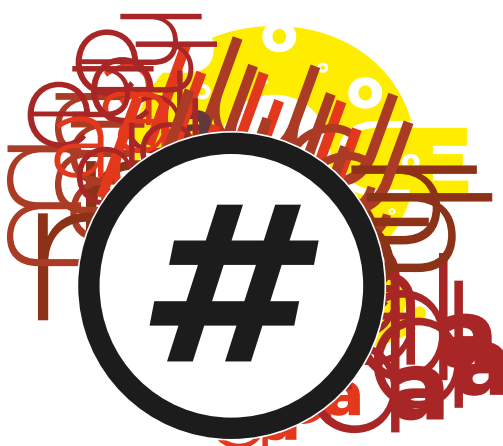
By the end of the 40's, they decided to move to Caracas. Her eldest son, Heriberto Álvarez, started working first as a “bus collector” and then as a workman at Pinturas Pinco in Catia, which allowed him to save money to move the rest of the family to the capital. They settled in San Juan civil parish, in a low-cost house.

Their Beginnings in the Capital

The first business was a small store called “El Arauda” where they sold empanadas and coffee. It was in the area of El Guarataro called Cola de Pato (Duck’s Tail). They did very well and decided to open another store, a bar, located at the corner of Maderero and Bucare, near Plaza Miranda, which was named El Chance (The Chance), where they sold the first “tostadas”, the name given to Trujillo arepas stuffed with cheese.

In an interview for *Arepas around the World*, the descendants of the Álvarez siblings confirmed the legend that Alfredo Sanchez Luna—later known as the Golden Voice, the beloved tenor Alfredo Sadel—was their first customer, and at that historical moment he asked for an arepa with *queso de mano*, the first of many arepas that the famous artist would enjoy in his lifetime at the Álvarez Siblings’ stores.

By 1955, they opened the first Álvarez Siblings’ Centro Criollo de Nutrición (Creole Nutrition Center) in La Gran Avenida (The Grand Avenue) that connects Plaza Venezuela (Venezuela Square) with Sabana Grande, a strategic location (since it was next to the Belloso sisters’ flower shop and the busy store “Todo París”) that would become the definite step towards the arepa evolution.



The Arepas of the Álvarez Siblings: From the Budare to the Mouth

Her grandson, Dr. Fredy Morales, son of Hernán Álvarez and who grew up next to her grandmother's stove, tells us that the dough for the arepas at El Chance, and for the other stores that came later, was made of pestle corn that was boiled in salt water early in the morning and taken to be grounded at a mill in La Vega civil parish, in Caracas. He remembers seeing the milling of corn when accompanying "el isleño Pepe" (Pepe from the Islands), one of the drivers in charge of transporting the precious grain that would later be distributed to all family businesses.

The arepas were made in each store. The female makers of arepas were so skilled that they could make them with both hands and in two movements. Those arepas went first to a steel plank; from there, they would be detached and placed on a grill on the stove embers where they would soak in the smell of burning timber. Our motto was: *From the budare to the mouth.*

“¡Precooked flour was never used! The dough was that simple, with no other additives but salt”, tells us Dr. Morales. By the way, Don Caballero Mejías, the creator of the first precooked flour, offered it to Don Heriberto Álvarez, but they never came to an agreement.

The Baptism of the Reina Pepiada

Is there a Venezuelan who has not eaten a *Reina Pepiada*? There are many recipes for this desired arepa, and as many variations as well. We talked to the Álvarez family about how this filling came to be, a filling that defined a before and after in the history of the arepa...

On his TV program on Venevision, *Así son las Cosas* (That's How It Is...), Óscar Yanez commented that the arepas regularly cost “a *real* and a *cuartillo*” (0.65 cents) or “a *real* and a *medio*” (0.75 cents). But with the arrival of the *Reina Pepiada*, the arepa went to cost one *bolívar* because its ingredients were very expensive. The *Reina Pepiada* has been the Diva of the arepas from birth.

As Dr. Fredy Morales tells us, the true story behind the name of this arepa, endorsed with knowledge of the facts and witness, is the following: Rodolfo Ramon Álvarez and Hernan Álvarez were the ones who, originally, came up with the name “Reina” (Queen) to honor the first Venezuelan Miss World Susana Duijm; adding “Pepiada” (meaning gorgeous, dotted) alluding to that beautiful woman who had just been crowned, and to the peas that adorn the arepa filling. The recipe would have been invented by grandma María and aunt Luisa. Heriberto, the administrator and “brain” of the family business, but not of the kitchen, would endorse the name and its advertising use.

To the delight of our readers, for the first time, we will reveal the original recipe to make the most famous of the arepas:

The chickens were slowly steamed. Doña María told the cooks to put the chicken “to sweat” with spices, red bell peppers, onions, ajíes dulces or sweet perennial peppers, coriander, and garlic. Once cooked, and the sauce reduced, they would be let to cool and then shredded. They would add a touch of Worcestershire sauce (Lea & Perrins, exclusively), homemademayonnaise, American-style mustard, part of the sauce from the chickens, thinly sliced avocado, and petite pois (green peas) from Monarch o Del Monte brands. These would be spread over the avocado slices.

A Family Business

Each member of the family was guided under the supervision of Doña María. She had the last word. Her eldest son, Heriberto, was the head of administration, logistics, and purchasing. Hernan, Victor, and Luis were managing the stores, ensuring that everything was top notch. Ada and Luisa, once they had finished with their studies and schoolwork, would help in the kitchen or manage the money, and Doña María was the head chef.

First and Foremost: Quality Control and Order

Hygiene was the motto of the Álvarez Siblings' business ventures, where the use of impeccably clean coats and hats was compulsory. Hygienic precautions were taken in the handling of food products and the cleanliness of the stores; which Heriberto would visit and supervise every night.

Organization and cleanliness characterized their stores; any leftover food was discarded at the end of the day as dictated by the regulations of those times. Everything served at the stores was fresh and made on the same day. "Many neighbors would scavenge the discarded food to feed the animals."

The Production Method: How Many Restaurants were there?

There was a main kitchen, one single command, and it was located at 323 Ave. San Martin; the phone number was 423077.

There, the day began at six in the evening until dawn the next day. Upon arriving, they would prepare all the food served at the restaurants, paying attention to avoid any cross contamination. The main kitchen had a laundry area to wash coats, hats, and tablecloths; a central storage unit for canned food, and a parking lot for the vans that each dawn started the distribution of the products. The cooking and filling of the arepas was made upon request at each restaurant.

The Álvarez Siblings' Creole Nutrition Centers would spread throughout the city spanning several decades; they could be found at Comercio Primario, at the corner of Maderero and Bucare; on La Gran Avenida, between Plaza Venezuela and Sabana Grande (1955); and in the coming years at Circo Metropolitano, Plaza Catia, and at the corners of Muñoz and Solis, and Cuji and Romualdo.



The Menu and the Prices

The golden age of the Álvarez Siblings lasted until the seventies. The prices varied according to the fillings and ranged from 0.50 bolívars to La Prohibitiva (The Prohibited One) that cost 27 bolívars.

Although their main offering was the arepa, which was always available for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, the menu of the Álvarez Siblings' Creole Nutrition Centers also included roasted and grilled meat, *asado negro*², soups, and salads.

The soups, famously known by a large group of followers, were two: "Countryside Vitality", a hen soup with "all the trimmings", and the creole cow belly stew, which they called "The Nervous one", specially designed for

those who had been up all night, had an original recipe, and was thickened with butter biscuit.

The sweets served for dessert were made by Doña María: candied papaya, Martinique Grapefruit, candied peaches and figs, quince jam, and *quesillo** made with milk The Dutch Baby. There was also fruit juice and EFE ice cream.

And among the exclusive details obtained in the interview done by the editors of The History of the Arepa, and of interest to all arepa lovers and vintage fans, there is the fact that the brand of butter used at the Álvarez Restaurants was Alfa, and the ham, imported from the United States, was Ferris -although it was known as Ferris's Ham.

AREPAS

LA PROHIBITIVA (THE PROHIBITED ONE)

MADE WITH CAVIAR,
A VERY EXPENSIVE INGREDIENT.

LA TELEVISADA (THE TELEVISED ONE)

TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE ARRIVAL OF TV TO THE
CAPITAL OF THE COUNTRY. IT IS STUFFED WITH
ROASTED PORK AND TOMATO SLICES.

LA TRIDIMENSIONAL (THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL ONE)

TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE ARRIVAL OF 3D MOVIES
TO THE COUNTRY.

LA BOMBA H (THE H BOMB)

AN AREPA STUFFED WITH FRIED BLACK BEANS.
IT WAS BAPTIZED WITH THIS NAME AFTER
THE DISCOVERY OF THE HYDROGEN BOMB
(H BOMB).

LA MULTISÁPIDA (THE MULTI-FLAVORED ONE)

INSPIRED BY THE NAME MADE POPULAR BY
PRESIDENT ROMULO BETANCOURT TO REFER
TO THE *HALLACA*¹ BETWEEN 1958-1963.
IT IS STUFFED WITH CHEESE, PORK RINDS, AND
CHICKEN.

LA DOMINÓ (THE DOMINO)

BLACK BEANS AND SHREDDED WHITE CHEESE.

LA TRUJILLANA (NATIVE TO TRUJILLO)

STUFFED WITH GOAT CHEESE.

LA FERRY (THE FERRY ONE)

STUFFED WITH FERRIS' HAM WRAPPED IN
CURED SPANISH HAM.

LA MALVADA (THE EVIL ONE)

NAME GIVEN DUE TO THE POSSIBLE
STOMACHACHES YOU COULD GET AFTER
EATING IT. IT WAS STUFFED WITH BLACK
SAUSAGE FROM EL JUNQUITO.

LA ANCHA BASE (THE WIDE BASE)

BAPTIZED WITH THIS NAME BECAUSE OF THE
GOVERNING PACT OF THREE POLITICAL PARTIES
OF THE COUNTRY: ACCIÓN DEMOCRÁTICA (THE
WHITE PARTY) WHICH WAS REPRESENTED
BY WHITE CHEESE; URD (THE YELLOW PARTY)
WHICH WAS REPRESENTED BY SCRAMBLED
EGGS; COPEI (THE GREEN PARTY) WHICH WAS
REPRESENTED BY AVOCADO.



Hermanos Álvarez

LA BANDA BLANCA (THE WHITE BAND)

THAT WAS THE NAME OF «THE WIDOWED
AREPA», OR PLAIN AREPA WITH NO FILLING. ITS
NAME WAS A REFERENCE TO THE WHITE BAND
ON CAR TIRES AT THAT TIME.

BEBIDAS

FRIVOLIDAD (FRIVOLITY)

A GLASS OF MILK

BARLOVENTEÑO (NATIVE TO BARLOVENTO)

BLACK COFFEE AND DEDICATED TO
BARLOVENTO

PEQUEÑO DE COLOR (LITTLE ONE OF COLOR)

BROWN COFFEE (OR BLACK COFFEE
WITH A DASH OF MILK)

MORIR SOÑANDO (DIE DREAMING)

A MIX OF ORANGE, CARROT,
AND BEETROOT JUICE

JUGO DE TUBO (PIPE JUICE)

A GLASS OF WATER AT ROOM TEMPERATURE

LA JUVENTUD (YOUTH)

A MILKSHAKE WITH CERELAC AND HONEY

POSTRE

QUESILLO CASERO (HOMEMADE QUESILLO²)

A RECIPE FROM DOÑA MARÍA DE LOS SANTOS

¹ **HALLACA:** A VENEZUELAN DISH THAT CONSISTS OF A CORN DOUGH STUFFED
WITH AN ASSORTMENT OF INGREDIENTS (BASED ON THE REGION), WRAPPED IN
PLANTAIN LEAVES. IT'S TRADITIONALLY CONSUMED DURING CHRISTMAS.

² **QUESILLO:** A FLAN-LIKE DESSERT MADE WITH SUGAR, EGGS, VANILLA, AND MILK



The Menu

The menu we are about to present is the most significant testimony of the creative capacity, marketing vision and treatment of what is known today—in the world of social networking, positioning, and brand identity—as a unique and cutting-edge strategy. Following is a list of the name of the fillings for the arepas that were included in the original menu of the Álvarez Siblings' Creole Nutrition Centers:

The Patrons

There were many important figures visiting the Álvarez Siblings' restaurants, especially throughout its golden age, a few of them being: Mario Moreno "Cantinflas", Pedro Vargas, Daniel Santos, Leo Marini, Alfredo Sadel,

Susana Duijm and her father; Renny Ottolina, Oscar Yanes; Aquiles Nazoa, author; Luis Frómeta (from Billo's Caracas Boys); Renato Capriles, conductor of Los Melódicos Orchestra; Abelardo Raidi, journalist; Omar Lares, journalist; Julián Montes de Oca, politician; Isidoro Cabrera—Caracas last coachman, known from the song "Epa Isidoro"; Salvador Salvatierra, businessman and banker; Carlos Morales; Eugenio Mendoza, entrepreneur, Oswaldo Karma, Ignacio Luis Arcaya, Manuel Egaña, Amador Bendayán, TV actor and presenter, Francisco Amado Pernía, Marco Antonio "Musiú" La Cavalerie, sports commentator; Rafael Minaya, pianist and conductor; José Antonio Mayobre, economist and diplomat; politicians Alfredo Tarre Murci, and Alirio Ugarte Pelayo; Miguel Thoddé, presenter and director of TV Channel 5; Gustavo

and Eduardo Machado, politicians; Rómulo Betancourt, Venezuela's former president and politician, Jovito Villalba, politician; José Agustín Catalá, editor; José Antonio Pérez Díaz; Kotepa Delgado, journalist. All of them were distinguished representatives of Venezuelan and Latin American society in the 20th century.

The End and another Beginning

In 1968, the Álvarez Siblings' Creole Nutrition Centers company was dissolved. The last business to be sold was located in front of Lido Movie Theater in Chacaito. Several stores were acquired by a new traditional fast-food chain called El Matracazo.

Doña María de los Santos Álvarez died on July 14th, 1982. She left her children with thriving businesses and established professions and trades. Don Heriberto Álvarez, who was at the helm, studied Business Administration. Until his very last years of life, he expressed that he could not stop working because that was what kept him alive, and that thanks to the family businesses, he was able to make a fortune that allowed him to travel and enjoy life.

Don Hernan Álvarez studied Accountancy; Don Víctor Álvarez worked in the family businesses, as well as Doña Josefa Álvarez. Don Rodolfo Álvarez studied Psychology and Doña Ada Luisa Álvarez studied Education. Don Luis Álvarez later worked as a mechanic specialized in diesel engines.

The arepa gave the Álvarez siblings The Chance to convert it into a successful business opportunity for them as well as for many families around the world

The Legacy

We decided to set the foundations of what we call "the arepa international boom" based on the legacy built by Doña María and her children, the Álvarez siblings, which started in that first migratory experience—within Venezuelan territory—the reference to the arepa success.

Why the Álvarez Siblings' Creole Nutrition Centers are the origin of a business model that, even today, is replicated and continues to work, and which has now expanded around the globe: the counter with trays of magical and colorful fillings of unique flavors, first-class attention, and the seasoning of an entire country at your fingertips to stuff each arepa?

Due to its large contribution in gastronomy, culture and industry, along with the fact that they promote commercial growth in a new or non-existent market sector, the Álvarez siblings is a compulsory reference regarding innovation in ventures specialized in Venezuelan cooking.

In those days, in Caracas, arepas were sold ("widow" or plain) by packets and

“to go”. The arrival of the Álvarez —with the recipe from their homeland: the *Trujillana tostada*— meant a radical change both in concept and aesthetics, because the arepa was cut open in half and stuffed with cheese; in addition, they were served to be eaten *in situ*.

The variety and quality of fillings, the ingenuity and market intuition when naming their products, managed to first make people eat stuffed arepas, and then make this act a reflection of the country's current social and political situation, its idiosyncrasy, and at the same time, with a very personal perspective, full of humor, analysis, and opinion. All this was part of the key to its positioning in the market.

Moreover, they knew how to build a “Star System” where personalities from cinema, radio, television, arts, politics, and business world felt as comfortable as any other patron in their premises, imprinting that halo of “entertainment” that is so attractive to our culture, besides offering the possibility of getting everyone together in front of a food that is liked equally by everyone.

These restaurants came hand in hand with the rise of modernity and reconstruction of the city, and they became the connector of reinterpreted traditions focused on adapting to a changing world, where everything is moving faster and faster. The Álvarez siblings manage to implement in an

assertive and functional way what would be a Venezuelan fast-food restaurant.

This model of business that we call “*arepera*” has been able to survive through time due to its qualities and innovations; and today, 70 years after the advent of El Chance, the Álvarez Siblings’ store, it has become an institution. It is evident that it is a business model to be exported, as well as cultural, gastronomic, and industrial patrimony of our nation; and its influence will be felt in the stories that we will share with you in this book.

Translated by Gloria Rodríguez Montilla

¹Arepera: A cafeteria-style place where arepas, empanadas, non-alcoholic beverages, and coffee are sold and eaten.

²Asado negro: It is piece of round roll/heel of round beef cooked in brown sugar until black and then stew in the same pan it was blackened in.

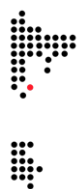


Roberto Bernal Dagüiz Advertising executive, artist, musician, and researcher. He leads the Marketing Strategy, Content Creation, and Social Network Design of the project “The History of The Arepa”.

Ambassadors of the Arepa

Translated by Jenny Y. Lam Chowdaury

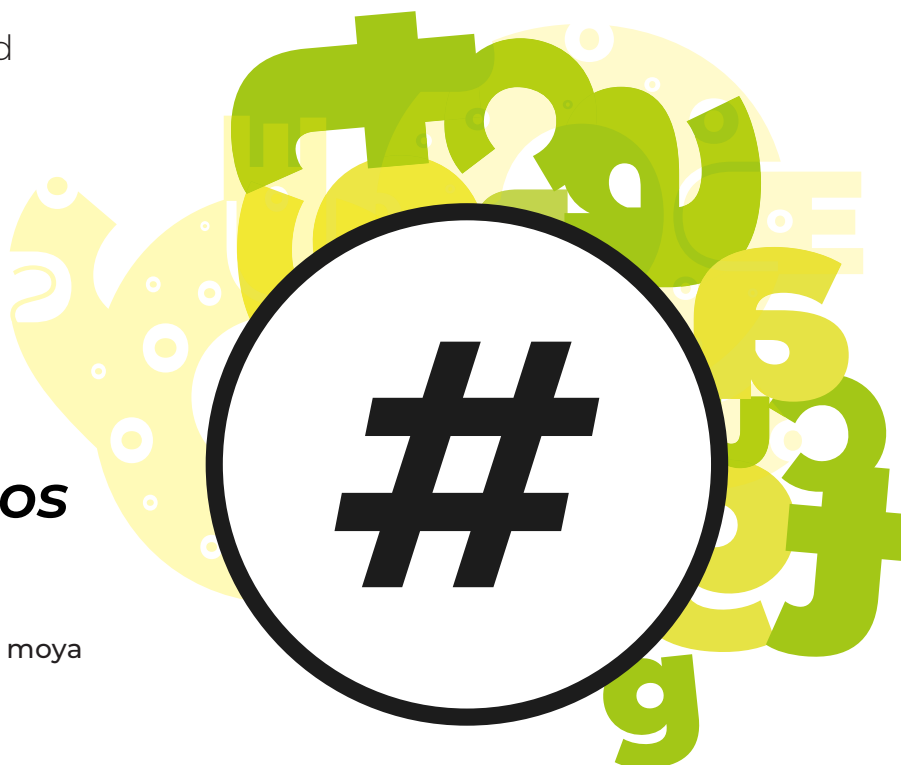




Margarita Island
VENEZUELA

Arepas Hermanos Moya

@arepashermanos moya

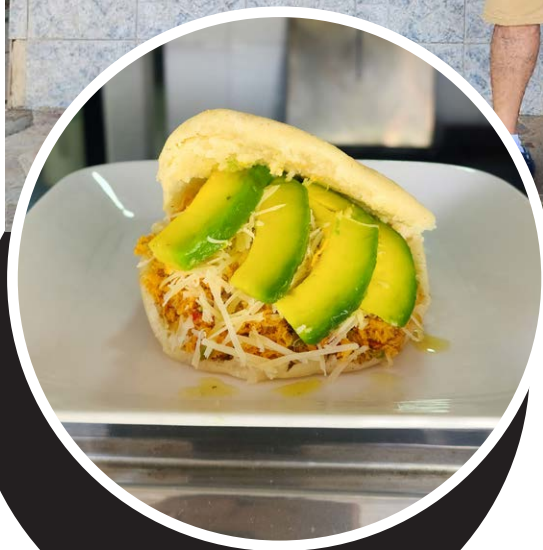


**“If I were to die, let it be in Margarita while I’m eating
an arepa of pork rinds from Hermanos Moya.”**

A compliment from Miro Popic

Everything began in 1973, at the old market of Porlamar, Margarita. Oscar José Moya Rodríguez, a Venezuelan proud of their successful family business that just turned 50 years old in September 2023, tells us, “Hermanos Moya is a business that relies on teamwork and everyone is in charge of a task. By joining all our efforts, we came up with the slogan, *Hermanos Moya, a different way of eating arepas.*”

One of the most difficult times in their journey while building up the business was, as remembered by Oscar José Moya, after *Viernes Negro* (it refers to Friday, February 18th, 1983, when the Venezuelan currency was substantially devalued against the US dollar.) At that time, nobody had heard about “delivery” in Venezuela but “I went out offering arepas from one store to another at Boulevard Guevara in Porlamar. I’d take their order, pick them up at the restaurant, deliver them, and then get paid at noon”.



For him, arepas are everything because they helped to raise four generations of Moyas. “Thanks to the arepas, I was able to go to university, have a family, educate them, and provide jobs for everyone. In Hermanos Moya, we have lawyers, engineers, computer scientists, language professionals, business administrators, and accountants”.

We could not help asking him what makes the arepas in Hermanos Moyas so special. “I think it’s because we make them with a lot of love and we use good ingredients. Here, in Margarita Island, we can find any

kind of ingredient, like fresh seafood, excellent cheeses, great produce, and the best butter, like *Maracay* or the French one, President. Having the privilege of being a free port brings us ingredients from all over the world. Also, by being on this island, we have access to a wonderful ingredient that is essential in all our food: *ají margariteño* (a variety of sweet chile native to the island). In Hermanos Moya you can find arepas stuffed with skate, *chucho* (another type of stingray fish), a mix of shrimp and crabmeat, octopus and crabmeat, chicken salad with avocado, roast pork, pork rinds, shredded beef, eggs with ham, turkey ham, leg ham, Dutch yellow cheese, pecorino cheese, and *guayanés* cheese (a typical Venezuelan cheese).

What he enjoys the most from the business is “to see people happy when they bite into their arepas and taste all those flavors.”

It’s not easy to begin, especially now that there are so many businesses. My only advice is to never compete with prices but with quality and service; that’s what makes the difference.

Arepa «La Moya»

It’s an arepa stuffed with skate fish stew, pecorino cheese, avocado, and olive oil.

For the stew:

- 2 kg (~4.5 lb) skate fish, boiled and shredded
- 600 g (~1.5 lb) onion
- 450 g (~1 lb) bell pepper
- 300 g (~11 oz) *ají margariteño* chile or sweet chile
- 150 g (~5.25 oz) green onion
- 80 g (~3 oz) garlic, mashed
- 25 g (~1 oz) salt
- 40 g (~1.5 oz) *Sazón Margariteño (Adobo)*
- 150 g (~5.5 oz) annatto oil
- 120 g (~4.25 oz) vinegar
- 30 g (~1 oz) Worcestershire sauce

In a pot, add the skate previously cut into pieces and cover with water. Let it boil until cooked. Remove the skin and the cartilages. Press with your hands to remove all excess water and shred it. Set aside.

It’s not easy to begin, especially now that there are so many businesses. My only advice is to never compete with prices but with quality and service; that’s what makes the difference.



Directions:

- In a cauldron, heat the annatto oil. Add garlic, onion, bell pepper, and a portion of *ají margariteño*, and green onion. Add salt, *Sazón Margariteño*, and Worcestershire sauce to the *sofrito*.
- Add the previously boiled, pressed, and shredded skate. Mix it well with the *sofrito*. Add vinegar and cook it for 15 minutes while mixing vigorously. At the end of the cooking time, turn off the heat, and add the remaining green onion and *ají margariteño*. Cover the cauldron and set aside.

For the dough of the arepa:

Ingredients:

- 1 kg (~2.25 lb) pre-cooked cornmeal
- 1.5 l (~6.25 US cups) water
- 20 g (~0.75 oz) salt

Directions:

- In a bowl, add water and salt. Stir to dissolve the salt. Add the flour little by little, integrating it with the water. Knead until you get a homogeneous dough.
- Form spheres with the dough and flatten them with your hands to give them the shape of an arepa. Cook the arepas on a griddle or *budare*.

Note: The cooking time for our arepas is from 6 to 8 minutes because they are thin and weigh approximately 100 grams.

Additional fillings:

The amounts of these additional fillings are based on personal taste.

- Pecorino cheese
- Avocado
- Olive oil

To assemble the arepa:

Using a serrated knife, split open the arepa, and stuff it with the skate fish stew. Top with pecorino cheese according to your taste. Add slices of avocado to give it some freshness. To finish, drizzle with olive oil to enhance the flavors.



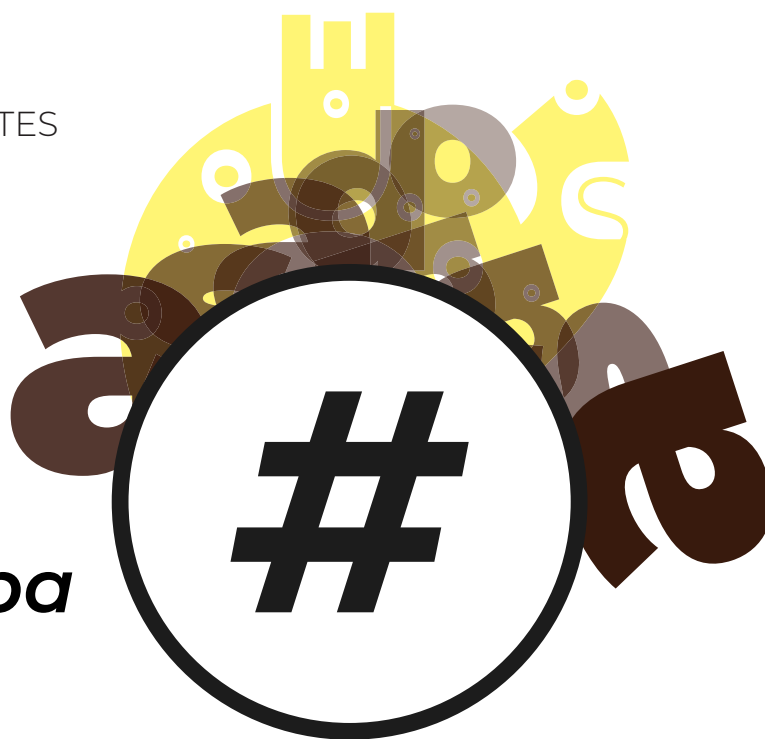




Georgia
UNITED STATES

**Arepa
Mía**

@arepamia



**“Today they told me that when they eat my arepas,
they end up speaking French, hahahaha!”**

Lis Hernández began selling arepas when she was nine years old on the streets of Petare (Caracas, Venezuela) with her mother. That was in the 80s. Her mother had suffered an accident that prevented her from standing for more than eight hours and, for that reason, she began to sell arepas. That was, also, how Lis, being the only daughter left in the house and the youngest one, accompanied and helped her mother. “She used to take me to a food stand we had at the Petare Roundabout where we sold the arepas. We did it for almost 25 years.” Thus, Lis grew up in love with cooking. She left Venezuela in 1992 chasing her dream of becoming a chef. She lived in the Dominican Republic, Mexico and, finally, settled in the United States, in Atlanta. Lis worked for years in Italian restaurants, until she felt the need to fulfill a dream that has always accompanied her: Opening her own Venezuelan food restaurant. “With food from my country because I was missing it...”



A friend suggested Lis to participate in a festival and from there, Arepa Mía became famous, so much so that they offered her a space within the renowned Atlanta market called Sweet Auburn Market. “The great Martin Luther King lived very close by. Today it’s an almost 100-year-old market full of history.” Arepa Mía opened at the end of 2010 and, over time, it became one of Sweet Auburn Market’s favorite restaurants. The Director of the Market, Pamela Joiner, was key in Lis having the opportunity to open her place there.

Arepa Mía expanded to a second restaurant, which today is still located in the town of Bonita in Avondale Estates, Georgia, and it has a patio where guests can enjoy dining outdoors. Arepa Mía has been opened

for more than 12 years, and now has a rum bar –with drinks also featured in the menu– where 90% of the rums are Venezuelan. “The menu is inspired by my travels around the world with roots in my beautiful Venezuela and my mother.”

When Lis was forced to close for two months due to the pandemic, the most difficult thing was not knowing what was going to happen... the uncertainty of the future. However, while staying at home, her fighting spirit taught her to focus more on the menu... and that “having more quantity wouldn’t translate into better quality. That’s why I decided to keep only one of the two Arepa Mía locations; to maintain the quality and the consistency of the menu”.

During that time, they created a page where clients could order online and request delivery. Since their reopening on May 24th, 2020, they have not stopped, and even broke a record. Today, Arepa Mía is one of the top 75 restaurants in Atlanta, and is also among the very few that serve 100% gluten-free food.

“The first thing is the ingredients I use. Since the beginning of Arepa Mía, I have sourced the best beef and pork from two local farms who supply us weekly.” They are White Oak Pastures and Riverview Farms, both located in Georgia.



Everything is made daily in the restaurant. They buy fresh cassava, plantains, and vegetables. Diners are loyal because of the freshness of the ingredients, apart from the fact that their menu is 100% gluten-free. “I don’t use soy or dry fruits because many people are allergic to these types of ingredients. That’s why Arepa Mía is one of the safest restaurants to eat at. There is no cross-contamination.”

What makes their menu interesting is that, apart from the traditional arepas that you would find in Caracas, you can also find one stuffed with fried oysters –which is really delicious!– and another one with fried chicken and a mango sauce, which is one of the favorites among diners. “I’m always innovating my recipes, and I use seasonal vegetables and fruits because that’s when they’re the most flavorful.”



Start... very small; always be consistent. Be a perfectionist when it comes to your business. And if you really do it from your heart, the rest will come by itself... Enjoy every day, listen to those who have experience and are successful... There’s a reason why they continue to exist. In short, consistency is an important key in whatever you do.

Arepa *Sifrina* del Sur

This arepa is inspired by the American Southeast, and specifically by the city of Atlanta, Georgia. I created my version of *La Sifrina* thinking about the American palate because they are the main guests of Arepa Mía. That's the reason why it has to be filled with an explosion of flavors. This recipe made Arepa Mía a favorite among many other restaurants here in Atlanta. Important newspapers and magazines have written about this arepa...

For the dough of six (6) arepas:

Ingredients:

- 720 ml (3 US cups) water at room temperature
- 2 tsp salt
- 350 g (~12.5 oz) pre-cooked cornmeal
- 100 ml (~1/2 US cup) sunflower oil or any other kind of oil

Kitchen tools and utensils:

A large bowl for kneading, a clean damp towel, an *aripo* or grill to mark the arepas, and a spatula to turn the arepas.

Directions:

- In the bowl, combine water and salt, and begin adding the flour little by little. Knead for at least 10 minutes to make the dough, and form a ball that can be separated from the container. Check that the dough does not have any lumps and that it is soft to the touch. Cover it with a damp towel and let it rest. Preheat the oven to 200°C (392°F) for 10 minutes.





Place the *arepo* or grill over medium heat and grease it with oil so that the arepas do not stick.

- Divide the dough into six balls of the same size and form arepa discs of 11 cm wide (4.3 inch) by 2.5 cm thick (~1 inch), leaving the surface evenly flat on both sides of the arepa so that the entire surface touches the grill and it cooks evenly. Cook the arepas for five minutes on each side to mark them with the grill lines. Once marked, place them in the oven for 15 minutes, turning them every five minutes until they puff up a little and the arepas are crispy and golden. This means they are cooked through and ready to be stuffed.

For the chicken stew filling:

Ingredients:

- 600 g (~1.5 lb) chicken breast
- 170 g (6 oz) diced white onion
- 170 g (6 oz) diced tomatoes
- 100 g (~3.50 oz) cut red pepper
- 3 garlic cloves
- 500 ml (~2 US cups) chicken stock
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 3 grains of allspice
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp of smoke paprika
- ½ *ají dulce* or sweet chile (if available)
- 60 ml (¼ US cup) sunflower oil

Directions:

- In a pot, boil the chicken with salt, allspice grains, and cumin seeds until cooked. Remove the chicken and let it cool so that it is easier to shred later into

thick pieces. Strain the water where the chicken was cooked and set aside.

- Heat oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Once it is hot, add and sauté the onion until translucent, then add the red pepper and *ají dulce*, and cook for 2 minutes. Add the tomato and chopped garlic, and cook for another 2 minutes. Add the shredded chicken, season with ground cumin and smoked paprika. Cook for about five minutes until the shredded chicken is fully incorporated and add the chicken liquid until it is a little “saucy”, but not soggy. Adjust the salt to your preference and cook for 8-10 minutes.

For the corn sauce:

Ingredients:

- 170 g or ½ cup mayonnaise
- 340 g (~11 oz) corn, previously cooked (canned corn may be used)
- 1 tsp of your favorite spicy sauce

Directions:

Blend all the ingredients until the sauce is creamy and smooth.

For the cilantro sauce:

Ingredients:

- 450 g (~1 lb) fresh coriander leaves, previously washed and chopped
- 140 g (~5 oz) mayonnaise

Directions:

Blend all the ingredients until it's creamy like a cilantro sauce.

To stuff your *Sifrina del Sur*:

- 6 arepas ready to be stuffed with hot filling
- Chicken stew filling
- 6 fresh lettuce leaves
- 6 slices of fresh seasonal tomatoes
- 6 slices of ripe avocado
- 6 slices (300 g or ~11 oz) of *guayanés* cheese or *de mano* cheese
- 12 slices fried ripe plantains
- Cilantro sauce and corn sauce
- Thai chile sauce or any (medium heat) sauce of your preference

To assemble the arepa:

Cut the arepas in half to make a pocket. Stuff the arepas with the shredded chicken, and place 2 slices of fried plantains on top along with a slice of *guayanés* cheese. Add the lettuce, a slice of tomato, and another slice of avocado. Once the arepa is stuffed, add the cilantro, corn, and spicy sauces to your liking, and bon appétit! If you don't get your fingers dirty with the sauces when eating this delicious arepa, it is because you did not put enough in it! ;)





SWITZERLAND



“Simón, your arepas are very Mexican!”

For Simón and Sabrina Figuera, arepas are “love, warmth, and flavor”, and they have been selling them since 2012 in their store, for delivery, in private catering services, and pop-up restaurants. They offer them stuffed with *pabellón*, chicken, or with vegan and vegetarian fillings. An ingredient that cannot be missed when making them is annatto oil. Where do you get annatto oil? In multicultural stores or local distributors.

On one occasion, they were left without a kitchen for a while; but, they tell us, “Perseverance and patience were the solution. What makes this business special is the continuous learning and the desire to improve ourselves.”

When making the arepas –this Venezuelan who has lived in Switzerland for years now– he adds the water first as Noerkis *la comadre*¹ and Elio Moya taught him. Simón enjoys making arepas while listening to his playlist and imagining the happy faces of the diners. “I Love Arepa was a way to reinvent myself in a new country. I discovered skills in myself that I didn’t even know I had, and that generated part of our family income.”

¹ *La comadre* is a term derived from being godmother to someone’s child. It is also used to refer to a very close friend. The male equivalent is *compadre*.



This arepa lover tells us about one of his creations, the Frittata arepa. “It is one of my favorite arepas, but it is not on the menu. I eat it daily and it gives me the necessary nutrients to start the day. It consists of an egg omelette made with the ingredients in your refrigerator. It’s simple, anti-food waste, and everyone likes it.”

Pollo loco. Lucerne, Switzerland

What do you do when you arrive in a country where you can barely find cornmeal? This is how our journey began: deciphering the Swiss palate. A country not used to eating cilantro, spicy food, or black beans... So we had to adapt to the ingredients we found in the city... Mexican stores! Of course! To paraphrase Sumito, “flavors that travel in suitcases”.

For the chicken: Because of the fat near the bone and the skin, it is better to use the whole chicken thigh than the breast.

Ingredients:

- 1 kg (~2.25 lb) whole boneless thigh
- 1 head of garlic
- 1 guajillo chile
- 1 ancho chile
- 2 red tomatoes
- 1 chile de árbol
- 1 onion



- 1 bell pepper
- 200 g (~7 oz) coriander
- 1 clove
- 1 bay leaf
- Annatto oil
- Salt and black pepper

Directions:

- Cut the thighs into cubes of approximately 3 cm each. Set aside and refrigerate.
- Add water to a pot to boil the 2 tomatoes, ancho and guajillo chiles, 1/2 onion, 50 g (~1.75 oz) of cilantro, clove, and half a head of garlic with a pinch of salt over medium heat 150°C (~300°F). When it comes to a boil, turn the heat off and let it rest. Try to remove the clove. Blend and refrigerate. Once cold, add to the chicken with a pinch of black pepper, set aside, and refrigerate.
- Chop 1/2 onion, bell pepper, 1/2 head of garlic, and 100 g (~3.5 oz) of cilantro. Add 1 cup of annatto oil to a pot and sauté them. Follow with 1/2 tablespoon of salt and 1/2 tablespoon of black pepper and stir.
- Raise the temperature to 200°C (~390°F). Add 1/2 of the chicken, draining the marinade from them as much as possible to avoid parboiling. Sear them, and once done, set aside. Repeat with the other 1/2 of the chicken. Remember that we want to create a crust on the skin and fat to give it a better texture. Once all the pieces are seared, add them all back to the pot and cook them with the



marinade sauce and the bay leaf at 150°C (~300°F) for 20 minutes, and then turn off the heat.

- Assemble the arepas as you are used to making and stuffing them. *Pollo loco* can also be accompanied with fried plantains, beans, and the cheese of your preference. Top with the rest of the cilantro. Delicious!

Prepare, put into practice what you have learned. Research and never lose your hunger to continue learning.





The best compliment: Just like my mom's!

«**T**he arepa is a gift from Venezuela to the world.» With this philosophy, Bárbara Guevara, a woman from Caracas living in Mexico, has been making arepas for the past 9 years at Los Chamos Restaurante. She started her business out of necessity and due to nostalgia, thus it has provided a livelihood to his nephews and a stable income for the family that would gradually come to Mexico. Bárbara enjoys making arepas, kneading little by little until she gets a uniform dough. First, she adds the flour, and then the water. Her mother, Marilé Guevara, taught her how to make them because her grandmother always scolded her for the way she kneaded. An ingredient that cannot be missed is cheese, and she considers them special because of the love that goes into making them, and because the cooks are Mexican.



In Los Chamos you can find arepas stuffed with *Reina Pepiada*, shredded meat, stewed chicken, *Llanera*, *Cabimera*, perico¹, ham and cheese, only cheese, banana with cheese, *pabellón*, and their star recipe: with avocado, tomato, plantain, and cheese.

The most difficult time for the restaurant was during the Covid-19 pandemic because many Venezuelans residing in Mexico moved to the United States, taking away a large part of their regular customers. However, Bárbara Guevara and her team remained open so that they could continue to introduce arepas to more people. “Arepas are a topic of conversation, wherever you can find one. In fact, strong bonds are established when you have them at the table. That’s what keeps us moving forward, looking for new ways for people to get to know them”, says this arepa ambassador proudly.

¹ Perico is the name Venezuelans give to eggs scrambled with tomato, onion, salt, and pepper.

Trust what you know and seek to learn from someone who did it first.



Arepa of Mexican *Perico*

If you are going to make an *arepada* (an arepa party), multiply these quantities by the number of guests you are inviting for breakfast.

To make the arepas (5 people): Ingredients and utensils:

- 2 cups pre-cooked cornmeal
- 2.5 cups water at room temperature
- 2.5 gr salt (~0.08 oz)
- 1 large bowl
- 1 *budare* or griddle with a non-stick surface

Directions:

- In a large bowl, add the water with the salt. It is important to clarify that if it tastes like sea water, your arepas will be salty, so add salt in moderation. Once the salt has dissolved, add the flour little by little, kneading it until you don't feel any lumps and it is all firm. Let it rest for a few minutes while waiting for the griddle, *budare* or pan where you're cooking your arepas to heat up.
- Make dough balls of about 150 g (~5.25 oz), and flatten them until they are 1 cm (~ ½ in) thick. The thicker they are, the longer they will take to cook, so make them thin. Now, the million dollar question: Cook it with or without a lid? Cover it for about 7 minutes first, so that a crust is formed, and then remove the lid to cook the other side. The sky's the limit when it comes to toasting arepas!

- While the arepas are cooking, it is time to heat up the pan where you are going to make the Mexican *perico*. Be careful here! Start with medium heat. We recommend using a Teflon frying pan due to its non-stick surface. Then turn down the heat to low to avoid burning the eggs, and use a wooden spoon to stir. Ready? Let's begin.

For the Mexican *Perico*: Ingredients:

- 2 large eggs
- 50 g (~1.75 oz) dice onions
- 100 g (~3.5 oz) tomatoes, including seeds
- 2 g (~0.07 oz) salt
- 1 tsp oil
- Chile serrano or de árbol (optional)

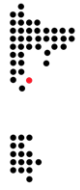
Directions:

- Wait! Do not add the oil yet. Give it a few minutes for the pan to heat up and the oil to sizzle. Use this time to cut the onion as small as you can, and then add it to the oil. Do not let it brown too much because it will give a burnt taste to the *perico*. Cut the *jitomate* (as our Mexican friends call the tomato) a little bigger so that it gives color to the *perico*. Add them to the pan and let them cook with the onion.

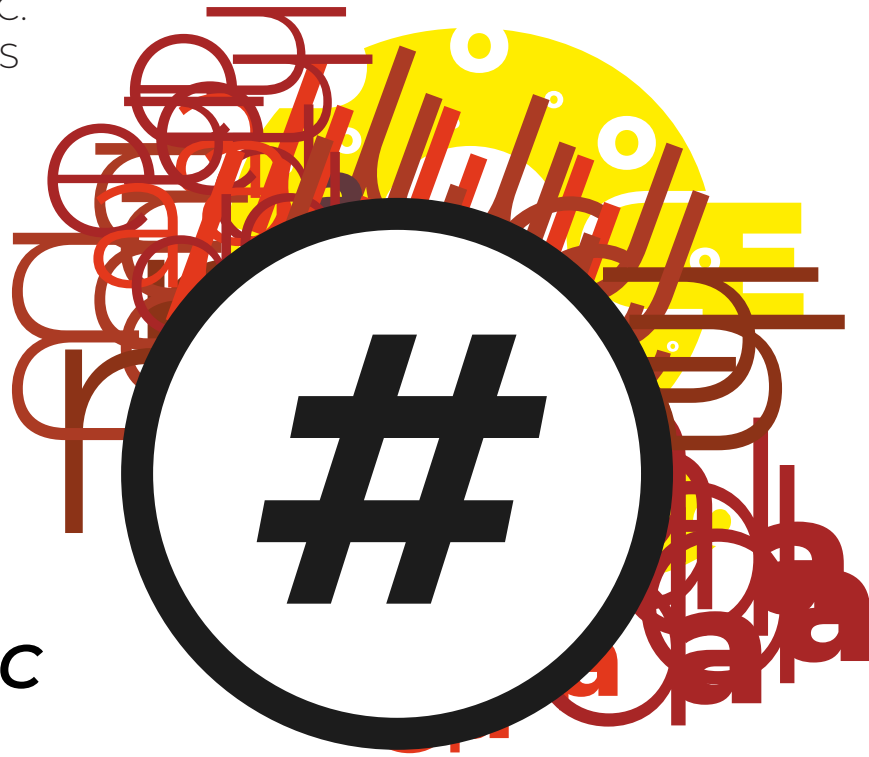


- For spicy lovers, this is the time to start chopping the chile so that the *perico* (parrot, in Spanish) starts “singing.” Make sure to devein and remove its seeds, otherwise, you will be like Speedy González.
- Wait 2-3 minutes before adding the eggs to the pan. Once added, stir them with the onion and tomato (and the chile if you decide to use them) until they reach a creamy mixture. Once it changes color, it is ready to be served.
- What we like most about this recipe is that by the time the *perico* is ready, you can hear a hollow sound when you tap the arepas, an indication that they are done.
- Split open the arepas, add a few spoonfuls of *perico*, and decorate with some cilantro leaves to make them look beautiful.





Washington DC.
UNITED STATES



**AREPA
Zone LLC**

@arepazone

“She told me that after trying them, she has been transported back to her childhood...”

For Gabriela Febres, one of the most beautiful experiences of her life was learning to make arepas with her grandmother. “I remember us gathered in the kitchen: she, with her desire to teach and I, with my eagerness to learn. With patience and affection, my grandmother revealed all the secrets: how to calculate the right amount of flour, use warm water for kneading, and add a touch of salt. But the most essential thing was to cook with the heart. Every time we were preparing arepas, she’d tell me stories about her childhood and her family, and I’d listen carefully. To this day, my grandmother remembers those moments, and she’s proud to see how far we have come.



It all started in 2011, when Gabriela was watching a soccer game in a bar where Venezuelans were gathered because La Vinotinto, as the Venezuelan team is known, was playing. There he met Alí Arellano, owner of a distributor of products, mostly Central American, for the Virginia, Maryland, and Washington D.C. area. Gabriela proposed to partner with Alí to reach the Venezuelan community, and thus “Antojitos de tu País”

was born, a distributor of Venezuelan products. “We had such a success that the same customers who bought us *guayanés* cheese, a can of Pirulín, or tequeños, asked us to open a restaurant, a place where they could gather. Opening an establishment was expensive, so we had to figure it out...” Therefore, on April 7th, 2014, business partners Gabriela Febres and Alí Arellano started a food truck that went



rolling through the streets of Virginia and Washington, D.C., introducing their arepas stuffed with *Reina Pepi-ada*, *Sifrina*, *Canosa*, *Catira*, cheese, shredded beef, pork, shredded chicken, and many others. Arepa Zone turned nine years old in April 2023. “We have expanded our business, which started with just a food truck and one employee, to a company with 62 employees and six locations, and a seventh now under construction. Our greatest pride is to be able to provide employment to 62 people, and to continue building, step by step, the great company that is, today, Arepa Zone.” “Once a couple came to the restaurant; a Venezuelan lady with her American

husband. The lady ordered a shredded beef arepa. After enjoying her lunch, she approached the cash register, and burst into tears. For a moment, I did not understand what was happening. The confused husband looked at me for answers... but we were both equally bewildered. The lady calmed down, and explained us that shredded meat tasted just like what her grandmother used to make; it had transported her back to her childhood. I immediately left the cash register area to give her a hug. She had driven over two hours to try a little piece of her country. There is no better compliment... because grandmothers’ dishes represent years of tradition, and provide the character-

istic warmth of a Venezuelan home".
"For Venezuelans, the arepa is a symbol of creativity, of the ability to do a lot with very little. Just with cornmeal, water, and a little salt, it is created a delicious and nutritious meal that can be complemented with cheese, avocado, shredded meat, or beans. Arepas can be a daily breakfast, a lunch shared with family, a quick bite on the street,

and a late-night snack after a party. It's the result of the diversity and fusion of cultures that exists in Venezuela, where each region has its own variants and secret recipes. The arepa for AREPA ZONE is not just our business; it is part of our life".



Create a detailed business plan that includes short- and long-term goals, financial projections, and marketing strategies. You can't do everything by yourself. Surround yourself with a team of talented and passionate people who share your vision, and who will help you lead your business to success. And, of course, don't give up!

Arepa La Canosa

Our star recipe is undoubtedly *carne mechada* or shredded beef. That's why this arepa has been one of our best sellers since the moment it opened. It's a grandmother's recipe. We're sharing with you our most acclaimed recipe; this is the ideal amount for 5 people.

For the *carne mechada*:

Ingredients:

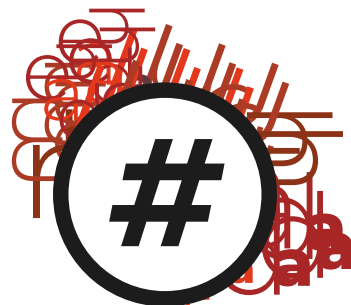
- 1 kg (~2.20 lb) of flank steak
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 4-5 tbsp of crushed tomato
- 1 glass of red wine
- 1 tsp crushed *ají dulce* or sweet chile
- A few sprigs of fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- Black pepper
- Oil
- Water
- Salt

Directions:

- Trim the fat from the meat, and season it with salt and black pepper. Heat up 4-5 tablespoons of oil in a pot. Add the meat and brown it over high heat on all sides. When it is well browned, remove it from the pot and set aside.
- In the same pot and with the same oil that you used to brown the meat, prepare the *sofrito*. First, add the garlic until it turns slightly brown. Then

add the onion and brown them over low heat until they are translucent and soft. Next, add the pepper, and cook everything together, stirring occasionally so it does not stick.

- Add the crushed tomato, just enough to cover the bottom of the pot, and let it cook for a couple more minutes. Now add the *ají dulce*, thyme, bay leaf, cumin, and meat. Cook everything at medium-high heat for a minute. Add the wine, salt to taste, and water until it covers the piece of meat, and let it cook for approximately 3 hours.
- Once the meat is soft and can be shredded without effort, remove it from the pot, let it cool and shred, separating the meat into strands. The meat will fall apart on its own if it is well done; you can shred it easily with your hands.
- Add the shredded meat back to the sauce that was left in the pot. Turn on the heat to reduce the sauce, and the meat is well impregnated with its flavor. Stir frequently. It will be ready once the sauce has reduced. You can leave the meat with more or less sauce, based on your preference, and depending on what you are planning to do with the meat.





To make the arepas

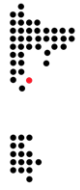
Ingredients:

- Pre-cooked cornmeal
- Warm water
- A pinch of salt
- Olive oil
-

Directions:

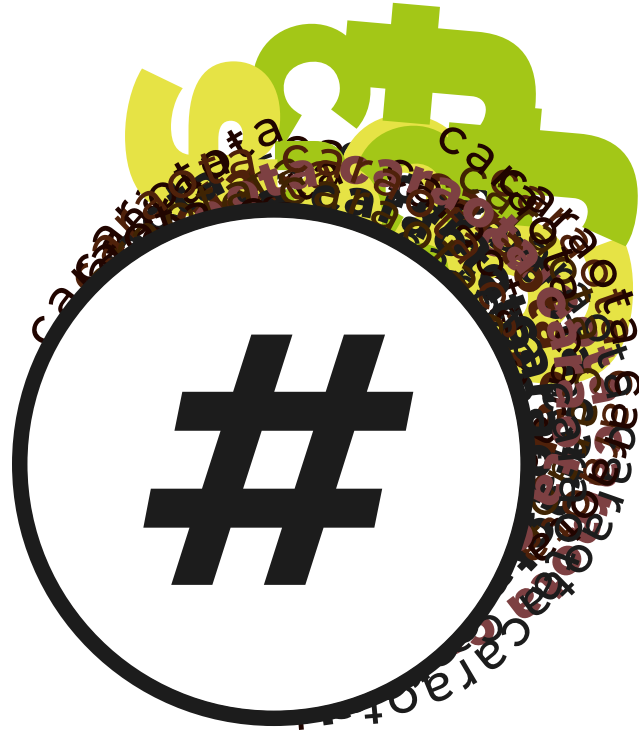
- Add water and a pinch of salt to a bowl. Add the cornmeal, little by little, and stir it with a spoon. Let it rest for 3 minutes until the dough gets some consistency. Then knead it vigorously until it no longer sticks to the walls of the bowl. There should not be any lumps left.

- Form spheres the size of an orange and then flattens them with the palms of your hands until you obtain circular arepas of about 10 cm (~4 in) in diameter. Place them in the pan and cook them covered for about five minutes. Remove the lid and turn the arepas. If you want the arepas to be very crispy, you can put them in the oven for about 10 minutes at medium heat or 180°C (356°F). The arepas will bulge slightly and, if tapped gently, it will produce a hollow sound.



ESTADOS UNIDOS

AREPAS
La Gocha
@arepaslagocha



“The best arepas, somehow the best part, they are healthy!”

Jenny Arraiz loves making arepas. She always saw her grandmothers, mother, and aunts really enjoying making them. “That’s how I enjoy it, moreover, because I make arepas with my husband who is Chilean, although he also learned to make them. In fact, I think he makes them better! For Jenny, the arepa is the memory of her childhood, the visits to her grandmother’s house “where they’d be waiting for us with some good arepas, the very thin ones, by the way!”

It started as a home business, then it became our only livelihood during a difficult economic period, “and now it is our business where we no longer use our home kitchen, but rather have our own kitchen to make arepas!” Their successful business has been running for eight years. They are made with love, and also thinking about that client who is health-conscious and wants to eat a really healthy arepa made with organic ingredients.

We always brought arepas to our friends’ gatherings because everyone would tell me, “Gocha, bring your arepas, they are so delicious,” so I did. One day, a friend told us that we should sell the arepas, but at that time we didn’t listen to him. When we were going through a somewhat difficult financial situation, my husband and I looked at each other, and said, “Well, the only thing we have to get out of this situation are the arepas.”



Thus they began to sell arepas to all their acquaintances and friends who initially enjoyed their arepas in the gatherings, “they became our customers, and the news spread by word of mouth.”

At first, they made corn arepas mixed with spinach, chia, flaxseed, oats, and carrot. At that time, they only used cornmeal, and the package they offered had five pre-cooked arepas, vacuum sealed, and with those flavors. “With time we understood the need of the market because many people asked us for arepas, but requested us to please not use cornmeal because of their medical condition –celiac, diabetic, and others– so they have to avoid consuming corn.” It was at that they decided to innovate the arepa dough, and began kneading with almond, coconut, and flaxseed flours. They also added new flavors to the menu such as pumpkin, sweet potato, beet, quinoa, or made them 100% cassava or ripe and green plantain. Nowadays, La Gocha arepas are consumed and recommended throughout the United States.

When we made the decision of innovating, a childhood friend, who had not eaten arepa for a long time because she was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, which her daughter also inherited, wrote me something that I want to share with you: When Venezuelans leave their homeland, for any reason,

the *budare* or the *tostiarepa* have a space in their suitcase. The arepa is one of the few things we can bring with us! It's not like the music from Efe or Tío Rico (Venezuelan ice cream brands) carts, or *La cruz del Ávila* (The Cross on the Ávila) that lights up every December 1st, or the smell of a freshly strained *guayoyo* (a very light black coffee, Venezuelan-style.) None of that fits in a suitcase, but the arepa always comes with us. ...Until you are diagnosed with an autoimmune disease. That was my case. More than ten years ago, I was diagnosed with Celiac disease, and while there were foods that I quickly got used to removing from my diet, I did not feel the same with the arepa. I tried thousands of recipes, but nothing could replace an arepa on a Sunday morning with a good *perico* (scrambled eggs, Venezuelan-style.) Then Arepas La Gocha gave me back that little piece of home that I thought I would never visit again. The gift was not only for me, it was also for my daughter who inherited my condition. Being able to stuff a cassava arepa (a favorite in our home) with chicken and avocado, and hearing my daughter say with her American accent, "*Reina Pepiada*", fills me with pride! A pride that only Venezuelans can understand. Arepas La Gocha has been a gift for our health and our heart. Thank you for giving me back my Sunday breakfast. I can hear the music of the ice cream cart in my memory; I can see *La Cruz del Ávila* light up through the screen of a phone, but what about the arepa? The arepas have now come back to our house to never leave again!

Be persistent; nothing should stop you. Economic reasons are not an impediment to achieving your goals.





Green plantain arepa with Pil shrimp

For the shrimp

Ingredients:

- 1/4 kg (~1/2 lb) of shrimps
- 1 tbsp ghee (clarified butter)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 clove garlic
- Ground chile flakes
- Pink salt and black pepper

Directions:

- The first step is the mise-en-place of the ingredients.
- Bring a frying pan to medium heat and add the olive oil and ghee. Once

hot, add the previously chopped garlic clove to flavor the preparation. When the garlic is golden, add the shrimps. Incorporate the chile, pink salt, and black pepper to taste, while continue sautéing the shrimps for four minutes.

The **Pebre** (Chilean sauce)

Ingredients:

- Tomato
- Red, green, and yellow bell pepper
- Onion
- Cilantro
- Olive oil, salt, and black pepper for seasoning

Directions:

Chop the vegetables very small and mix all the ingredients.

For the arepas with green plantains:**Ingredients:**

- 2 green plantains
- A pinch of pink salt

Directions:

- Heat 1 liter (~4.5 US cups) of water with salt in a pot. Peel the plantains and cut them into pieces. Add them to the pot with water, along with salt and lemon. Cook until they are soft to puree.
- Make the puree by crushing the cooked plantains with a fork, but if it is very lumpy, you can use a food processor to avoid having big chunks left in the dough.
- Knead and form 6 balls, and then flatten them forming a kind of wheel or flattened circles. Cook on a griddle over medium-high heat until they have a finely crispy surface, approximately 2 minutes per side.

**How to serve:**

When the arepa is ready, split it open to stuff it. Start with a layer of *pebre*, followed by the shrimp, and the resulting garlic and chile sauce from the cooking to give it a spicy flavor. Now we're ready to enjoy a good arepa La Gocha with Chilean flavors! I'm sure you'll love it as much as we do.



Milan
ITALY

El Caminante Food Truck

@caminantemilano

“Some foreigners passing through Milan said it was the best food they had ever had”.

How do you combine ecology, Italy, arepas, and travels? In 2015, the mayor of Milan wanted to make the city more ecological and promote the use of bicycles. He also opened a street food tender, and the winners would have access to work downtown, near the Duomo.

Among the winning projects was that of Pedro Hernández and Mónica Cabras, an intercultural couple who presented a Venezuelan and Italian gastronomy fusion. Because they were offering an arepa made out of cornmeal, it was also a gluten-free alternative. They called it, El Caminante (The Walker).

“El Caminante is my story, a 35-year-old immigrant, a guy who had been traveling around the world, learning about different cultures, beautiful people, and traditions, until I arrived to this land where I fell in love, studied, and decided to settle in; but I didn’t stop walking,” as Pedro Hernández tells us.





In 2012, before starting the business, Pedro did market research about the arepas worldwide, and in which cities they were selling them. “I realized that our gourmet arepa project was the first one in the world to combine both Venezuelan and Italian gastronomies. In addition to that, we are pioneers in Italy selling arepas in a food truck”.

It was his Italian wife, Mónica Cabras, a fashion designer, who, while working between Los Angeles and New York, came up with the idea of creating a food truck in Milan that would fuse the two cuisines, creating the “perfect arepa”.

For Pedro Hernández, a Venezuelan, the arepa is “my childhood, family, friends, Venezuela; it’s everything.” His mother taught him to make arepas, which is his main business. He attributes his success to that fusion between both the cuisines of Italy and Venezuela, “and to the love between my wife and I”.

Mónica Cabras is from Alghero, Sardinia—a dream city that produces the best lobsters in the world. “That is why our recipes are made with local ingredients, such as pecorino cheese and olive oil”.

Most of El Caminante’s clientele is European, mainly Italian. They love arepas and usually eat them for lunch or dinner. Their favorite arepa is *Reina Pepiada*, known in El Caminante as “Arepa Caracas.” It has been eight years since this couple started their food truck adventure, and what Pedro, *El Caminante*, continues to enjoy is when a customer takes their first bite and says, “It is so good!”

Wherever you are, open an arepa business because it is easy-to-love food... Even if it is a small business, it is possible!

Arepa Alghero

Dough for 5 arepas:

Ingredients:

- 1 cup of pre-cooked white cornmeal
- 1 ¼ cups water
- ½ tsp salt

Directions:

- Pour the water into a container. Add the salt and the pre-cooked cornmeal, slowly. Mix everything until you obtain a soft dough.
- Divide the dough into 5 portions. Form into balls and flatten them with your hands to make discs of 10-12 cm (~4-5 in.)
- Cook on a griddle over medium heat for 5 minutes on each side. Cut it open from the side and stuff it.

For the pesto:

Ingredients:

- 5 sun-dried tomatoes
- Toasted pine nuts
- Grated Parmesan cheese
- Chopped marjoram
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

Prepare the sun-dried tomato pesto by blending the drained tomatoes, toasted pine nuts, parmesan, and EVO oil in a blender. Season with salt and pepper if necessary, and add the chopped marjoram.



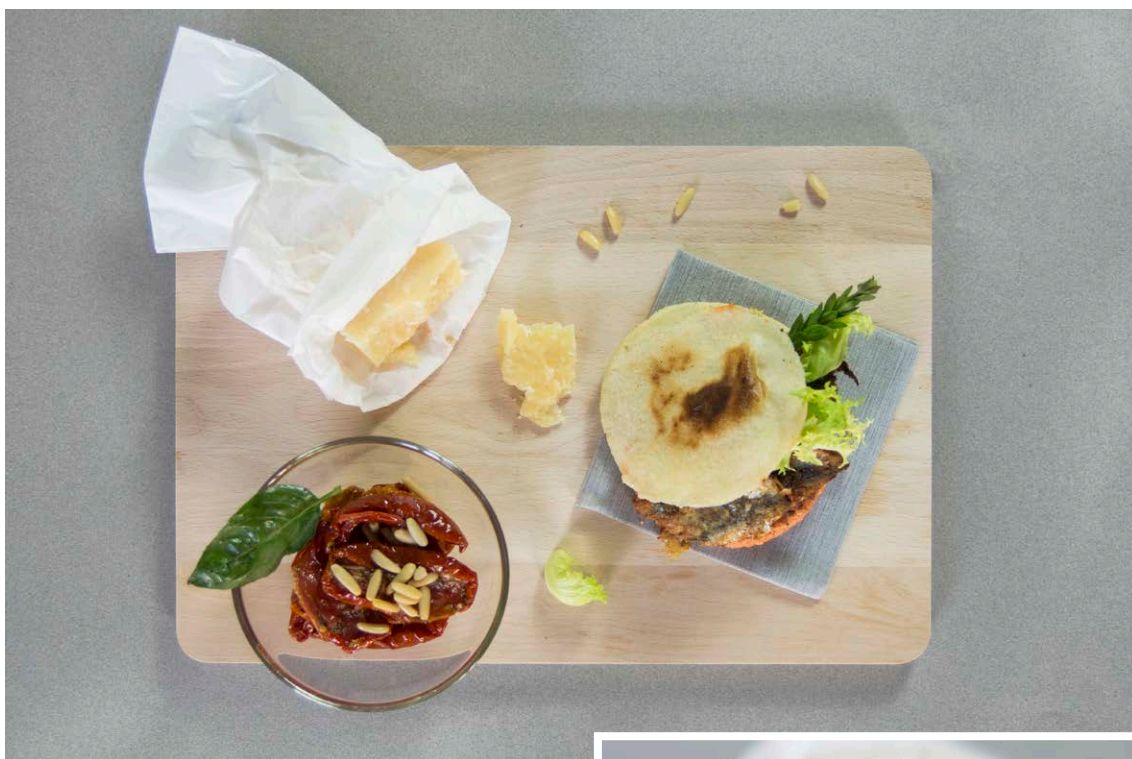
For the stuffed sardines:

Ingredients:

- 10 caciocavallo sardines
- 5 slices of Provolone forte, the length of a finger, and about 4 millimeters thick
- Bread crumbs
- Endive salad
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Coarse or Kosher salt

Directions:

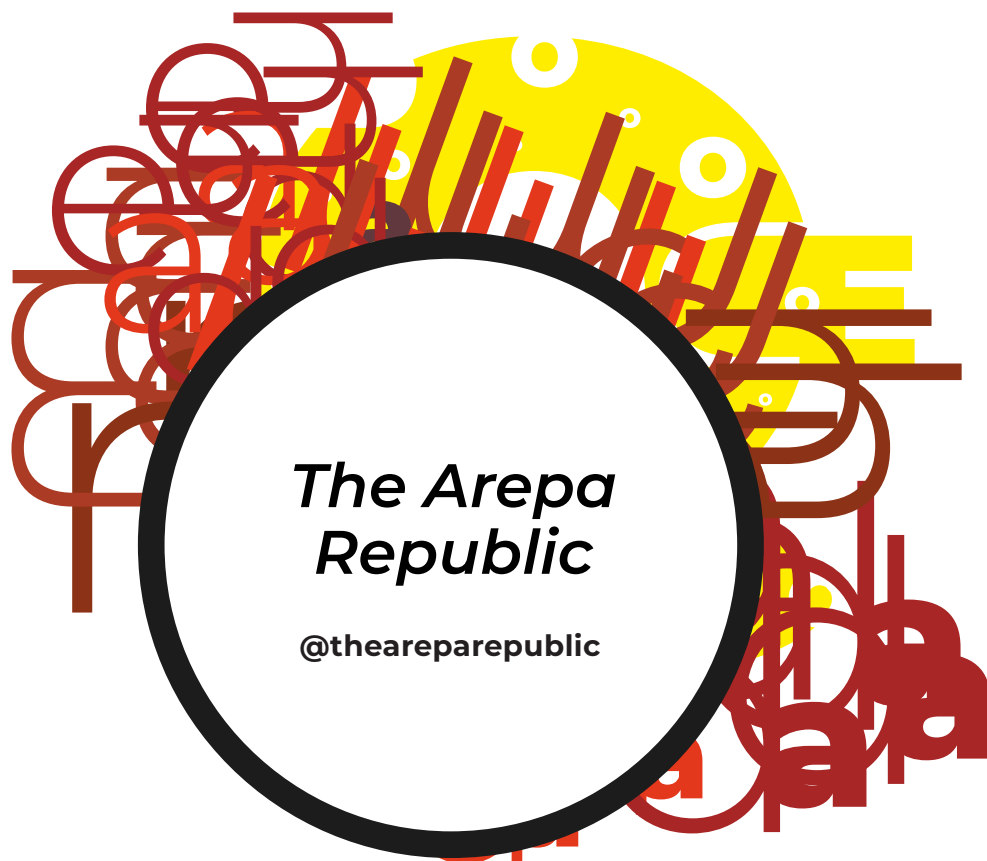
- Clean the sardines, split them open, and remove the backbone and tail. Season the meat side with salt and pepper.
- Prepare the stuffed sardines by placing 1 slice of provolone cheese on a filet, and close it with another sardine, making sure that it is of the same size. Press hard and coat them with very fine breadcrumbs.
- Grill the sardines with a little oil for about 2 minutes on each side. Season with salt.



To serve the arepa:

Open the arepa, and start with a tablespoon of tomato pesto and $\frac{3}{4}$ of stuffed sardines (depending on the size). Add the curly green salad lightly seasoned with oil and salt to taste.





“A Venezuelan from Barlovento who came to visit Canada told me that she never imagined she would eat an arepa here, and better than the ones she had eaten in Venezuela!”

For eight years Luis Córdoba, a Venezuelan residing in Canada, has been selling corn arepas with their traditional fillings in his restaurant and his food truck, both part of The Arepa Republic, a business established with his wife Verónica Hernández. Like many Venezuelans, the one who taught him how to make arepas was “My mom”. He considers the arepa as our best ambassador worldwide. In fact, what Luis enjoys the most is explaining what the arepa is, where it comes from, and how it should be eaten, to people who do not know it.



When Luis lived in Venezuela, he had a catering company that offered arepas for parties, and upon his arrival in Canada, he began to sell them in local markets. His wife Verónica is in charge of management and their social media, and he is in “operations.” Over time, they decided to open the first arepa food truck in the country. “Perhaps the most difficult moment was starting the restaurant. We researched for a long time! After two years, we were ready, and opened in 2018. To continue our expansion, we are currently franchising our concept”. And what makes their arepas special? “We have always focused on offering what’s traditional, and the Canadian public loves that. They look for the authentic flavors of a country, and that is what we offer them!” Among many anecdotes, Luis Córdoba remembers a funny one: “Once, a Canadian young woman came with a note written by her Venezuelan friend that read: *Give her an arepa pelúa but make it as if it were for you*”.

Maintain quality and consistency in all areas of the business!
And do not give up despite the circumstances.



Arepa La Vagana

For the dough:

Ingredients:

- 1 cup pre-cooked cornmeal
- 1 ½ cup water
- ½ tsp salt

Directions:

- Mix the ingredients until obtaining a soft dough.
- Make balls of approximately 150 g (5.5 oz), flatten them, and cook on both sides in a frying pan with a little oil over medium heat, 2-5 minutes on each side until a golden crust forms.

For the vegan filling:

Ingredients:

- 1 tomato, sliced
- 1/2 Hass avocado, sliced
- *Chimichurri* sauce to taste
- 1 eggplant, sliced
- Mixed greens of your choice

Directions:

Brush the eggplant slices with *chimichurri* or the vegan sauce of your choice. Grill the eggplants until tender.

To serve:

Open the arepa, add the mixed greens salad, followed by the sliced avocado, tomato, eggplant, more mixed greens, and sauce. Accompany with a pumpkin cream or a salad with blackberry dressing, and *papelón con limón* (a refreshing traditional Venezuelan drink made with raw sugar cane, lime juice, and water).



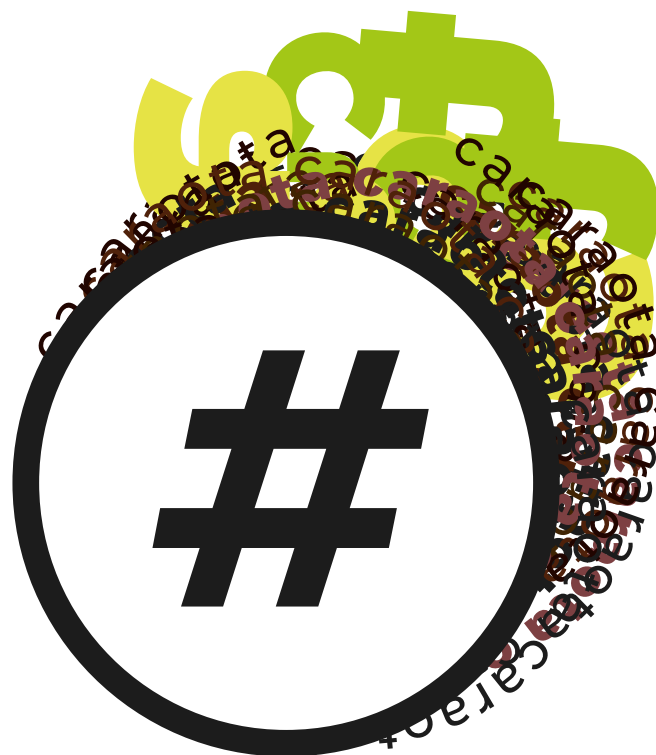


SWITZERLAND



Santa Arepa

@santaarepastreetfood



“They don’t eat the arepas from home, but they eat the ones from Santa Arepa. Hahaha”. A classic compliment from Venezuelan-Swiss couples.

For 8 years, the Swiss have been enjoying arepas stuffed with traditional or vegan *pabellón*, fried vegan chicken arepas with spicy or lemon and cilantro mayonnaise, and many other delicacies at Street Food Festivals, Pop-Ups, and Christmas markets, thanks to Santa Arepa, an enterprise happily managed by Adriana Rivera from Táriba (Táchira, Venezuela), who gets her most exotic ingredients from Turkish stores.

“Finding ourselves comes with the understanding that we were lost: For many years I did not know what it was to be a Venezuelan because I had left the country before “leaving” became also a national identity. I was too young to understand the love for the homeland.

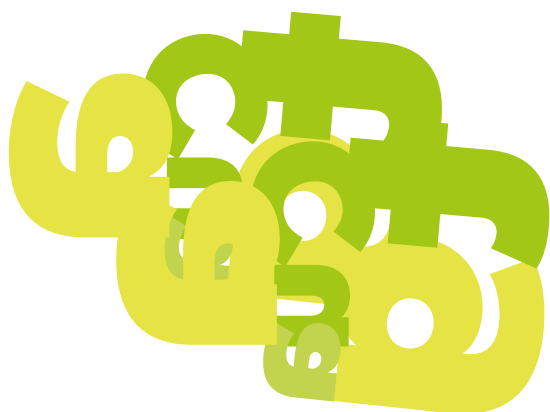
During the years I lived in Madrid, I was surrounded by Spaniards and I learned to love their traditions: potato omelet, winter, El Retiro, croquettes, summer, the subway... a very extensive list, but there was something I could not have: the 'hometown.' All Spaniards have the 'hometown' of their grandmothers, of their parents, a place to go every summer to see their childhood friends. Galicia, Castilla, La Mancha, Andalusia... People from Madrid would return to their family roots, but I did not return to Venezuela; it was a reality too far away to be able to make an analogy. That was 'my hometown,' but I did not understand it until much later".

Adriana Rivera started selling arepas by pure chance: "In the summer of 2015, I went to my uncles' house in Zürich, the closest 'hometown' I had. I was part of a family project that later became mine, and at the end, I was working with arepas".

There she began, step by step, to build Santa Arepa. "With events, with the colleagues with whom I worked at those events (from the Mexican stand and its *taquitos* to the Dutch stand with its *poffertjes*, and on another occasion with my Gujarati friend making *naan*...) From them I learned techniques, recipes, and above all, the passion of sharing a piece of your life with someone else: 'Look, this represents me'." An essential ingredient in her kitchen is time... "for kneading, for cooking the stews, for cutting the ingredients perfectly. In my opinion, time is key to good cooking; to take care of all the details".

Undoubtedly, 2020 was one of the most difficult years, and although the Santa Arepa team spent it "with a lot of anxiety, there was also a lot of hope."

"Although I have been away from Venezuela for 22 years, I found the way back to my Venezuelan identity through cooking: arepas are my compass." And what Adriana enjoys the most about making arepas is the repetition, "by repeating the same process over and over again, I'm focused on the present".





Patience, love, and eagerness. The most difficult days are the ones that transform us the most.

The first event with arepas was in October 2015; it was the premier of the *Reina Pepiada*, but we kept hearing this comment throughout the weekend: “Hello, I would like a chicken arepa.” And five minutes later the customer would return: “Sorry, the chicken is cold.” And so, again and again, they returned the *Reina Pepiada*, which was removed from our menu until 2023, when we received the visit of the only person who had the courage to offer it again: Venezuelan chef Sumito Estévez. Now our customers love it: We tried it this summer, inspired by Sumito’s visit.

Until then, we had to figure out a solution, thus the fried chicken arepa was born. This is the recipe that I would like to share, but also, veganized, and gluten-free. Nothing traditional, but one of the most demanded by the community of faithful lovers of the crunchy bun is the fried arepa, vegans who believe in a better future, celiacs who eat confidently (something very important is that the celiac consumer needs much more care than what they actually receive. For this community, arepas are a paradise island), and avocado lovers.

Arepa of chicken popcorn

For 6 arepas:

Ingredients:

- 550 g (~20 oz) water
- 320 g (11.5 oz) of pre-cooked cornmeal
- 2 tbsp oil
- Salt to taste
-

Directions:

- Make the dough by adding water, salt, and oil to a bowl or container. Stir in the pre-cooked cornmeal.
- Shape the arepas; they should weigh around 100 g (3.5 oz) each.
- Fry them in plenty of hot oil.

For the vegan “fried chicken”:

Ingredients:

- 500 g (~18 oz) vegan chicken substitute like Heura (there are countless brands)
- 250 g (~9 oz) chickpea flour
- 350-400 ml (~1.5-1.75 oz) water
- Gluten-free corn flake cereal
- Spices to taste: smoked paprika, garlic and onion powder, oregano, turmeric, and cumin
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- Mix the chickpea flour with the spices. Add water slowly until it gets to a pancake-batter consistency. It should be a thick batter to cover the vegan chicken well. Season with salt and pepper.
- Crush the corn flakes cereal, mix them with the same spices and salt, and set aside.
- Dip the vegan chicken pieces in the batter, coat them with the crushed flakes, and fry them in plenty of hot oil.

Coriander and lime vegan mayonnaise:

Ingredients:

- 100 g (~3.5 oz) soy milk
- Juice of 2 limes
- A handful of coriander
- ½ tsp onion powder
- 5 g (~0.17 oz) salt
- ¼ tsp sugar
- 230 g (~8 oz) neutral oil

Directions:

- In a tall glass, using an immersion blender, blend all the ingredients well without the oil.
- Add the oil and blend again with the blender attached to the bottom until it begins to emulsify. Move the blender up and finish blending all the oil until you obtain mayonnaise.
- You can mix part of it with hot sauce, and thus have two vegan mayonnaise options.

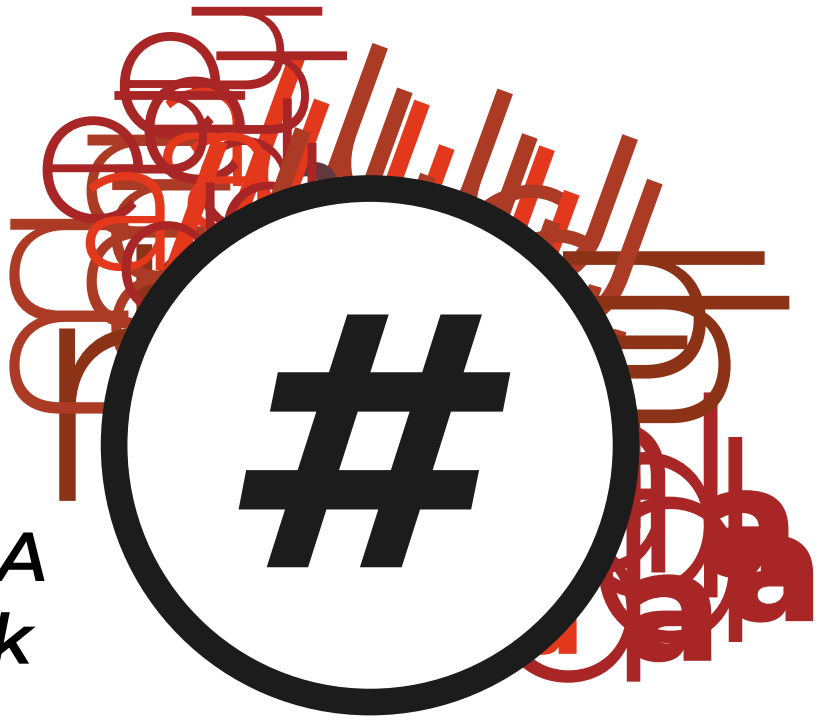
To serve with avocados:

Once everything is ready, stuff the arepas with a layer of sliced ripe avocado, then some crispy vegan chicken pieces, and lemon mayonnaise at the top.





PANAMA



DELIAREPA Food Truck

@deliarepasoficial

“I feel like I am at home.” (I love it when they say that.) It makes me happy to be able to give you an experience of love and remembrance, and more so, if you are abroad.

“I grew up eating the *arepitas* (a Venezuelan affectionate way to call “arepas”) of my grandmother, La Negra Bustillos.” Eliza Campins is Venezuelan —everyone out of affection calls her Eli— and, since she was a child, she spent time in the kitchen with her grandmother.” I remember my grandmother getting up early to go to the store that was in front of our home where she made empanadas and arepas. When she returned home, she would bring me an *arepita* for breakfast. Since then, I learned to add water first when making the dough for the arepas.

The twists and turns of the arepa took her to Panama, and then to start her own business. “My husband is Panamanian and had never eaten arepas. One day, I made them for dinner, and he loved them. He said to her, “We should sell arepas.” At the time, Eli had a full-time job that did not allow her to do anything else. However, she agreed to make some mini arepas for his colleagues at work and it was a success. The following weekend, her husband, Oscar Stanziola, came home with an order for 20 arepas (from one day to the next), and

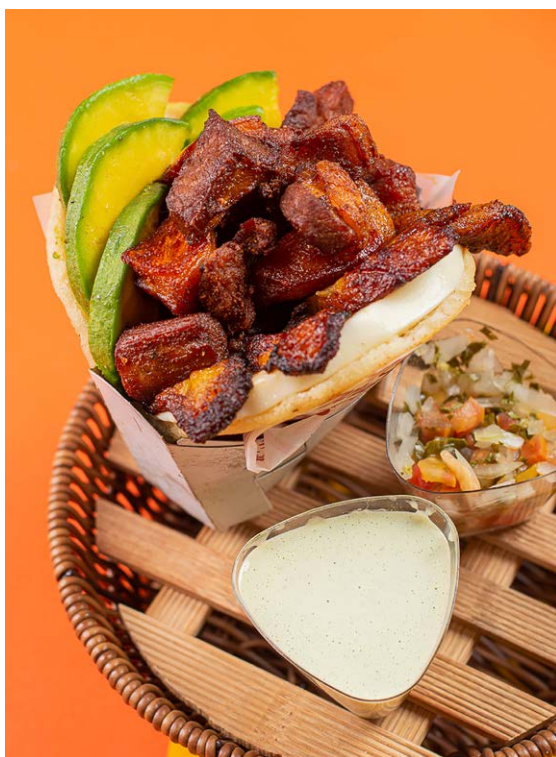


on that same day, they received another one. They started selling them only on Saturdays for breakfast. She would cook on Fridays, get up early on Saturdays to make the arepas, and then distribute them. Only this way could Eli do her weekday job. “The arepas were for delivery, hence the name: DeliArepa, for ‘delivery’, ‘delicious’, and for ‘Eli’.”

Due to the pandemic, she lost the job for which she had left Venezuela and that had given her economic stability for 10 years. She overcame it with patience, many tears, letting the feeling of frustration pass, and a lot of faith. But “the fact that I had started weekend deliveries when I had a weekday job, helped me. When I lost the job, I was still able to bring in an income. At first, it was all a hobby. Today, it’s our livelihood and what supports our family. During the pandemic, they could only leave home for two hours and based on their National ID number. During that time-frame, she would take orders and do the deliveries. Oscar and Eli invested in a food truck right before the pandemic, so they were not able to open to the public until everything was over. The truck was parked for two years, deteriorating under the rain and sun.

Deliarepas has been embarked on this adventure for six years and, today, their food truck offers arepa stuffed with shredded meat Venezuelan style, chicken, pork, *Reina Pepiada*, fried pork, *picaña*, shrimp, sausage. What makes their arepas special? “I make them with love and I cook them myself at home. I already have a standardized recipe. Plus the charisma and good vibes of Oscar, my husband. Cooking has always been my passion!”

Love what you do. A good entrepreneur must always be a good student. Take risks, dream big, and wake up every day wanting to make your dream come true. Trust God, and put Him at the center and as partner of your business.



La Marranita

by Eliza Valentina Campins Bustillos

Seeking to offer a fusion dish between Panama and Venezuela, we created La Marranita, a grilled arepa made with pre-cooked white cornmeal, stuffed with fried pork, *queso de mano*, slices of ripe plantain, *pico de gallo* topping, avocado, and salsa of the house. For me, an arepa means Venezuela.

For 16 grilled arepas of 150 g (5.25 oz) each:

Ingredients:

- 1kg (~2.25 lb) pre-cooked white cornmeal
- 1,700 ml (~7 US cups) drinking water
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 tbsp sugar (optional)



Directions for the dough:

- Add water, salt, and sugar to a bowl, and dissolve. Add the cornmeal slowly and mix using enveloping movements to avoid lumps. Knead with love and let the dough rest for 5 minutes so that it hydrates very well.
- Make balls that weigh 150 g (~5.25 oz) each. Flatten and place them on a lightly greased griddle or pan over medium heat. Once the arepa can be separated from the pan or griddle, it is ready to be turned over. Grill each side for 3 minutes.

Tips: If we cook the arepa over low heat, it will crack, but if we cook it over high heat it will burn, which is why managing the heat is very important so that it can puff up and get cooked to *al dente*.

For the pork filling:

Ingredients:

- 2 kg (~4.5 lb) pork belly, diced
- 1 tbsp salt
- 1 tbsp paprika
- 1 tbsp garlic powder
- 1 tbsp dried oregano
- 250 ml (~1 US cup) Worcestershire sauce
- 3 l (12.5 US cups) of vegetable oil (for frying)

Directions:

- Place the pork belly, chopped into small squares, into a bowl and season it with Worcestershire sauce, salt, garlic powder, paprika, and dried oregano. Let it rest.
- Add oil to a frying pan or deep fryer, let it heat up, and once it is very hot, proceed to fry the pieces of pork belly until it turns golden brown and is a little crispy. Take out and reserve.



For the *pico de gallo*:

Ingredients:

- 6 plum tomatoes
- 1 white onion
- 1 sprig of cilantro
- 1 lime
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- Dice the tomatoes, onion, and cilantro.
- Squeeze the lemon into a cup, add the olive oil, salt, and pepper.
- Mix this dressing with the vegetables. This will give you a fresh and delicious *pico de gallo*.

For the *Delisalsa*:

Ingredients:

- 1 green bell pepper
- ½ white onion
- 6 cloves of garlic
- 1 branch of chives
- 1 sprig of parsley
- 1 sprig of cilantro
- 1 lime
- 350 ml (1.45 US cup) mayonnaise
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Add the vegetables to a food processor or blender. Once they are combined, add the mayonnaise, lemon juice, salt, and pepper. This is a delicious green sauce that you will love.



For the filling:

Ingredients:

- 2 ripe plantains (6 slices per arepa)
- 1 piece of *queso de mano* per arepa
- ½ avocado (sliced) per arepa
- 60 g (~2 oz) *pico de gallo* per arepa
- 60 g (~2 oz) homemade *Delisalsa*

Directions:

- Slice the avocado.
- Slice and fry the plantains.

Steps to assemble the arepa

- Always open the arepa with a plastic knife, this way the arepa dough will not come out and it will be perfect. After opening the arepa, spread some butter, and add a piece of *queso de mano* and fried plantains.
- Finish with the fried pork belly and decorate with the avocado.
- Add *pico de gallo* and *Delisalsa* to taste as you savor each bite. I hope you enjoy and like it as much as we do!



**“I have always been told that they are the best arepas
they have ever eaten.”**

“My mother had a small arepa and empanada business; so, from a very young age, I learned and helped her,” says Pedro Luis Gallardo, who has lived within the universe of the arepa for years. It is a lifestyle; he has won festivals, has been nominated for best food in Colombia, and has gone viral. “I consider myself part of a new generation of *areperas* (a place dedicated mainly to selling arepas)”. It started eight years ago, in Ciudad del Río in Medellín with a food cart. «Truthfully, there were very difficult moments, but I was able to overcome them thanks to perseverance, innovation, and the desire to take arepas to the next level.» Conexión Gourmet has focused on creating a different plus for each arepa, they are not the traditional ones, and they have an extensive menu where everything is completely artisanal: sauces, arepas, smoked foods. The magic of a smoker barrel is that it gives an exquisite charcoal smoke to their arepas and meats. They use different suppliers and artisan producers from Colombia and Venezuela.



Among the main fillings in their assorted Colombian-Venezuelan fusion menu, the specialty is slices of “*costichic*” (a pork cut that includes bone-in rib meat and pork rinds) smoked in a barrel for three hours on charcoal, accompanied by *queso de mano* and *Reina Pepiada*.

One of the most difficult times was, of course, the beginning of the pandemic. Pedro went from selling arepas out of a food trailer to selling them from his home. However, he did not stop paying attention to the production or the quality. Foods that are always offered are juicy shredded meat, a good piece of smoked *costichic*, a good *guasacaca*, and garlic sauce. Due to his care for the product, they received the visit of the influencer @Tuliorecomienda, which gave a boost to the business. “Then, with God’s blessing and a good public reception for our food, we began to be popular on social media. A lot of people recommended us, so we managed to open a business in the middle of the pandemic and have seven employees.”

“Today, we have two locations, one in Medellín and another in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. “We are creating new experiences through arepas.” In an incredible way, Pedro feels that arepas are part of his life and all his stories. Thanks to Conexión Gourmet, he has been able to help his family in Venezuela, create jobs in Medellín, and “we were able to create a foundation to give arepas at night to people living on the streets.”

Yes, it is possible. It does not matter if you do not have a lot of budget, as long as you innovate, create a winning product, have the right attitude, and love what you do. You can start from scratch and achieve great things.



Arepa Explosion of Flavors

To make 5 or 6 arepas:

Ingredients:

- 500 g (~1.10 lb) pre-cooked cornmeal
- 600 ml (~2.5 US cups) water or more if needed
- 3 tbsp oil
- Salt to taste

Directions:

- In a bowl, mix water, cornmeal, salt, and oil.
- Knead until obtaining a soft dough. Once ready, shape into a ball of about 3.5 oz, then flatten it until getting the shape of a disc.
- Heat a griddle or frying pan. When it is very hot, place the arepas, and one minute after the first arepa was added, lower the heat to medium. Keep turning them until they reach the desired color and crispness. This process can take up to about 15 minutes.

For the shredded chicken:

Ingredients:

- 350 g (~¾ lb) chicken breast
- 1 cup water, where chicken was boiled previously
- 1 onion, diced
- ¼ red bell pepper, diced
- 1 *ají dulce* or sweet chili pepper, diced
- 40 g (~1.5 oz) green onion, finely chopped
- 40 g (~1.5 oz) cilantro, finely chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 pinch of cumin
- ½ tbsp soy sauce
- Annatto powder, as needed to give color to the oil
- Salt to taste

Directions:

- Boil water in a pot. Do not fill it too much to avoid overflowing when adding the chicken.
- Add the chicken breast when the water starts boiling.
- After about 30-40 minutes (depending on the size of the breasts), remove and let them cool a little. Shred the chicken and reserve.
- Meanwhile, chop the vegetables and garlic into very small pieces.
- Heat a little oil in a frying pan and add the vegetables and garlic. Follow with a little salt and cook for three minutes over medium heat, stirring occasionally.
- Add the shredded chicken plus 1 cup of the broth where the chicken was boiled.
- Mix well and add the annatto powder. You will see how everything begins to get some color.
- Cook for 5-7 minutes, taste, and add more salt if needed.



For the shredded beef Venezuelan style

Ingredients:

- 350 g (~¾ lb) flank steak
- ½ onion, diced
- ¼ red bell pepper, diced
- 1 *ají dulce* or sweet chili pepper, diced
- 40 g (~1.5 oz) green onion, finely chopped
- 40 g (~1.5 oz) of cilantro, finely chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 pinch of cumin
- ½ tbsp soy sauce
- ½ tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- Annatto oil, per your preference, to give color to the food
- Salt to taste

Directions:

- Place the meat in a pressure cooker with water halfway up and ½ tablespoon of salt. With this cooking method, the meat will take about 20 minutes to be ready.
- After 20 minutes, turn off the heat, and remove the meat from the pot to cool. Do not throw away the broth as you will use it later.
- While the meat is cooling, start chopping all the remaining ingredients: onion, red bell pepper, sweet chili pepper, green onion, and cilantro.
- Begin to shred the meat when it's cool enough to handle. Once shredded, place oil in a large pot or frying pan and bring to medium heat.
- Once the oil is hot, add onion, garlic, pepper, chopped vegetables, and condiments to make a *sofrito*.



- When the *sofrito* is ready and the onion begins to turn translucent, add the meat, stir for a couple of minutes, pour some of the initial broth, and add salt and pepper to taste.
- Let it cook for 5 minutes while stirring. Turn off the heat when the meat is dry.

For the pork shoulder:

Ingredients:

- 300 g (~0.70 lb) of pork shoulder
- Charcoal for narguile (hookah)
- A small square piece of aluminum foil
- For the marinade: mustard, oregano, Worcestershire sauce, oil, and salt

Directions:

- Cut the pork shoulder into square pieces. Add the marinade and massage the meat until everything is well integrated.
- Transfer the meat to a frying pan over medium heat and cover it. When the

meat is medium, light the charcoal and place the aluminum foil and charcoal in the middle of the pan.

- Cover the pan until the meat is golden. The charcoal will give the pork a smoky flavor.

Once the proteins are ready, proceed to stuff the arepas.

Additional fillings

- 300 g (~0.70 lb) yellow cheese
- 1 avocado, sliced
- 1 ripe plantain, sliced and fried

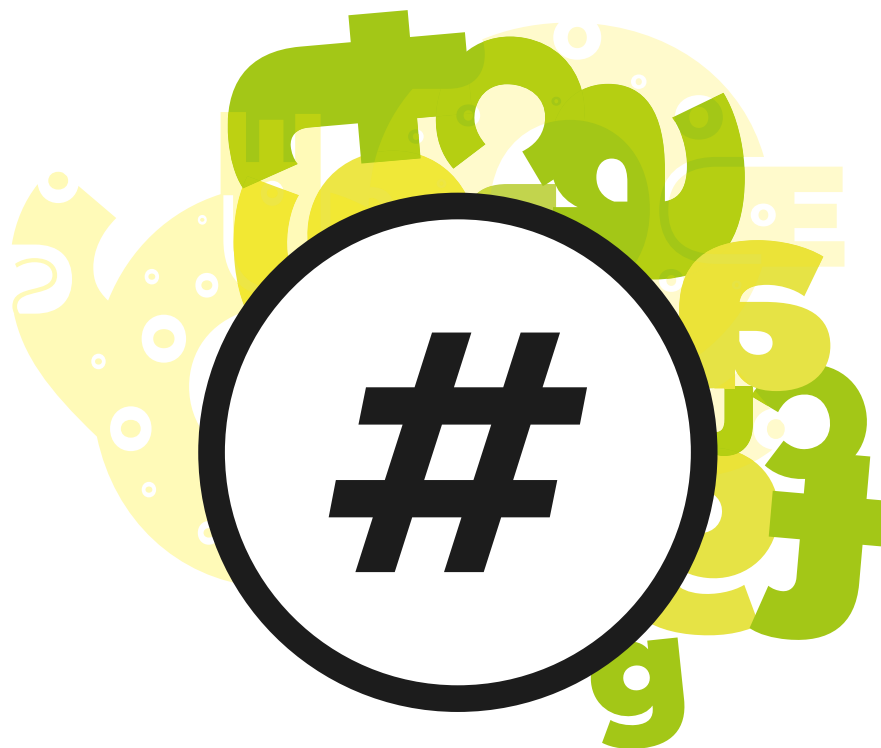
To assemble the arepa

- Open the arepa. Stuff it with 50 g (~1.7 oz) of shredded meat in one half of the arepa and 50 g (~1.7 oz) of shredded chicken in the other half.
- Add 4 slices of fried plantains and 50 g (~1.7 oz) of pork. Top with 50 g (1.7 oz) of yellow cheese, and a slice of avocado.



Pacheco Venezuelan Street Food

@pachecovsf



“Congratulations to the best arepas in Ireland and its neighboring islands.”

“Pacheco is pacheco because in Ireland... What *pacheco*?¹ Only Venezuelans know what it means without an explanation, right?” repeats one of the Andreas who amusingly narrates the adventure. They have already been selling their arepas in the Irish markets for six years. And they serve them stuffed with meat, chicken, jackfruit, chickpeas, cheese, plantains, beans, and avocado. The recipes of these two business partners come from generations of family traditions, which allow them to keep the authenticity of the flavors alive. Andrea Olivo learned how to make arepas with her friend Leonardo, “He was the one who told me, ‘First, the water, then the cornmeal!’” And, who taught Andrea Figueira? “My mom”.

The Andreas, both Venezuelans, love to cook together, and they also like the characteristic aroma that comes from the corn arepa while being cooked on the grill, whether it is a cold or a rainy day, and even when they are thousands of kilometers away from their country, that smell takes them back home and makes them feel as if they were in Venezuela.

¹ Pacheco: A cold-weather front in Caracas in early December. It refers to a flower vendor named Pacheco who would come to the city to sell his flowers when temperatures drop.



In 2012, there was only one small place in Dublin that sold arepas, and Andrea Olivo always took her co-workers to eat there; it was a tiny place in Temple Bar. “I remember, in particular, one lunch when my Irish boss asked me to go for arepas again; that was unforgettable!” Sometime later, the place closed and the arepas were only made at home. She invited friends of different nationalities to try them: Irish, German, Czech, Spanish, Argentinian, Chilean, French... To be able to share that first bite of a delicious arepa with someone who has never had the experience before, an “Arepa Virgin,” and witness their joy of trying it for the first time, is simply wonderful. Her friends asked her to repeat the experience again and again. It was from those gatherings with friends that she got into the idea of selling arepas.

When Andrea left her job, she thought how wonderful it would be to be able to sell arepas in Ireland. She shared this idea with her dearest friend, “my cosmic sister and partner, Andrea!”, who had emigrated to learn English and was working at that time in a marketing company. The next day, Andrea called Andrea to tell her that she would like to turn that idea into a reality with her.

Finally, the two Andreas opened Pacheco Venezuelan Street Food in 2017, and over time, they managed to enter the Irish markets. Since then, they have participated in different markets, music festivals, dance events, Pop-Ups, and more. Undoubtedly, the most difficult moment for Pacheco was the beginning and the end of the pandemic. They had to stay at home for two weeks with all the



ingredients purchased for next week's production! As they had always avoided wasting food in their business, they decided to cook what they had, and offer it as fillings ready to reheat and share at home, through delivery. "We announced it through a Live on Instagram and, to our surprise, we sold everything we had prepared that day." However, it was not enough to cover the kitchen rental costs, and when the pandemic came to an end, they faced a new challenge: How to re-enter the market without having a kitchen? "To overcome this, we created a menu adapted to the new circumstances, which gave us the opportunity to offer more vegetarian and vegan options. Thanks to these changes, Pacheco reopened and moved forward!"

Use fear as a tool to grow, stay consistent and believe in your brand. Perform all your actions with passion and love.

We are pleased to share with the community one of our star recipes at Pacheco: The Vegan *Reina Pepiada*! This recipe was created during the pandemic, and allowed us to connect with the vegan community in Ireland, and give them the opportunity to enjoy one of the most traditional Venezuelan arepas. The Vegan *Reina Pepiada* can also be prepared as a vegetarian option by adding cheese. At Pacheco we offer it with Irish cheddar cheese and the result is absolutely delicious!



Vegan *Reina Pepiada* a la Pacheco or Chickpea Dotted Queen

To the translation of *Reina Pepiada* that Pacheco created many years ago, we added “chickpea” so that it is understood that it is not chicken.

Ingredients:

- 1 can of 400 g (~14 oz) chickpeas in water
- 1/4 small onion
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 tbsp vegan mayonnaise
- 1 small avocado
- Salt and black pepper to taste

Directions:

- Rinse the chickpeas under running water in a colander and let them drain.
- Cut the onion and garlic into small pieces and set aside.
- Prepare a medium frying pan over medium heat and add a tablespoon of vegetable oil when hot.
- Add the onion and the garlic, and season with salt to taste. Cook until the onion is translucent.
- Transfer the drained chickpeas to the pan and mix them with the vegetables. Season with black pepper to taste and cook until the chickpeas have a soft texture. Remove from the heat and let it cool to room temperature.

- Place the chickpeas in a container and cut the avocado into cubes. Add the vegan mayonnaise and mix all the ingredients until well combined. Your Vegan *Reina Pepiada* filling is ready to be used in your arepas! Enjoy this delicious combination of flavors and textures.

To make 3 medium size arepas:

Ingredients:

- Salt to taste
- 1 tsp vegetable oil
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup pre-cooked cornmeal.
-

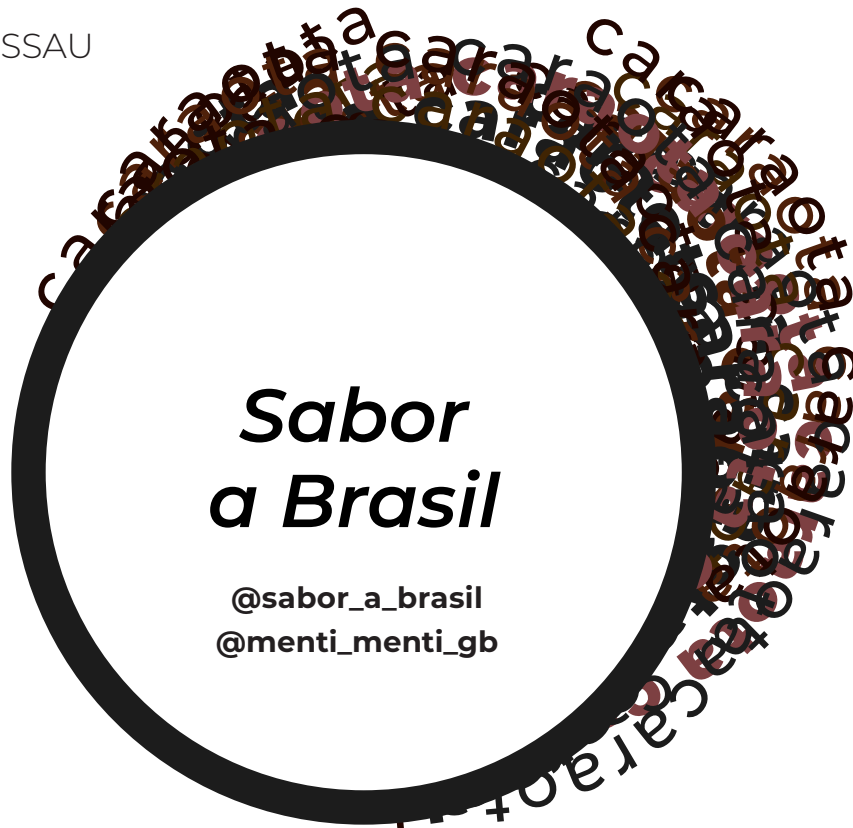
Directions:

- In a container, add water and salt to taste. Slowly add the pre-cooked cornmeal to the container. Mix with your hands and/or a fork, making circular movements and breaking up any lumps that may form. Let it rest for 5 minutes.
- Preheat a frying pan over medium heat (old frying pans usually work better.) Add the oil to the pan.
- The dough should be thick enough to hold its shape without cracking when molding. If it is too soft, add a little more cornmeal; if it is very hard, add a little more water. Form the dough into a ball and gently flatten it until it reaches the desired thickness. At Pacheco we prefer it to be thin and crispy.
- Place the disk of dough in the pre-heated pan and cook the arepa for 8-10 minutes on each side, or until lightly golden.
- Carefully open the arepa in half and stuff it with the Vegan *Reina Pepiada*. Serve the arepa hot, and bon appétit!





GUINEA BISSAU



“They taste amazing...”

For the Venezuelan Geoscience engineer, Arianna Andrea Ortega Ramírez, the arepa is more than food, it is history, culture, connection, “the arepa is love made with my hands.” For five years, she has been selling her corn arepas in Guinea-Bissau, where she lives and works. She offers them stuffed with *Reina Pepiada*, *Catira*, *Dominó*, *Pelúa*, *Perico*, *Rompe colchón*, tuna and, of course, shredded meat Venezuelan style.

“It all started with my mother’s arrival in Africa, here in Guinea-Bissau. Her arrival and the pandemic happened at the same time, thus it coincided with the closure of our restaurant and family business, Sabor a Brasil, and our beginning to sell food only to take away. One day, in the few hours they were allowed to go out, at the market, her mother approached a woman selling rice, beans, and corn by the weight, and said to her daughter, “Arianna, why don’t we make corn dough? We can sell empanadas and arepas to the Latinos in this country. They both remembered how tasty the corn empanada was, thus deciding to buy their first kilogram of corn.”

“We cooked it for hours, and with a manual mill we managed to make our first dough!” Happy with the achievement, they made empanadas and arepas, but it didn’t work out, the dough was not very consistent, and they would get damaged when fried. However, they did not give up. They returned another day to the market to buy more corn, and when they got home, they repeated the process, but on this occasion, they added a type of corn flour that was widely used in Guinea-Bissau for children’s food. This time the dough had a good consistency, and they sold their first order to some Colombian ladies, a Cape Verdean couple, and a few young Spaniard women.

Then they would move on to an electric mill, and the results would continue to improve. “My mother was key to starting this business venture and leading us to take the next step, which was to have a supermarket bring us the pre-cooked cornmeal.” They requested it for months, until it arrived on November 21, 2021. They bought the first two boxes to begin preparing the arepa dough in a more practical way for the business.

Finally, they were able to reopen their restaurant Sabor a Brasil, and this time, with a new menu that included a Venezuelan dish: The Arepa! In addition to the birth of “the Afrizuela,” which Arianna explains to us, is an arepa that accompanies typical dishes from Guinea-Bissau, such as *mancara* broth, *tchebem*, and *feijoada*, the latter being a Brazilian food widely consumed in the country, “It was also significant for many Guineans to eat these arepas again after having lived for years in Venezuela. For them it was remembering and reliving the experience of being in the best country in the world.”

Currently, the most difficult thing in their business continues to be having access to pre-cooked cornmeal. “When I can’t find it in the supermarket, I repeat the initial corn process to keep up with the demand.” Despite being far from Venezuela, for Arianna Ortega it is important that her children know and eat arepas, “that they feel that it is theirs and that we are lucky to have this food. My two-year-old son already tells me, “Mom, arepita.” The arepa with cheese is his favorite.

Don’t give up. You must know that entrepreneurship takes its time; perseverance is the key to success.





Arepas Dominó

For the filling:

Ingredients:

- 1/2 kg (~1 lb) fresh white cheese
- 1/2 kg (~1 lb) black beans
- 1 tsp baking soda
- Onion
- Bell pepper
- Garlic
- Chives
- Cilantro

Directions:

- In a bowl with water, soak the beans with the baking soda for 12 hours. Wash well and cook for 20 minutes in a pressure cooker or until the beans are soft.





- Chop the vegetables separately. Sauté the onion until translucent and then add the garlic for a minute. Add the pepper and chives. Cook for three minutes, and add the beans and salt. Cover and let it cook for 10 minutes. When ready, turn off the heat and add the coriander.
- Separately, grate the cheese and set aside.

To make the dough for 8 arepas:

Ingredients:

- 1/2 kg (~1 lb) cornmeal
- Salt
- Water

Directions:

- In a bowl add the cornmeal and the salt, then add the water until it covers the cornmeal. Let it hydrate for five minutes.
- Knead, and if necessary, add more water until the dough is soft.
- Shape the arepas. Cook in a *budare* for five minutes on each side, and that's it.



To serve:

Open the arepa, stuff with beans, and then cheese, or vice versa.



AUSTRALIA



«You definitely make the arepa look beautiful with your flowers and recipes. You make the impossible become magical. Congratulations! Thank you for taking the arepa to so many places».

A compliment posted on IG

When she was little, Alejandra told her grandmother and one of her uncles, “Once I’m famous and they ask me, what is your favorite dish? I will proudly say, ‘Arepa with beans, fried egg, and cheese!’ Hahaha.” Her maternal grandma, every time her granddaughter came home, already knew what she wanted: her arepas.

In 2011 when she arrived in Australia, Alejandra Utrera could not get anything Venezuelan at all. “The little Latin food that existed at that time was not the best, and that was when I started to miss those flavors from home and began to develop a passion for cooking.” She cooked for her Australian husband and friends, and they were so delighted with her food that encouraged her to open a business.

The most difficult thing to consolidate her entrepreneurship was not knowing how to run a business in another country. She overcame it by studying cooking, taking business courses and, very importantly, gaining experience by working



Get to know the culture of the country where you are. It is key to integrate the locals or vice versa. I know it is not easy. You have to try it. It is beautiful to achieve the fusion of two countries. The arepa goes well with everything.

in local restaurants, and learning more about Australian culture. Of course, she already knew how to make arepas because her mom had taught her. She confidently told us, “Introducing our beautiful Venezuelan culture in Australia has been my passion.”

At Big Latin Flavor, the arepa is a must in their Latin party boxes, catering or private events; it is their source of income. Thanks to the arepa, Alejandra Utrera is known in Australia, where she serves them filled with meat or *pelúa*, the chicken one, *Reina Pepiada*, and vegetarian. And where do you get the ingredients? “I get them at a store near my house that has been in the city for almost 40 years and sells European and Latin food. There are also some Colombian young guys who have a company and sell a lot of Latin products.”

In these five years, Alejandra was the first Venezuelan to participate in cooking shows on Australian TV, cooking *Reina Pepiada*, *hallacas*, *pabellón* and *cachapas*. She has done cooking demos in different cities in Australia. She has collaborated with different Australian brands, developed recipes in books and magazines, and is one of the coordinators of World Arepa Day in the city of Brisbane. “So much so that they know me as the Queen of the Arepa, hahaha...”



Corderito Llanero

Arepa with grilled lamb, seasoned with mint, rosemary, and fresh sweet chili from my garden. Today, I want to unite the two cultures and use one of the most traditional and consumed meats in Australia, but with a Venezuelan seasoning, and what better way to serve it than in our versatile arepa.

Ingredients for 4 people:

- 500 g (~1 lb) lamb shoulder
- ½ tbsp of grated *papelón* (raw hardened sugar cane juice)
- ½ tbsp sweet paprika powder
- ½ tsp turmeric
- ½ tsp cumin
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp ground black pepper
- 2 cloves of garlic, crushed
- 1 tbsp finely chopped fresh mint
- 1 tbsp finely chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 tbsp finely chopped *ají dulce* or sweet chili pepper
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Aluminum foil to wrap the lamb

To baste the lamb during cooking:

- 50 ml (~3 ⅓ tbsp) of vinegar
- 50 ml (~3 ⅓ tbsp) of beer

Directions:

Mix the vinegar with the beer and set aside.



Preparation: 15 minutes

Cooking: 4 hours

Directions:

- Place all the ingredients to marinate the lamb in a bowl and mix well. Add the lamb to the spice mixture and rub until completely covered, refrigerate for about 45 minutes, if you can leave it overnight much better.
- Starting your grill at a low temperature is ideal. Place the lamb, close the lid of your grill and cook for two hours at 120°C (248°F).
- Every hour, spray the lamb with the vinegar and beer mixture. This is to prevent the skin from drying out and to keep the meat moist.
- After two hours, wrap the lamb in aluminum foil and place it on the grill for two more hours.

- Using a thermometer, measure its internal temperature; ideally, the lamb should reach a temperature of 93°C (~200°F).
- Let it rest for half an hour before serving. Finally, remove the aluminum foil, and with two forks, shred the lamb. Set aside.

Mint Sauce:

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup finely chopped mint
- ¼ cup finely chopped parsley
- 1 clove of crushed garlic
- 1 teaspoon *papelón* or brown sugar
- 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 2 tbsp olive oil

Directions:

Combine all ingredients in a small bowl and mix until everything is well incorporated.

Arepas:

Ingredients:

- 2 cups pre-cooked cornmeal
- 2 ½ cups water
- ½ tbsp vegetable oil

Directions:

- Mix all the ingredients and knead for 2 minutes. To prevent lumps from forming, use a whisk and stir constantly when adding the cornmeal to the water. Let the dough rest for 5 minutes.
- Divide the dough into equal portions. Form small balls of dough and flatten them with your hands.
- Cook in a frying pan or griddle over medium heat for five minutes each side.

To plate:

Serve the shredded lamb on the arepa, accompany with the mint sauce and decorate with fresh herbs: cilantro or parsley, mint, rosemary, micro herbs, edible flowers, and finely sliced purple onion.





ARGENTINA



“It is the best arepa I have ever eaten!”

Onoto Latín Food has been in the northern area of Buenos Aires for 5 years, supplying arepas to the city. They offer them with meat, chicken, *Peluda*, *Sifrina*, *Reina Pepiada*, *pabellón*, *asado negro*, and many other fillings.

“For me, the arepa is love, nothing in life tastes better than an arepa made by your mother, it is about being hopeful with every bite,” says Lumen Yuslay Sanguino Zambrano, who started selling arepas when she left Venezuela. She was in Mexico and Argentina, and wanted to introduce her culture to those other people.

When faced with challenges, you only need the best attitude. “Actually, in Argentina, you learn to deal with many challenges due to the rapid fluctuation of prices, so you need to adapt and see how to continue. It’s not impossible, but it requires a cool head.”

For Lumen, making arepas is a joy. “When I make the dough, it relaxes me because it is a moment that helps me think.”



The Onoto team only hopes that their guests can perceive in just a bite the dedication and love that they have put into the making of their arepas. They are very grateful with the arepa because it has provided a livelihood for the families working with Onoto Latin Food.

For Lumen, the arepa is part of our cultural heritage, “Venezuelans without their arepa have no direction, we must introduce it to the new generations that are outside our country; we are obliged to cultivate that love in our children who are growing up abroad.”

Persist, starting a business is not easy, you have to stand up again and again.



Arepa Ana Isabel

A turmeric arepa with smoked salmon, a recipe inspired by my daughters.

For the salmon:

Ingredients:

- 1 kg (~2.20 lb) salmon
- 5 g (0.17 oz) rosemary
- 5 g (0.17 oz) bay leaves
- 30 g (1.05 oz) piloncillo (muscovado sugar)
- 5 g (0.17 oz) garlic
- 8 g (0.28 oz) salt
- 3 g (0.10 oz) paprika
- 10 ml (~2 tsp) soy sauce
- 10 ml (~2 tsp) Worcestershire sauce
- 3 g (0.10 oz) mustard
- 3 g (0.10 oz) cloves
- 3 g (0.10 oz) rosemary
- Pepper

For the marinade: 24 hours before the preparation, place the salmon in a bowl and add the mustard, soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, paprika, muscovado sugar, salt, rosemary, bay leaves, and garlic and integrate, covering the entire salmon with all the spices. Cover it with plastic wrap and put it in the refrigerator.

For the smoking process: Add the spices (rosemary, bay leaf, black pepper, muscovado cane sugar, and cloves) and pieces of wood to a pan. To smoke in heat, insert a rack inside the pan so that it impregnates with the smoked flavor. On top of the rack, put a griddle. Place the pan, rack, and griddle on low heat, and once smoke begins to come out, arrange the salmon and cover the pan with aluminum foil, so that the smoke permeates the salmon for 10 minutes over medium heat.

NOTE: There are many methods for smoking. The one used in this recipe is an adaptation so that it can be made at home.

For 10 arepas:

Ingredients:

- 1 kg (~2.20 lb) pre-cooked white cornmeal
- 800 ml (3 ⅓ US cups) water
- 800 ml (3 ⅓ US cups) chicken broth
- 8 g (~0.28 oz) salt

Utensils needed for the recipe:

Bowl, spoon, scissors, scale, griddle, rotisserie, pan, rack.

Directions:

- Mix the cornmeal with salt and turmeric.
- In another bowl, mix the water with the chicken broth. Add the cornmeal slowly to avoid lumps from forming, while mixing with your hand or a large spoon until it comes together to form a dough, approximately 8-10 minutes. The dough should have a soft texture that can be handled.
- Proceed to knead the dough and form balls of 150 g (~5.5 oz). Flatten the balls with your hands to form a circular disc. It should not be too thick. Also, make sure that it is not cracked around the edges. If it looks cracked, it means that it needs more liquid.
- Preheat the griddle over medium heat and use a napkin to grease it with oil. Once it is hot, place the arepas over medium heat and leave them for 5-8 minutes.

- Turn them over once they can be removed easily from the pan. While cooking the other side, keep an eye on the timing. The arepa will reach a point in which it will puff up; it is an indication that is ready.
- To make it crispier, leave it on low heat for a little longer; when ready, it should make a crackling sound when patted.
- Once the arepas are ready, wrap them with a kitchen towel to keep them warm. Reserve them in a bowl.

To assemble the arepa:

Take an arepa while hot, open it with the help of a knife, and stuff it with the salmon. It can be accompanied with the drink of our choice.

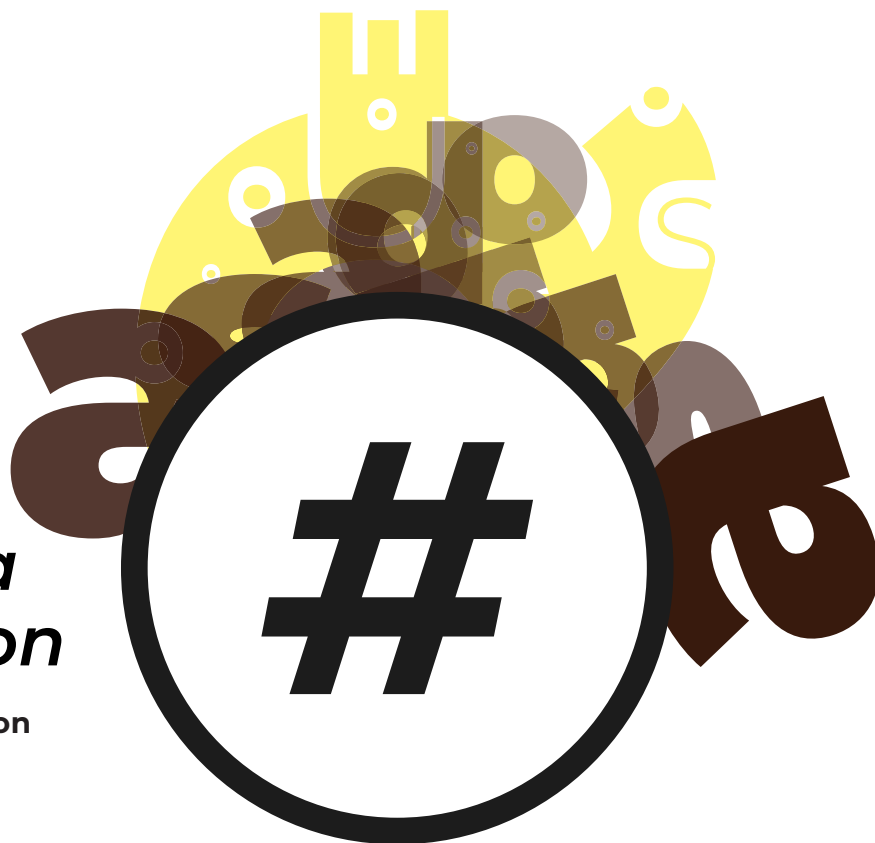




ENGLAND

**Ávila
London**

@avilalondon



“A Venezuelan told us that it was the best arepa she had ever eaten (it was one of *pabellón*) and we felt very happy.”

Gustavo Carucci and his wife began selling *patacones* in a very touristic market in London, but people asked them for “arepa” so they couldn’t resist offering it. “It has been four years of total financial independence with Ávila London and thanks to the arepa, which is the favorite item on our menu, we can have a livelihood here in London and help our family in Venezuela”.

What the Caruccis enjoy the most is the satisfaction of seeing people who did not know about Venezuelan culture enjoying a good arepa, “eating it like us, ordering more, and learning the names of the arepas”.

They offer them stuffed with shredded meat, shredded chicken, beans and a delicious *pernil* (a slow-roasted marinated pork leg.) And what makes them special is, undoubtedly, that they are made in the most traditional way possible “with our mothers’ recipes, with that Venezuelan or *criollo* seasoning. And we can’t miss *Guasacaca*... That sauce is the star of our business, it’s the hook!” They get their products in London, at a meat market and a vegetable wholesaler.

“We are very happy because through Ávila London we have a way to reach many Venezuelans who miss the country, and help them feel closer to home every



time they eat an *arepita* in our business. We are also happy because thanks to our cuisine, we're able to support ourselves as a family, making it easier to instill in our daughters a love for Venezuela".

The most important step to start a business venture is to have the desire to do it; focus on what you want to offer and stay firm.

We always say that organization, discipline, and perseverance are the key to achieving anything.

Arepa *Pernil* with everything, a la Ávila London

The main secret is to make them with a lot of love and a desire to eat tasty food.

For the *pernil*:

Ingredients:

- 1kg (~2.20 lb) *pernil* (pork leg)
- 1.5 l (~6.5 US cups) orange juice
- 10 cloves of garlic
- 1 large onion
- 1 tbsp cumin
- 1 tbsp oregano
- 1 tbsp garlic powder
- 1 tbsp salt
- 5 bay leaves

Directions:

- Blend all the ingredients and then massage the pork leg. Let it marinate for 4 hours in the refrigerator submerged in the marinade.
- Cover with aluminum foil and bake at 180°C (356°F) for 90 minutes. After 90 minutes, remove the aluminum foil and leave it in for another 15 more minutes to brown the pork.
- Shred very carefully once taken out of the oven.



For the *pico de gallo* salad:

Ingredients:

- 2 tomatoes, diced
- ½ onion, diced
- Juice of 1/2 lemon
- ¼ cup finely chopped coriander
- A pinch of salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Add the diced onion, tomatoes, and finely chopped cilantro to a container. Drizzle with the lemon juice. Season with salt and pepper, and then mix.

For the arepa dough:

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of pre-cooked cornmeal
- 2 ¾ cups of water
- A pinch of salt to taste

Directions:

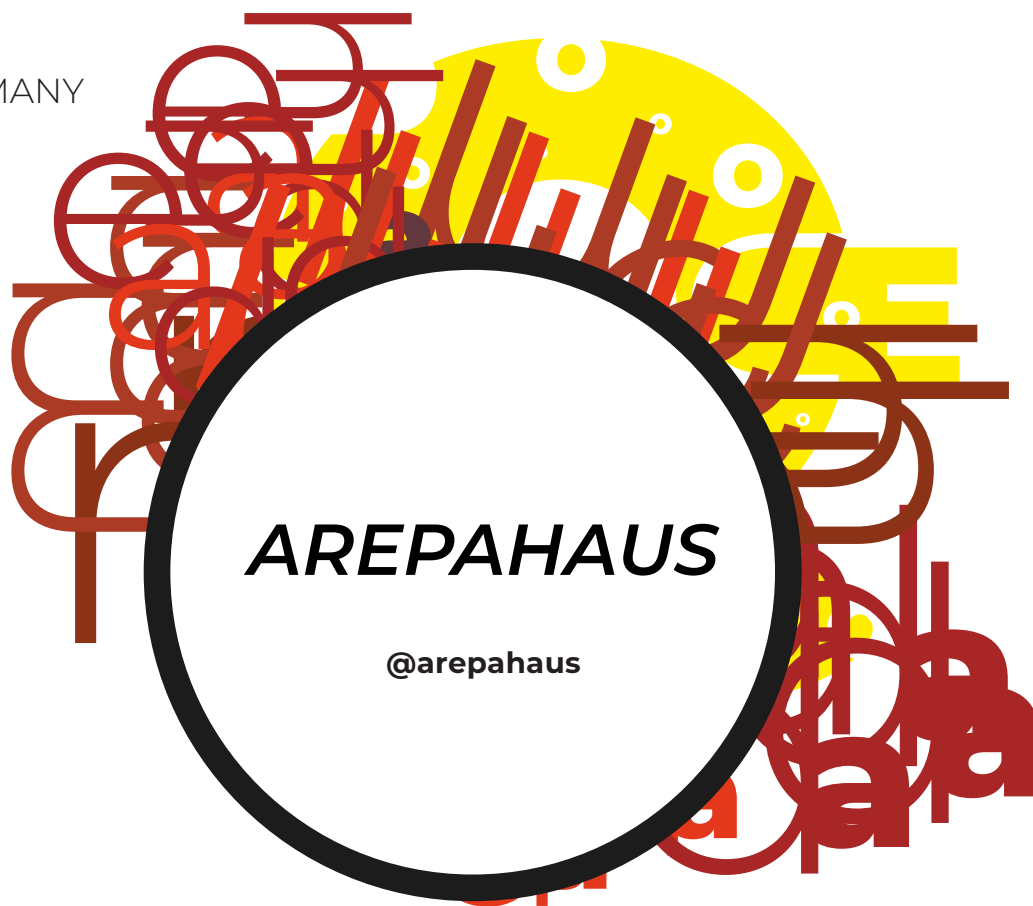
- Mix all the ingredients: water, cornmeal, and salt, in a bowl. Let it rest for 5 minutes and knead until you obtain a smooth dough without any lumps.
- Make balls about the size of a tennis ball, more or less, then press the dough with both hands until you get a disc of about 1 cm (~0.40 in) thick.
- In a pan as flat as possible, over medium heat, cook the arepa for approximately 10 minutes on each side.

Additional fillings:

- Sliced avocado
- Fried sliced plantains
- Yellow cheese
- Once the arepa is ready, with a plastic knife (preferably), open it in half and stuff it first with yellow cheese so that it melts; then add the pork and continue with the fried sliced plantains, sliced avocado, and the *pico de gallo* salad.

Be ready to enjoy a delicious arepa!





“It’s the best I’ve eaten in Germany.”

Sisters Zoret and María Eugenia Méndez began selling arepas in the middle of the pandemic from their home in Göttingen, Germany. The one who taught them how to make arepas was their mother, and at AREPAHAUS to make them more special, they fry them. They offer them with *pabellón*, *Pelúa*, *Catira*, *Dominó*, grilled meat, grilled chicken, capresa, and vegan (beans and avocado). What they enjoy the most is seeing people eating them with enthusiasm. An essential ingredient is *harina P.A.N.*, or pre-cooked cornmeal, and although it may seem unusual, they get some of their ingredients in an Asian store. For Zoret and María Eugenia the arepa is everyday life, and with Arepahaus they are celebrating three years. The most difficult moment that they had to overcome was the day when, while at a Latin Fair in Stuttgart, they learned that their father had passed away in Venezuela. “It was Saturday and we had to open, so even with tears, we prepared arepas. We wore dark glasses, but the



lack of joy was noticeable, and all the people at the participating stands talked, hugged, and consoled us. “My husband brought us flowers, and among the hustle and bustle, the people, and the loud music, we kept going!”

And a special and joyful moment they remember was when participating in a German Food Fair in a small town called Leinefelde. A Colombian lady came with her children and German husband and ordered an arepa of *pabellón*... “When she took her first bite, she started crying with emotion and we immediately asked her what was wrong. She hadn’t been in Colombia for the past 12 years and that arepa brought her memories of her childhood and country!”

I think keeping me close to my roots is one of the ways in which the arepa has helped me continue.



Arepita Grillúa

The *Grillúa arepita* is the perfect combination of crunchy and soft banana dough, accompanied with the favorite filling of all *Maracuchos**: abundant cheese... The *Grillúa arepita* is one of the most traditional and typical arepa recipes from the Zulia region of Venezuela. She is *grillúa* (pretentious) because she thinks she is better than the cornmeal arepa.

Ingredients:

- 1 small green plantain
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 tsp butter
- 100 g (~3.5 oz) of grated white cheese

Directions:

- Add water to a small pot to boil. Peel the plantain, cut into 2 parts and add it to boiled water for 10 minutes. After 10 minutes, take them out and drain them in a colander.
- Grate the plantain in a bowl. Add 1 teaspoon of butter, a pinch of salt and 50 grams (~1.75 oz) of grated cheese. Knead with your hands until all the ingredients are integrated. Let it stand for 5 minutes.
- Make two balls of the same size and proceed to give it the shape of arepas. Wet your hands to help yourself shape them while avoiding breaking them.
- Place the arepas in a previously heated and greased *budare*. Grill them over low heat for approximately 6 minutes on each side. Once ready, open them, and add butter to taste and the cheese of your preference.

**Maracuchos*: People native to Maracaibo, a city in the western region of Venezuela.

Cumaná Bistro Food

@cumana_bistro_food



“The best arepa I’ve ever had,” said in French, English, Mandarin, Russian, Arabic, and many other languages.

“When I was a new immigrant, arepas saved my life,” says Marielvis López Silva, a Venezuelan, born in Cumaná, who moved to Colombia in 2015, and who was taught to make arepas by her grandmother. She tells us that having just arrived in the city of Armenia, Quindio –a coffee region in Colombia–, she tried to find a job without success... and with her last savings from the sale of her few valuable belongings, Marielvis decided to make and sell some arepas. She says that after searching for pre-cooked cornmeal for a long time, “I bought 1 kilogram of *harina P.A.N* (of course!) and made 18 chicken-stuffed arepas... and with all my courage, I carried them in a styrofoam ice box to the entrance of SENA—a well-known training center—and sold them all.”



On the other hand, Mariam Echenique Bello, from Caracas, but raised in Cumaná, and co-founder of Cumaná Bistro Food, dedicates her daily life to study, explore, learn, and work with Venezuelan flavors, serving as **main chef** in this creative gastronomical entrepreneurship.

By 2020, Marielvis and Mariam had a successful location in the town of Salento in Quindío—a small town of 8,000 inhabitants in the Colombian central mountain range situated at more than 2,000 meters above sea level—the birthplace of the Quindío wax palm, the national tree of Colombia. “One of the most popular tourist destinations for foreigners... and our restaurant became first place thanks to social media.”

But in March 2020, due to the pandemic, everything changed, and sales, customers, and cash flow fell almost to zero... For months the restaurant went from being number one to becoming a bakery to avoid closure. To do this, Mariam and Marielvis decided to sell emblematic Venezuelan bakery products, such as *canilla* bread, *campesino* bread, *acemitas*, *golfeados*, *cachitos*, among others, “thus they survived during the six months that the municipality was completely closed when people in town couldn’t leave nor foreigners enter.” During 2021 and 2022, they managed to position Cumaná Bistró Food again as one of the best Venezuelan cuisine restaurants in the Colombian coffee region. On the extensive menu at Cumaná Bistró Food, in addition to the *asado negro*, *pabellón*, and *cachapas*, they are now celebrating five years offering the following arepas in their classic presentation (the arepa is wrapped in greaseproof paper on a plate): *Pelúa*: shredded meat and Dutch yellow cheese; *Reina Pepiada*; *Dominó* (beans and white cheese); *Catira*: (chicken and yellow cheese); *telita* cheese arepa; arepa with *asado negro*, and *Cumanesa* arepa. And do not leave out the typical Venezuelan drinks, such as *chicha*, *carato* of mango, *cocadas*, rum of ponsigue, *brujita*, *guarapita*.

The arepa has taught Marielvis and Mariam that flavor crosses borders, which is why they take great care to preserve their native Venezuelan flavors: “The arepas are made with yellow cornmeal, the Venezuelan flavors used to cook and prepare the *sofrito* to season the meats are made with *ají dulce* or sweet chili peppers that we import or bring from the Colombian Caribbean coast. These are not flavors that have been influenced by the main ingredients of Colombian cuisine. We always try to replicate the seasoning inherited from our home. And so whoever receives it knows that what we give them is our culture, so they respect it, love it and, above all, enjoy it.”

Discipline, perseverance, development of financial intelligence, respect, and legality.



Arepa of *cuajada* of trout

Cuajada is a type of plantain-and-fish-based egg tortilla, typical in the eastern region of Venezuela, where it is served as a main dish during the Lent season in cities such as Cumaná, Margarita, and Puerto La Cruz. The main products of that area come from the sea, and they zealously cultivate the Margariteño sweet chili pepper.

Due to migration, we left the flavors that have been in our palate since childhood, thus leading us to recreate these longed flavors by applying the same techniques to local fish such as the Salentino trout—that grows on the

slopes of the Quindío River, at the top of the imposing Cocora Valley—which is the most daily consumed local product in Salentino homes in various preparations.

The *cuajada* of trout with arepa is a delicious recreation of the famous *cuajada* of *cazón* (a type of shark). Its preparation begins with the trout *pisillo* technique, which must be previously prepared, then combined with the rest of the ingredients and cooked with the eggs (to *cuajar*), to obtain the desired dish.

For the *pisillo* of trout:**Ingredients:**

- 700 g (~1.6 lb) of fish
- 200 g (~1/2 lb) white onion
- 60 g (~2.10 oz) *ají dulce* or sweet chili pepper
- 150 g (~5.30 oz) bell pepper
- 50 ml (~3 1/3 tbsp) lemon juice
- 15 g (~0.50 oz) garlic
- 1 g (~0.05 oz) curry, turmeric, and black pepper
- 5 g (~0.20 oz) salt
- 15 g (~0.50 oz) vegetable oil

Directions:

- Clean and wash the fish. Place 4 cups of water in a pot to make a stock, add 1 tablespoon of diced onions, 1 clove of garlic, 1 sweet chili pepper, and salt. Pace on the heat and let it boil. Add the fish for 4 minutes and remove it (reserve the stock.)
- Drain the fish and remove the bones and skin, separating it into medium pieces. Cut the onion, sweet chili pepper, and bell pepper into *brunoise* or small cubes.
- In a frying pan or cauldron, heat oil, add all the vegetables and fry for 10 minutes. Add the fish, the seasonings (salt, pepper, paprika, turmeric, and curry) and a cup of the fish stock. Cook for 5 minutes over low heat. And finally, cook it over high heat for 2 minutes, stirring constantly, to prevent it from sticking, and to help reduce the stew sauce.

For the *cuajada* of trout *pisillo*:**Ingredients:**

- 4 whole eggs
- 150 g (~5.30 oz) trout *pisillo*
- 100 g (~3.5 oz) ripe plantain
- 1 g (~0.05 Oz) pepper, salt, and paprika
- 5 ml (~1 tsp) lemon juice
- 1 g (~0.05 oz) parsley
- 5 g (~0.20 oz) butter

Directions:

- Peel and cut the plantains into slices or cubes, fry and set aside.
- Beat the eggs and mix with the seasonings, plantains, and trout *pisillo*.
- Preheat a non-stick pan, add butter, and pour the mixture into the pan over low heat, push and arrange the edges into the *cuajada*, let the bottom cook for about 5 minutes.
- Turn the *cuajada* over, cook over medium heat for 5 minutes or until golden. Remove from the heat.

For the arepas:**Ingredients:**

- 2 cups of pre-cooked cornmeal
- 2 1/2 cups of water
- 5 g (~0.20 oz) salt

Directions:

- In a container, add water, salt, and the precooked cornmeal. Stir with your hands until obtaining a homogeneous and soft dough.
- Preheat a frying pan, *aripo* or *budare*. Take a portion of the dough, shape it into a circular, slightly flat shape, and place it in the frying pan, *aripo* or *budare* for 5 minutes over medium heat.
- Flip and cook the other side for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat, open and fill with the *cuajada* of trout.





"The best compliment is undoubtedly hearing a Venezuelan who has probably eaten more than 10,000 arepas throughout his life say that our arepas are the BEST they have ever tasted"

"We started in a big way! Our business was born and developed into what is now our first and only location. I got the idea of selling arepas after making the decision of selling a product that is of very high quality but without being pretentious," is what tells us Ricardo Rosales Maicán, chef and manager of Picando Arepas, who has the secret of the house: cooking with love.

The most stressful moment came when Ricardo was starting this family business and his first partner decided to abandon the project just six months after it had been opened. "I felt that the dream of having my own restaurant was fading for reasons beyond my work, dedication, and commitment. It was then that my guardian angel appeared, my second mother, the most wonderful person on the planet, my aunt Marisol. Thanks to her financial help and emotional support, the Picando Arepas team managed to survive that difficult moment because it gave us security where, before, there was only uncertainty.

Like many other Venezuelans, Ricardo learned to make arepas following the teachings and style of his beloved grandmother: Mrs. Rosa, matriarch and an



important person in the family, who used to add water first when making the dough. “It is incredible how well such a ‘simple’ dish can represent a nation so globally. For me, the arepa represents the humility, passion, and dedication that has transcended entire continents”.

Picando Arepas has a terrace and a very modern, relaxed, and colorful vibe. For two years now, it has offered all the classic fillings of the traditional *arepera* in Venezuela, as well as original fillings that have captivated the palates of both Venezuelans and Chileans. “I really enjoy seeing the expression of absolute pleasure on our clients’ faces. It’s priceless!”

At Picando Arepas, ingredients are 100% organic and are selected weekly at the central farmers market in Santiago de Chile, supplying our premises with pure quality, colors, and freshness. And of course, to be called an arepa it has to be stuffed with Venezuelan cheese!

Giving up is not an option. No matter how difficult the situation is, if you put love, effort, precision, dedication, and quality into your business venture, you will not fail.

The Irish one, a beet and flaxseed arepa stuffed with chicken, cheese and avocado

This arepa alludes to the Irish flag due to its colors, but it couldn't be more Venezuelan. Just like our people and culture, it's full of flavor, color, aroma, and character.

For the dough:

Ingredients:

- 1 cup (~250 g) of pre-cooked cornmeal
- 1 cup (~250 ml) water at room temperature
- Salt to taste
- 1 beet
- 30 g (~1 oz) flax seeds

Directions:

- Boil the beet in water for 15 minutes. Once it is cooked, blend it with the water until there is a homogeneous juice of an intense red color.
- In a bowl, place the beet juice, salt to taste, the flax seeds, and the cup of cornmeal. Knead vigorously until there are no lumps in the dough and let it rest for 5 minutes.
- Make 150 g (5.30 oz) balls and flatten them to shape into the desired size.
- In a hot and oiled frying pan or *budare*, place the flattened dough for 5 minutes on each side, or until the desired toasting is achieved.

To boil the chicken:

Ingredients:

- 250 g (~½ lb) chicken breast
- 1 white onion
- 1 head of garlic
- 4 bay leaves
- 2 sticks of celery
- 1 carrot

Directions:

- In a pot, boil the chicken breast, onion, head of garlic, carrot, bay leaves, and celery for 20 minutes.
- Remove the chicken from the water to be shredded later, and strain and save the broth.

For the chicken stew filling:

Ingredients:

- Annatto vegetable oil
- 1 white onion, diced
- 1 head of garlic, finely minced
- 1 yellow bell pepper
- 2 *ají dulce* or sweet chili peppers, diced
- 50 ml (~3.5 tbsp. white wine)
- 80 g (~0.30 oz) cilantro, chopped very small
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 1 pinch of oregano
- Paprika, cumin, turmeric, curry to taste
- Salt and ground pepper to taste
- 200 g (~7 oz) *de mano* or mozzarella cheese
- 2 avocados

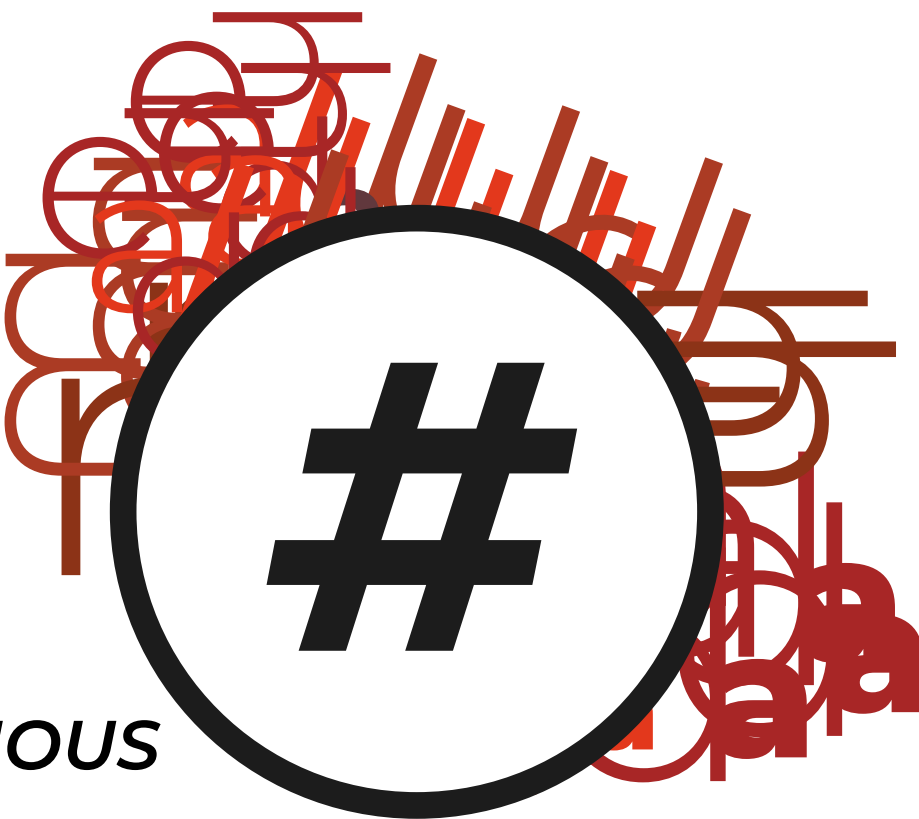
Directions:

- In a large frying pan, sauté the onion and the garlic, then add the cilantro stems. Add all the spices, salt, and pepper. When it forms a beautiful toasted crust, add the white wine and stir, scraping the bottom of the pan. Let the alcohol from the white wine evaporate a little, and add the paprika and sweet chili peppers. Add the mustard and a cup of chicken broth, cook over low heat until most of the liquid has evaporated. At the end, add the pinch of oregano, chopped cilantro leaves, and shredded chicken.
- Stuff the beet arepa with a little bit of butter, the shredded chicken stew, *de mano* or mozzarella cheese, and slices of avocado according to your preference.





Massachusetts
UNITED STATES



CAROLICIOUS

@carolicious424

**Thank God we receive daily compliments,
“The best we’ve had in a long time.”**

Carolina García and Carolina Salinas have applied discipline, perseverance, patience, and study to observe the place where they decided to start their business venture to understand it better, in addition to taking advantage of every opportunity, and never saying “No.” Thus, by reinvesting in their business and establishing priorities, they have managed to move three locations forward and, for almost a year now, have been participating every Thursday at the Boston Public Library, specifically in the Newsfeed Café.

Let’s start with the arepas... They were both taught how to make arepas by their mothers, and when preparing the dough, they always put water first. “Our arepas are delicious, crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside. We have 17 types of arepas, including *Catira*, *Reina Pepeada*, *Pelúa*, *Rumbera*, *Dominó*, and many more. Plus our signature sauce (made with basil) that makes them even more succulent. We always use *harina P.A.N.* or pre-cooked cornmeal.



For the Carolinas, arepas are “our identity. The best letter of introduction for Venezuelans. “It’s kindness made food.” Definitely, the love they put into what they do, the desire to do it well, and teaching everyone that the arepa is the best, have been their key to open doors. And here goes their story.

They participated in a program called Nibble (Somerville Arts Council) at the City of Somerville in Massachusetts, where they had the opportunity to teach about the arepa in Somerville at each of the Pop-Ups, festivals, and farmers’ market for three years. In August 2019, in that same city, they managed to have their own location, inside a brewery called Aeronaut Brewing. And in March 2021, they opened the second location, inside Aeronaut Cannery in the City of Everett, Massachusetts. In September of that same year, they were invited by Commonwealth Kitchen to sell their proposal at MIT, in the Stratton Student Center, in an area called The Launchpad, in Cambridge.

During the pandemic, they had to close for three months, from March to June 2020. It was hard because they had just opened their store in August 2019. But “it was a precious time to rest and think carefully about the business. Time to create,” they commented with their most uplifted spirits.

The arepa allowed them to restart in another country and in another stage of their lives. Part of their service philosophy is that customers should feel that



they are coming to the kitchen of a Venezuelan family willing to treat them with the greatest affection and make them happy. “The arepa is the best company for the Venezuelans who decided to migrate, the arepa is everywhere around the world, and that fills us with a lot of pride.”

The Carolinas really enjoy introducing the arepa to people from all over the world. “Somerville is a very diverse city and our location close to Harvard and MIT means that all the diversity of Boston can try this wonderful Venezuelan dish. We feel like ambassadors of our culture, and offering our flavors to so many people is what we like the most.”

Valuing what is ours and honoring it is a duty, but also a huge pleasure when you understand how far you have come with your business venture.



Arepa La Sifrina, a classic of Carolicious

For the arepa dough:

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cold water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup pre-cooked cornmeal

Directions:

- Add water, salt, and the pre-cooked cornmeal into a bowl. Stir with a fork and let it rest for 2 minutes. Make the arepa balls according to your preferred size. Give them the shape of an arepa by patting the balls with both hands.
- Cook the arepa on a griddle or a frying pan with a little oil. Leave it for 5 minutes on each side, and then give it an additional 5 minutes to cook. If the arepa is thick, leave it longer so that it cooks well.

For the *Reina Pepeada* filling:

Ingredients:

- 1 chicken breast
- 1 small avocado
- 1 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise (adjust to your taste)
- Grated yellow cheese

Directions:

- Cut the chicken breast into large cubes. Boil it until it is cooked. Strain and shred with your hands or—here's a tip—help yourself with a hand mixer and it'll be done in 2 minutes.



- Puree the avocado, and add mayonnaise and salt. Add this cream to the shredded chicken and your *Reina Pepeada* is ready.

Time to assemble the arepa!

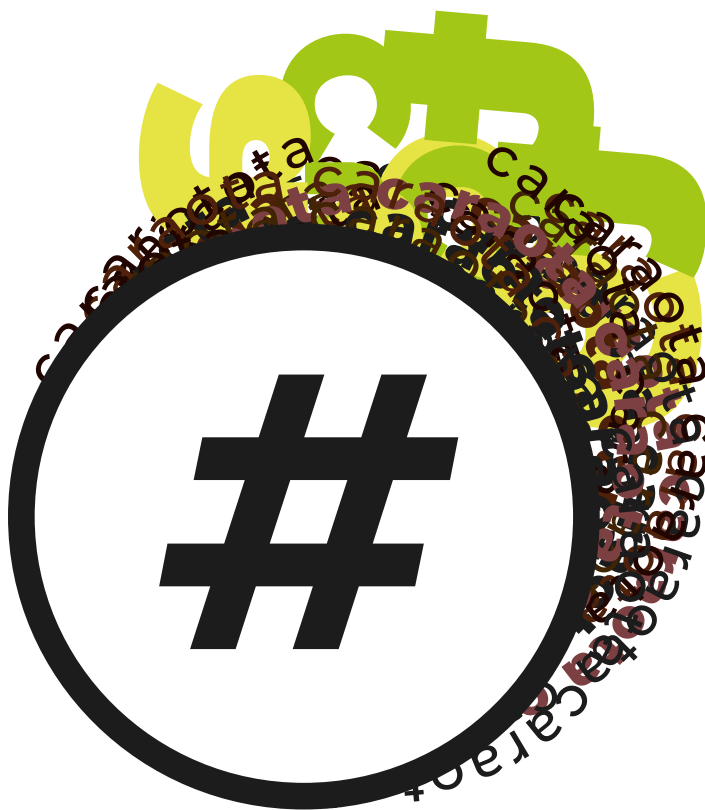
Open the arepa, stuff it with *Reina Pepeada* and a lot of yellow cheese, and enjoy our Sifrina a la Carolicious!



Monagas
VENEZUELA

El Fogón del Este

@elfogondeleste



"¡Very delicious!"

Like most entrepreneurs, Said Frangie had difficult moments to overcome while building his business. One of them was when he suffered from Covid-19 and had to close, and then reopen with limited resources and move forward slowly. Once the vicissitudes have been overcome, it has been two years since Said has consolidated El Fogón del Este in Maturín—a typical food restaurant—where arepas are present in the menu, “It is a versatile dish. In Venezuela the arepa is the “ideal meal for any time of the day.”

The fillings of the arepas at El Fogón del Este are really particular, you can choose one of these delicacies or combine them with each other: *carne en vara* (typical Venezuelan beef skewers), roast pork, fried pork, *de mano* cheese, chorizo, shredded meat, shredded chicken. Few places offer these combinations where meats are wood-roasted, like at El Fogón del Este.

In addition to that, they offer fried *arepitas* with *nata* (a spreadable cream from milk) to accompany other dishes on the menu. “Our fried *arepitas* with *nata*



are generally an ideal starter or accompaniment to meals. They are made with the same dough as an arepa but with an added sweet touch, are smaller, and fried. They are accompanied by *nata* or *natilla* (a cream similar to sour cream.)” Said, who was taught to make arepas by his mother, feels satisfied when he sees customers “finish and leave nothing on the plate.”

Always offer quality products and, whenever possible, purchase ingredients from local suppliers.



Arepa Llanera by El Fogón del Este

This arepa was born from the need to bring together several flavors to this sphere-shaped food that represents us and that Venezuelans carry in their DNA. The arepa is part of our identity and we can travel to every corner of the country through its filling. For this

reason, looking for that flavor balance that would transport us to the Venezuelan Llanos, in El Fogón del Este we combine traditional ingredients to make the *Llanera* arepa a special event. Due to the repeated requests from our customers, we came out with the flavor combination in this recipe.

Ingredients for one serving

For the filling:

Ingredients:

- 250 g (~½ pound) of pork leg
- Dried oregano in leaves
- 1 artisanal beef and pork chorizo (90 or 100 g) or (~3 -3.5 oz)
- 100 g (~3.5 oz) *de mano* or *telita* cheese

Directions:

1. Previously season the pork leg by rubbing the piece with oregano and salt.
2. Insert the piece into a wooden stick suitable for cooking and place it on the stove lit with firewood.
3. Monitor the cooking of the pork, which should be ready in approximately 90 minutes, maintaining its juiciness, once the cooking process is complete. Keep also an eye on the chorizo while cooking.

For the *Guasacaca*:

Ingredients:

- 1 small onion or 1/2 an onion
- 2 tablespoons of oil
- 4 *ají dulce* or sweet chili peppers
- 1 bell pepper
- 3 cloves garlic
- 100 g (~3.5 oz) cilantro
- 1/2 cup oil
- A touch of vinegar
- Salt to taste

Directions:

Clean all the ingredients very well and remove the seeds from the sweet chili peppers. Chop finely, and then place

all the ingredients together in a container and mix until you obtain the desired consistency.

To make the arepa

- 75 g (~2.7 oz) of P.A.N. pre-cooked cornmeal (rice and corn)
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 pinch of sugar
- 75 ml (5 tbsp) of water

Directions:

1. Preheat the “aripo” (an iron or clay griddle on which the arepas are toasted, also known as *budare*) over high heat.
2. To prepare the dough: mix the flour with the salt and sugar, add the water and mix. Let it rest for five minutes. After that time, knead well for 10 minutes until reaching a soft and compact texture at the same time, achieving a medium point of firmness.
3. Give it a rounded shape and place it in a very hot *aripo* or *budare*. Cook over low heat, on both sides, until you reach a crispy shell that when tapped with your fingertips, makes a dry sound.

To stuff it:

After opening the arepa, spread some butter. Then fill it with 120 g (~4.25 oz) of roast pork leg, plus the mixed chorizo, and the fresh *de mano* or *telita* cheese. Serve it accompanied with *guasacaca*.



New York
UNITED STATES



"The best"

Mylene Yáñez and her brothers have been selling arepas for 15 months. For them, their place is special because of the love they put into making their food and the way they treat customers and explain to them how an arepa is made, "and the pride we feel about being Venezuelans because the arepa represents us." They offer them stuffed with *pabellón*, *asado negro*, *dominó*, shredded meat, vegetarian, tuna, *Pelúa*, *Catira*, *Reina Pepeada*, cheese, *pernil*, shrimp, ham and cheese, *cazón*, and stewed sausage in their locations situated in New York.

It all started in 2020, when Mylene Yáñez fractured her left ankle. So she started a family business selling food from home. Cooking was her passion so she had to do something to keep going. They started with *tequeños*, *hallacas*, *pastichos* (Venezuelan-style lasagna), *golfeados*, sweet breads, *catalinas*, *polvorosas*, traditional Venezuelan papaya sweet, and much more, which they sold in catering for baptisms, baby showers... until they were called to prepare the entire menu of a wedding.



With the Covid-19 pandemic, they were forced to continue working from home. "My father was sick with cancer, and yet he also helped us as much as he could..." However, on December 28th, 2020, her father was hospitalized, and on January 12th, 2021, he passed away. That was a very hard blow for the entire family. "It took us a lot to get out of the depression we had."

Thanks to the family unity, they joined forces and began to attend bazaars for entrepreneurs in New York. The public made them trust their products and motivated them to think about going one step forward. They were presented with the opportunity for a venue and finally, the three siblings decided to be partners, naming their business Los Roques Arepas. "It follows the model of the *areperas* in Aragua, the state where we come from in Venezuela. We opened on March 12th, 2022, and so far we've continued till today thanks to God and my father, who'd always believed in our family business."

Los Roques Arepas has had excellent acceptance from the American community, and the stars are the *pabellón* arepa, the *Reina Pepeada* and the Veggie.

**We have to believe in our dreams and our products,
and do everything with the best disposition. Perseverance and
hard work lead to success.**





Arepa Llanera

- 2 grilled *chorizos*
- *De mano* cheese

For the dough of 3 arepas:

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of pre-cooked cornmeal
- Salt to taste
- 2 ½ cups of water

Directions:

1. Add the water, salt, and pre-cooked cornmeal in a container. Knead it for 5 minutes and let it rest for 5 minutes.
2. Make three balls to make the arepas and shape them by flattening them.
3. Once the arepas are ready, we take them to the griddle and let them cook until they're toasted on both sides.

For the filling:

Ingredients:

- 125 g (~5 oz) of thinly cut top sirloin for each
- Salt to taste

Directions:

Cook the meat on the grill for five minutes on each side. Cut it into julienne strips. Cut the chorizos in half and grill until golden brown.

For the *guasacaca* sauce:

Ingredients:

Green bell pepper, cilantro, parsley, *ají dulce* or sweet chili pepper, onion, oil, vinegar, salt, and a pinch of sugar.

Directions:

Place all the ingredients in a blender. Blend until everything is combined.

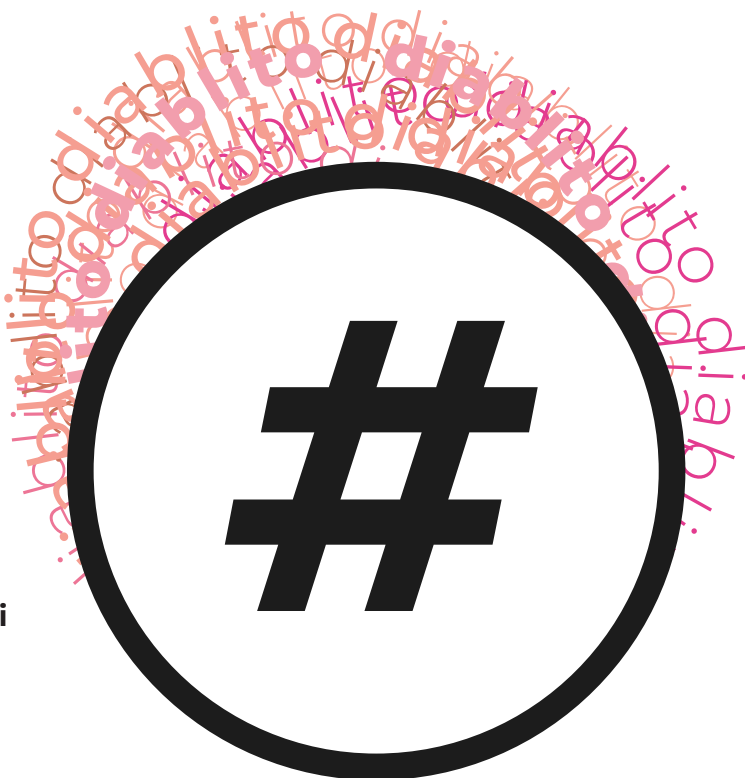
Once everything is ready, proceed to stuff the arepa. Open it and start with *de mano* cheese, followed by the meat, *chorizos*, and avocado. Top with *guasacaca* to taste.



Miami
UNITED STATES

Las Arepas de María

@lasarepasdemaria.miami



**"The first bite transports them to their grandmother or mother's table,
often with tears included".**

María Pérez is a dynamic and entrepreneurial mother who has been selling her arepas full of flavor and cheese from a food cart for nine months at El Doral in Miami. She tells us that one way to show love to her loved ones is through the arepa. "On family trips or meetings with my friends, I've always prepared breakfast for everyone. When I moved to the United States, I wanted to find a job that would make me happy and that would allow me to spend time with my mother and my son. That's how my business—Las Arepas de María— was born." It is a space that she has created, little by little, with the help of her family and that is giving her the opportunity to grow personally and professionally.

Opening her Instagram account is getting to know her a little. María is active, happy, and she introduces you to her arepas with a great vibe. "Ufff, all the fillings are delicious, the shredded meat is made with my great aunt's seasoning, the *Reina Pepiada's* shredded chicken is my mother's specialty." You will also find combinations with grated white cheese, grated yellow Gouda cheese, *guayanés* cheese, ham, cut sausages in sauce, mortadella, beans, *Diablitos* (Deviled Ham), Rikesa Cheddar (Cheese spread), and so on... When making the



dough, add the water first. Through trial and error, she perfected her recipe so that the arepas are “soft on the inside and crispy on the outside.”

María’s arepa takes her back to happy childhood memories when her mother would put two Tostiarepa’s arepas in her lunch box for school. “And what I enjoy most is sharing this dream with my mother because it allows us to spend more quality time together.”

This has been a project that has taken her out of her comfort zone, “being a single mother and working at night has been one of the most important challenges of my life but, at the same time, the one that has made me the strongest.” I have learned to balance both roles in my life, I can be a mother and a business woman at the same time.”

It is very comforting for her to see her business grow so quickly, and to know that many people come from far away to try the arepas. And her customers are not only Venezuelans. Being able to bring the arepa to people from other cultures and receive such positive comments is something that fills María Pérez’s heart with pride.

Start your business no matter what. You will never have everything ready as you planned in your head, but the important thing is to get started. Everything falls into place along the way. Only with real exposure you will learn about the market. You will also discover that there are details that were not considered at the beginning, but you will only be able to see them when your business starts.

Arepa La Colegiala

This is the signature arepa from Las arepas de María. This recipe is important because it represents me and reminds me of the arepa that my mom used to make me for school every day. It is a mixture of Diablitos with Cheez Whiz and it is served usually with grated white cheese, but you can add any cheese of your preference.

Dough for 5 arepas:

Ingredients:

- 1 cup pre-cooked white cornmeal
- 1 ¾ cups of water
- ½ teaspoon salt

Directions:

1. Pour the water into a container. Add the salt and incorporate the pre-cooked white cornmeal little by little. Mix until you obtain a smooth dough.
2. Divide the dough into 8-10 portions. Form into balls and flatten them with your hands until obtaining discs of 10 to 12 cm (~4-5 in)
3. Cook on a griddle over medium heat for 5 minutes each side. Open on one side and stuff it well.

For the filling:

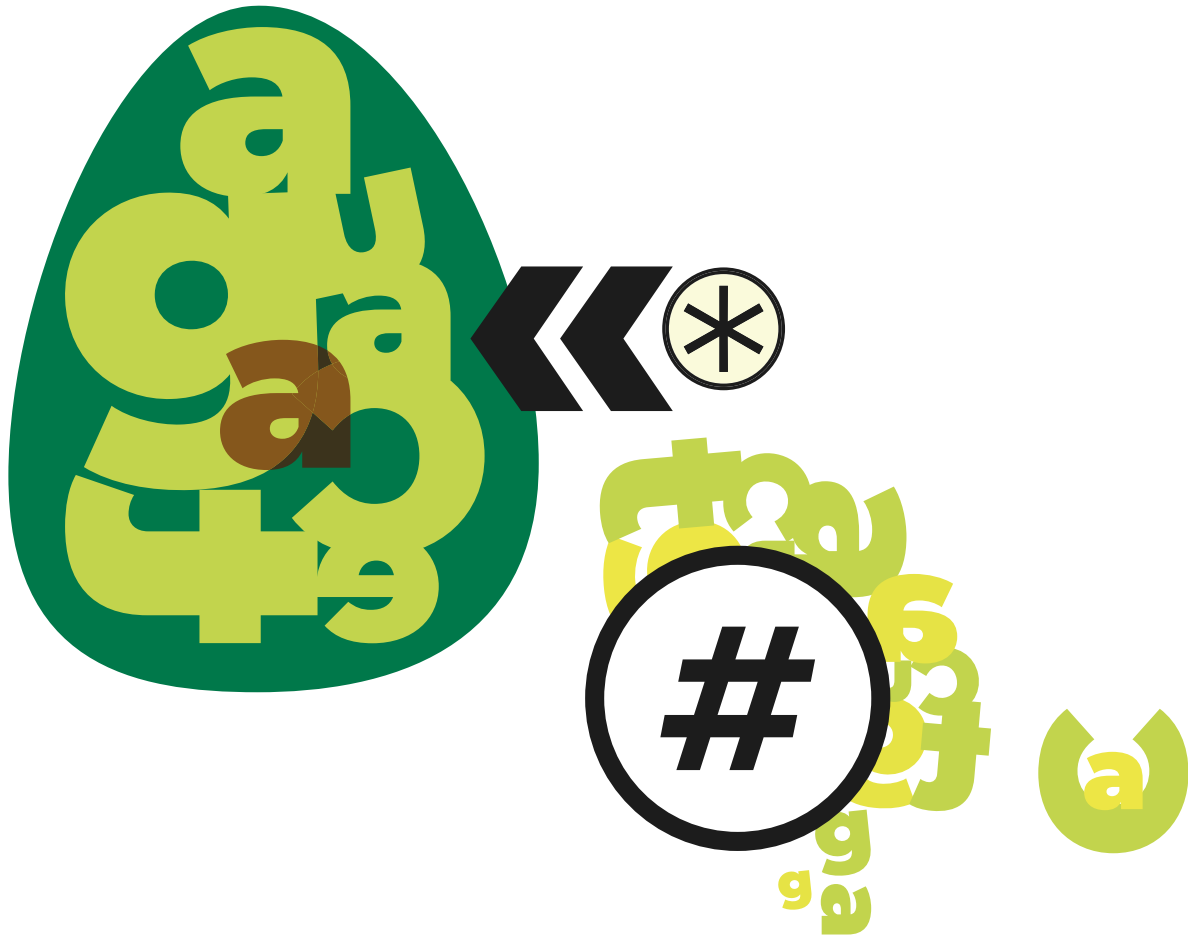
Ingredients:

- 5 tbsp *Diablitos*
- 5 tbsp Cheez Whiz
- 225 g (~8 oz) grated white cheese
- Butter (optional)

Directions: In a bowl, mix *Diablitos* with the Cheez Whiz and stir well. Spread the mixture onto one of the sides of the arepa, then add three tablespoons of grated white cheese. If you want to give it a special touch, ask for the “llorona” (the crier), which comes with butter that will drip with every bite.”



*We continue stuffing our
arepas with stories.*





"A client approached to tell me she was the chef of a famous restaurant in the place we were, and that she had never eaten arepas before and loved it. I thought she was going to kiss me!"

Wilmer Fernández Depablos, who was taught how to make arepas by his paternal grandmother in Boconó, Venezuela, is now rolling throughout Sweden like a rock star. From that early training, he learned to put the water first. He has been traveling from city to city for the past two years selling the “bread of the gods” in a food truck, after managing to participate in an international food festival, which opened unexpected doors for him, and allowed him to introduce his gourmet fillings to many more people.

«At first, my wife and I started with a partner. Unfortunately, we didn’t come to an agreement so we had to split. The restructuring was tough, however, we moved forward with new partners, Ricardo Montero and his family, and we gave it a more familiar environment. “As we travel like nomads, sometimes we have to make sacrifices, leaving our wives and children for long periods of time.”



For the Épale!- Streetfood team, selling arepas makes them feel like rock stars because they are traveling all over Sweden, and “the receptiveness in all the cities has been very pleasant. This interfamily team that we are makes us work very united,” confirm the Fernándezes.

Épale!- Streetfood offers arepas stuffed with *entrecôte*, chicken filet, pork filet, beans and cheese. They use local products from the cities they are visiting, making sure that the ingredients are all top-notch. Pre-cooked cornmeal for arepas is essential. They purchase it from an importer that brings it from Venezuela.

And just as they care so much about the quality, they also pay a lot of attention to the service they provide. And like every arepa ambassador, Wilmer loves to see the happy reaction of their customers when they try the arepa for the first time. Seeing their satisfaction confirms “the culinary potential of our beautiful country.”

Believe in yourself and, above all, know how to work with the flavors of your host country. It is important to have a balance.

*¡Épale! : Venezuelan greeting expression that translates as “Howdy”.

The Sweden *Pelúa* with *Chimichurri*, *Pebre* and *Guasacaca*

The *Pelúa* is a finely sliced *entrecôte* or rib eye, seasoned with cumin, *chimichurri*, salt, onion, and paprika.

Arepa

Ingredients: Warm water, pre-cooked cornmeal, a pinch of salt, a little oil, and a lot of love.

Directions: Mix and knead well.

For the *entrecôte* or rib eye

Ingredients:

- Onion, diced
- Green, red, and yellow bell pepper, diced
- Seasonings: 2 tsp salt, 2 tsp chili powder, 2 tsp onion powder, 4 tsp garlic powder, 5 tsp paprika, 2 tsp cumin powder, 3 tbsp oregano, 2 pinches of cayenne pepper, 3 tsp parsley powder.
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tbsp of vinegar

Directions:

Sweat the onion, red, green, and yellow bell pepper. This is the *sofrito*. Mix all the seasonings together and add them to the *sofrito*. Add the finely sliced *entrecôte* or rib eye.

For the sauces

Guasacaca

Mix in a blender or processor: Garlic, mayonnaise, cilantro, parsley, leek, green bell pepper, avocado, salt, and celery.

Chimichurri

Mix in a blender or processor: Garlic, cilantro, parsley, leek, green and red bell pepper. Add salt, a touch of spicy sauce, and lime. Pour into a jar and macerate with oregano in oil.

Pebre

Dice everything very small: Tomato, onion, garlic, cilantro. Add lime juice, salt, spicy sauce, and oil.

After stuffing the arepa with the meat and the sauces, add some grated cheese on top, and then it is ready to eat.







Maracaibo
VENEZUELA



«I have a very special client who told me that my arepas are a delicacy of the gods and, at the same time, that I am “diabolically” good at making those arepas, hahaha».

Well, her mom did not make arepas, but she did make the best pastas and pizzas! When her Italian mother had just arrived to Venezuela, specifically to Ciudad Ojeda, an oil city located on the Eastern Coast of the Lake of Maracaibo, in Zulia (a state in the Western side of the country), she hired a Colombian woman to help her with household chores, and “that lady taught my mother how to make arepas and of course how to eat them.... And from there, she went on to teach me when I was old enough not only to eat them, but to make them myself!”



Of Italian parents, and with a large family, as she explains us: “My husband is Maracucho (a native from Maracaibo, the city capital of Zulia), and he has 5 brothers, more than 10 nephews, and 2 wonderful children who, together with our 2 princesses, make up our home,” thus I was always linked to cooking, to the dough, and to large celebrations, so the first arepas were made for those family gatherings. “A ‘family’ reunion in my house was a gathering of at least 30 people! Every time the family came, we asked ourselves: What do we feed them? And the answer was

always the same: AREPAS!!!” Two and a half years ago, Mariagracia Sampieri successfully started her healthy arepa business venture from the comfort of home: ALLBUDARE.

«When I started my business, I started with the “normal” arepas, then the healthy boom arrived and I had to reinvent myself – my diabetic and hypertensive parents gave me genetics that were difficult to cut, and my weakness is bread and pasta!” There are two key moments that shaped her business: Her father’s passing and the pandemic. “My father died 8 years ago from a heart attack caused by excessive consumption of sugar, pasta, and bad fats. Witnessing the pain that my family had to go through, I dedicated myself to serving more of the healthiest version of the arepas on my table by adding more vegetables, less processed cornmeal, more fiber, more vitamins, and more nutrients, in other words, MORE LOVE!!!”

What gave her the final push? During the pandemic, “being at home I felt a great need to give to others because I had plenty to share. The family that used to fill my home have migrated, including my two oldest children, so our gatherings are no longer of 30 people. But today I am fortunate that I can bring my healthy arepas to many more tables and families.”

Mariagracia’s healthy arepas use whole, organic ingredients and are gluten-free. She uses 100% of the steamed and processed vegetables to



make a dough full of nutrients, minerals, and vitamins, in other words, they are “full of health”, with a flavor that goes beyond a simple cornmeal arepa because it preserves the purest vegetable flavor. “And of course they are special, I make them!”

She sells her arepas vacuum-packed. They are offered in 12 variations: chard, brown rice, pumpkin, sweet potato, zucchini, spinach, potato, yellow banana, plantains, beet, carrot, and cassava/quinoa.

Traveling abroad to visit her children and the rest of the family, thus having to leave her business closed, is the most difficult decision, because when she travels, it is for a long time, “to spend a couple of months with my family. I don’t leave anyone in charge because I do everything, and I think that’s what my clients liked the most: that personal touch that I give to my vegetable arepas.”

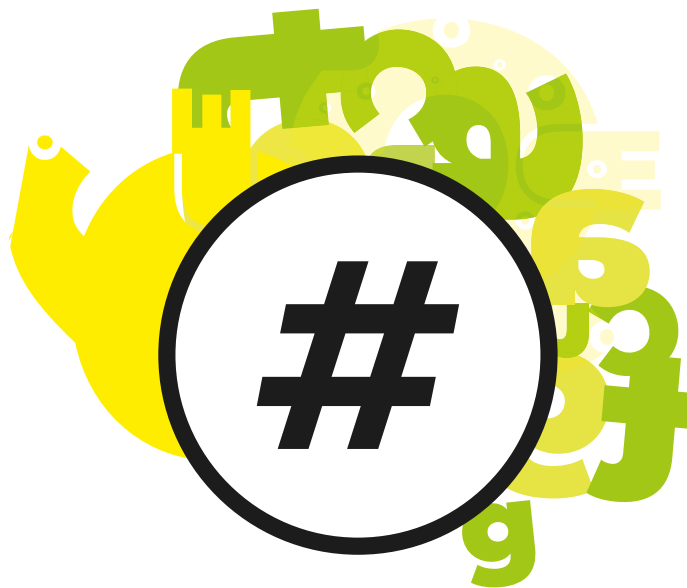
Even though she left packages ready, clients wrote to complain that “the attention is not the same,” because her clients are not just clients, they have become her friends and confidants, “like, my new family and, of course, I make them all feel special.”

Because of her fear of losing everything and having to start over, she kept in touch through Instagram by sharing about her daily life and creating new recipes. She regained her audience and “I was missed.” When she came back, she couldn’t believe that the orders were just pouring in.

«The good thing is that I have such a wonderful clientele. They are supportive, give me strength, understand my weaknesses, encourage me when I encounter new opportunities, and do not abandon me during difficult moments. They are aware that my hands need to rest at night from the day’s work, that I have two girls, a home, and a husband to take care of, and that my hands are not only dedicated to making the best vegetable arepas, but I’m also focused on being a better mother, wife, and housewife.”

«As an Italian, an arepa is the welcome that Venezuela gave to my parents when they came to settle in this country at a very young age. It is the flavor that embraced them and allowed them to love this land as their own.”

**You have to dare to do it, the worst thing you can do is nothing,
and if there is something that needs to be nurtured first,
it is self-confidence.**



The Chard Arepa

This arepa has an extraordinary flavor! It's one of the 12 flavors I offer and it came into existence when, one time, I couldn't find a good spinach, so when I saw those big, green, and beautiful leaves of chard, I said to myself, "Why not?" So I prepared it and we were very surprised by its delicious flavor! It is still on my menu and in my clients' orders.

To prepare the arepa:

Ingredients:

- 1 kg (~2.20 lb) of well-washed chard
- 1/2 cup of pre-cooked white cornmeal (I use whole corn and gluten-free)
- 1/2 cup of rolled oats (I use whole oats and gluten-free)
- 1 tbsp of chia
- 1/2 tsp pink salt

Directions:

1. This dough makes 5 arepas of approximately 100 g (~3.5 oz) each. First, separate the stem from the leaf. Place a large pot over high heat, fill it halfway with water, add the stems and let it boil for 10 minutes, then add the leaves and let it cook for 10 more minutes.
2. Remove everything and drain. Let it cool. Once cold, blend stems and leaves and transfer to a bowl.
3. Add the rest of the ingredients, knead, form the arepas, pre-cook them in the *budare* and then transfer them to the air fryer for 10 minutes at 180°C (356°F) or until they have the crispy and toasted consistency that you like best.

For the filling:

Ingredients:

- 500 g of cocktail shrimp.
- 1 tbsp yellow bell pepper, cut into very small pieces
- 1 tbsp red bell pepper, cut into very small pieces
- 1 tbsp red onion, cut into very small pieces
- 1/2 cup chives, cut into small pieces
- 3 to 4 tbsp of olive oil
- 1 splash of sesame oil
- Salt, pepper, and garlic to taste
- The pulp of a mashed avocado with a splash of lemon, salt, and pepper

Directions:

1. Cook the shrimp in a tablespoon of olive oil at low heat until golden brown on both sides. Remove and set aside.
2. In the same pan, place another tablespoon of olive oil, and let the onion and bell pepper sweat. Add the shrimp, chives, a splash of sesame oil, and the rest of the tablespoons of olive oil. Season with salt and pepper, and add garlic powder to taste.
3. Cook it at low heat for a few more minutes. The vegetables should be al dente.

Stuffing this arepa with shrimp cooked with tomato, onion, and bell pepper is amazingly good!



Metro de Madrid
SPAIN



**“Eating them is to be back in Venezuela again,
even if it’s just for a brief moment.”**

Vanessa Otero and Alfredo Yunes are Venezuelans and have been in Spain for years. However, they were impacted like many by the pandemic, which forced them to close their stores located in the metro of Madrid. For years, they had lived in Spain with economic stability thanks to their businesses, but with Covid-19, everything collapsed. One day, they saw a place next to a Burger King and they came up with the idea of setting up an *arepera* (an establishment dedicated to selling arepas) in one of the main Metro stations. The *arepera* gave them a new opportunity to continue and gave them enthusiasm for a new project! So far, they have had two successful years with AREPA'S Coffee & Shop. The most difficult thing was at the beginning. They had no idea about the food business, so they had to learn in record time, spending long workdays, and leaving family and friends aside. And who taught you how to make arepas? We asked Vanessa, and she answered, smiley, “I can’t never make them round! Hehehehe. My mother is English so it wasn’t her!”



The fillings are spectacular: *Reina Pepiada*, *Pabellón*, *Pelúa*, *Catira*, mixed, *asado negro*, *pernil*, vegetarian, vegan, *de mano* cheese... Meat is the ingredient that is never missing, "I can tell you that our meat is exquisite! Many of our AREPA'S have shredded meat!"

"We don't make them, we just created the concept," says Vanessa. Their team prepares them upon receiving the order and they are ready in a matter of a few minutes: They are large, well stuffed, delicious, and served immediately. "They call us the Burger of the AREPA'S because of the speed with which they're prepared and served!"

What this team enjoys most is seeing a guest who has never tried them becomes a regular customer eating AREPA'S.

Follow your dreams, follow your instinct. Hang out with people that make you better. If you see that something is not working, change it! Don't get caught up! Perseverance and determination bring success! It's not easy to emigrate. But if you have a dream, fight for it!



Arepa La Mixta: Shredded meat, stewed chicken, and grated Gouda cheese.

We are located in one of the largest transportation hub in Spain: Moncloa, the student area of Madrid. Thousands of people pass through there every day and with as many nationalities as you could imagine. And as the arepa is becoming more international every day, we are creating combinations to satisfy the tastes of those customers who come every day to eat an arepa. Although there are people from all over the world, our main customers are from Colombia. La Mixta arepa (the mixed one) was created for them because they always requested it, even when it was not on the menu. We introduced it little by little and today, not only

Colombians ask for it, many Spaniards and even Venezuelans also enjoy it.

For the shredded meat (4 portions):

Ingredients:

- 1.5 kg (~3.30 lb) beef rose meat
- tomato-based sauce
- 1 red pepper
- 1 onion
- Pepper, salt, and cumin to taste

Directions:

1. Boil the beef rose meat until soft. Let it cool, then shred and set aside.
2. Dice the pepper and the onion, and make a *sofrito* by letting them sweat in a little bit of olive oil.
3. Add the shredded meat to the *sofrito*, the tomato-based sauce, and the spices. Let it reduce for approximately one hour.

For the stewed chicken:

Ingredients:

- 2 skinless chicken breasts
- 1 onion, chopped very small
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped very small
- Tomato-based sauce
- Pepper and salt to taste

Directions:

Boil the chicken breasts with a little salt, pepper, and half a chicken broth cube. When the breast is cooked, drain and let it cool, and then shred. In a frying pan, sweat the onion and red bell pepper. Then add the shredded chicken and stir. Add a little tomato-based sauce and let it reduce for approximately 30 minutes.

1. Boil the chicken breasts with a little bit of salt, pepper, and half a chicken bouillon cube.
2. When the chicken is cooked, drain, and set aside to cool before shredding it.

3. In a frying pan, sweat the onion and red bell pepper. Then add the shredded chicken and stir. Add a little tomato-based sauce and let it reduce for approximately 30 minutes.

For the dough of the arepa:

Ingredients:

- 1 cup pre-cooked cornmeal
- Warm water
- Salt to taste

Directions:

1. Add warm water and a little bit of salt to a bowl and stir. Add the pre-cooked cornmeal and mix with a circular motion. When the dough is ready, let it rest for about 15 minutes.
2. The arepas are shaped and placed in a preheated *budare* over medium heat, 5 minutes on each side. Once ready, remove from the heat.

To serve:

Open the arepa and stuff one half with shredded meat and the other half with the stewed chicken. Finish with grated Gouda cheese.



TOKYO AREPA

@tokyoarepa



"In Japanese, there is an expression, SUGOI, which means AWESOME. There isn't a Japanese person who hasn't said it once they receive their arepa".

«For me an arepa is Caracas, the house where I grew up. An arepa is my mother having hers with grated cheese and butter for breakfast, contemplating el Ávila, and it's me thinking that I could eat this every day for the rest of my life. That is what an Arepa represents for Raúl Márquez Barrios.

It all started when Raúl was teaching Spanish to his Japanese students, and whenever he had an opportunity, he would introduce them to his favorite dish: "arepa", which is also fun to make. Over the years, noticing that people liked the arepa, he and his wife Miho, began to entertain the idea of having an *arepera* (an establishment dedicated to selling arepas) in Tokyo. This is how Tokyo Arepa was born and it has been around for the last two years.

«I think it was difficult to open during the pandemic, but the main hurdle was learning to make a good arepa. Even among those of us who sell them, not everyone knows how to make a good arepa. Raúl learned to make them from his friend Simón Trujillo or "Cocó", and so he adds the water first.



Tokyo Arepa was conceived with the mission of introducing Venezuelan gastronomy to the Japanese palate and, most importantly, having fun while fulfilling this purpose. Tokyo Arepa offers various fillings, such as *Perico* (scrambled eggs), *Reina Pepiada*, *Capresa*, *Pelúa*, smoked chicken and Feta cheese; and specials such as Cacao Arepa with Gianduaia, banana, and strawberries; the Green arepa with shrimp and avocado; the Wafu Arepa (Japanese), a Wasabi arepa stuffed with shrimp, snapper sashimi and avocado with a dressing of ponzu, wasabi, yuzu koshō, and olive oil.

“I think the quality of the ingredients plays a very important role, but I think the fundamental thing is the love we put into it, because we want to sell a product that is as close as possible to what we eat at home,” say Raúl and Miho Márquez Barrios.

Planning is the basis of every business, if you fail to make a plan, you are planning to fail.



Wafu Arepa 和風アレパ (Arepa Japanese-style)

For the dough:

Ingredients:

- Pre-cooked cornmeal
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 cups water
- 20 g (~0.07 oz) wasabi

Directions:

1. In a bowl, add 2 cups of warm water, a teaspoon of salt, and 20 grams (~0.07 oz) of wasabi, mix and add the pre-cooked cornmeal until you achieve the perfect texture of the dough.
2. Make balls and flatten them with the palms of your hands until you get a thin disc that can be opened once cooked. In a lightly oiled frying pan, place the disc and cook on both sides until a slightly crispy texture is achieved.

For the filling:

Ingredients:

- 200 g (~7 oz) Ama Ebi (Japanese shrimp)
- 200 g (~7 oz) of Tai Fish (snapper for sashimi)
- 1 small avocado
- 4 green shiso leaves

Dressing:

In a bowl, mix 50 ml (~3.5 tbsp) of olive oil, 50 ml (~3.5 tbsp) of ponzu, 1/2 teaspoon of sesame oil, 1/4 teaspoon of wasabi, and 1/4 teaspoon of yuzu koshō ゆず胡椒.

Once the dressing is ready, add the diced fish, the shrimp, and the diced avocado. Mix it carefully to not smash the avocado. Once all the ingredients are seasoned, they are ready to stuff the arepa.

To serve: Once the arepa is ready, open it and add a shiso leaf (previously beaten between the palms of the hands to release its aroma), then proceed to stuff it with the seasoned fish, shrimp, and avocado. ITADAKIMASU!!! (Bon appétit in Japanese)

AMBASSADORS OF THE AREPA

by Ocarina Castillo D'Imperio

An Argentine friend, who lived in Caracas while in exile, likes to tell me that I am “*more Venezuelan than the arepa*.” It is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful compliments I have ever received. I had not understood and appreciated that comment so well until now, because in our current difficult times, I can well interpret the load of memory, taste, and emotions contained in those words. I can understand food as sustenance and product of our cultural imaginaries, as a sacrament that links us equally to nature and divinity, as a factor of differentiation and integration in social relations, as a language and a system of codes capable of creating the notion of “us” from the deep and the contradictory and, finally, as a space for symbolic expression that calls for rapprochement and encounter, for the construction of citizenship and peace.

From our food, the arepa is that very white envelope that represents and tells the world about us, is the bread that feeds body and soul, the one that tells stories about Venezuela’s coast, plains, and mountains, that is named in different local and regional accents, and the one playing a main role at any time and in anyone’s hands.

In these times of diaspora, the arepa is spreading around the world thanks to its “ambassadors”, the people who represent and introduce it to new places and, similar to what happens in international relations, it is also helping to advance dialogues, encouraging exchange, and reaffirming relationships between countries and cultures. Today, “gastronomic ambassadors” are those who, in addition to promoting their different culinary repertoires, talk about food from their own personal history and advocate for sustainability and responsible consumption practices that translate into dishes, gastronomic establishments, and restaurants.

In recent years, I have tried to understand the complex phenomenon of migration, looking at it from its multiple dimensions, approaching it as a process and not as a succession of specific events, accepting it as a migrant reality that can involve multiple points of destiny that could happen in continuous, recurrent, and alternative ways... with or without a returning plan. I have understood that despite being an uprooting, dislodging, stigmatizing, and segregating process, it has also meant hospitality, encounter, and interculturality. As Daniel Hierau rightly points out, migrants “...not only carry objects and affection, but also space. That important space or territory is carried by the migrants in their material objects, their memory, and their nostalgia.”

The profoundness of the new encounters and the emotional weight, product of that contrast between what is ours and what has been acquired, between continuity and change in the incessant everyday life, have led certain experts to define migration with a transnational approach, according to which, it is “the process by which immigrants forge and maintain multiple simultaneously intertwined social relationships that unite their societies of origin with their societies of settlement.” (Glick Schiller, 1995.)

From this perspective, food, and particularly our arepa, acquires a fundamental significance in establishing relationships and building nostalgia, as Annie Hubert points out:

It is after abandoning our culture that we understand the importance of its cuisine. Flavors that calm us and make us feel safe, concoctions, and familiar techniques that are good for the soul, all of which are essential for our well-being and happiness. Former black slaves who arrived to the American continent have a beautiful way to call it: “soul food.” There is no doubt that this is the reason why culinary identity persists so much among migrants. This is how the “emblematic dish” emerges, and around it, we gather in groups to strengthen the bonds of cohesion and feel safe.

Therefore, if you asked me who are the ambassadors of the arepa, I would say that they are each of the migrants who fly, sail, cross green paths, jungles, or highways, and move along endless routes listening to dissimilar accents, alone or accompanied, and have taken on the task of putting together the fragments of themselves and their stories to embark on a different life and to give themselves a new opportunity. And right in that suitcase, along with their affections and nostalgia, go the flavors, and among them, reigns the emblematic arepa. The ones made with corn of different colors and textures, with large or small kernels, with more or less sweetness, that are ground, kneaded, and cooked in *budares*, *comales*, or modern griddles in small quantities for family enjoyment, or in large quantities for informal sale in food stalls or small stands located at public transportation stops, subway stations, or establishments run by family entrepreneurs. The ones stuffed and prepared by generous hands to distribute among the migrants arriving in towns and communities and who are in need of welcome and respect. The ones that are sold in small or large, traditional or sophisticated *areperas*. The ones with curious names that invite you to try them. The ones that are stuffed with local flavors that are probably too inconceivable for our taste memory, but that still make us fall in love with their inventiveness... These are the arepas that feed us, help us heal, and dream.

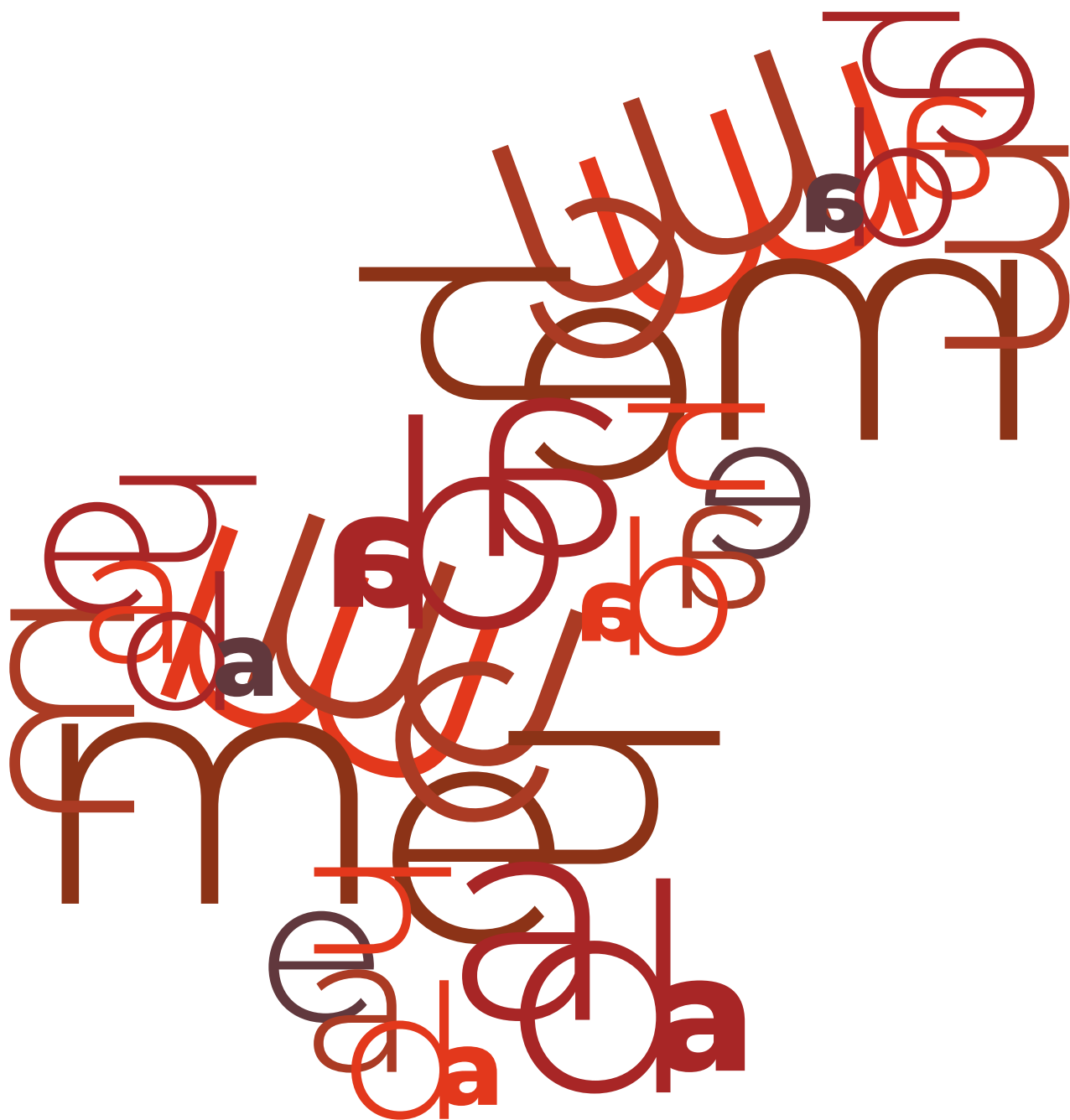
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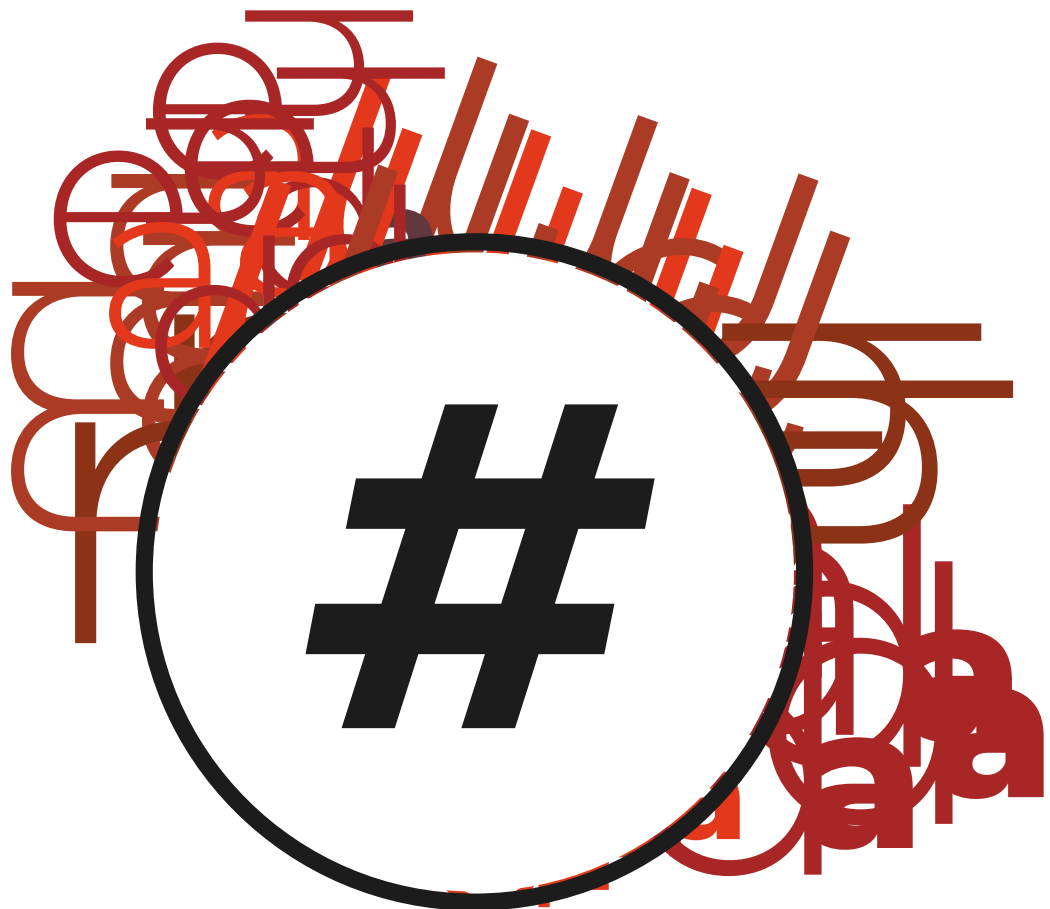
Ocarina Castillo D'Imperio

@ocacastillo

An anthropologist with a Master Degree in Contemporary History of Venezuela and a PhD in Political Science. She is a member of the Venezuelan Academy of Gastronomy and was awarded a seat as *Individuo de Número* at the National Academy of History a couple of years ago. Dr. Ocarina is the founder of the Samuel Robinson Program and the Interschool Study Project known as the Interfaculty Cooperation Program (PCI). She is also the founder of the Diploma Program *Antropología de los Sabores* (Anthropology of Flavors) from the School of Sociology of FACES (at the Universidad Central de Venezuela.) She has a deep knowledge of Venezuelan food anthropology as well as of other Latin American countries.



**AND HOW DO WE
PRESENT IT?**





The Dot and the Arepa

by **Ira León**

Kandinsky used to say that the dot is the simplest unit of the image, and at our table, without a doubt, the most elemental food product is, in itself, a round and perfect circumference—that closed curve line in which all its dots are at the same distance from the center. Each Venezuelan, anywhere geographically, has become that closed curve line from the same common center that is our table: everything converges in that center that links us to taste and visual memories, our primary circle: the arepa. The one



that has always been in our hand since birth, that which has nourished and comforted us so much—nothing better than an “arepita” (little arepa) that gives comfort—but which, at the same time, is that fundamental shape that has been with us since the first *prima natura*. And so, it is being created a common thread with our round visual and tangent roots; no doubts, it is a shape that plants concepts full of affection and memories connected to a specific space; a full moon that accompanies you and, from any place you are now, brings you back to the tropical context where we grew up. The shape, which is also a dish, is also the form, but that, without a doubt, is a form that unifies; it is that circumference that skillfully bound dots to also nourish our soul.

The circle is related to the divine; the circle feeds us, it is the original shape. As soon as we come to this world, it is a pigmented areola by hormones that calls for our immediate attention, as an urban sign: “Be aware that food is in here.” And so we were growing up when they would “feed us nine arepas” (1) at some baseball game or when we got an “arepazo” (2) to the face during a brawl. We also “feel areposos” (3) after a heartbreak, but we also “look for the arepa”(4) every fifteenth and last day of the month. And so, unaware of it all, we were accompanied by the primary circle drawn by Soto, and it was with vitality that we found the mysterious bond that made us accomplices of the food and, in this case, of the soul as well. For the nutrition of the intellect, we were being educated in an always-circular visual that deep down comforted us because it was simply the form connected to what is eternal.

It is the circle turned into food that reaffirms that the shape does matter and that we would never eat a square arepa because it is evidence of poor culinary skills. Soto once said that the square does not exist in nature; maybe that is why it is a huge offense to say that the arepas came out squared and, therefore, impossible to eat, *antinatura*.

What identifies an arepa? That it is perfectly round; thus, returning to the maker's skill and the ancestral memory of the Divinity as the sublime shape that represents the Almighty, the most stable shape, the most organic, the most maternal one.

So, since visuals impact what we eat, how is it possible that such a shape could please us one way or another and, in addition, feed us? Yes, it is true that we feast with our eyes, but our visual culture is under an advanced developmental process since modern Caracas presented us with a discourse of exemplary basic shapes. Also, we organically grew up in cities with amazing proposals that were defining an identity shown in the perfecting of our also modern food, that food that bound us to the future, to the technological progress of that imminent modernity. We grew up with shapes that still draw our urban skyline, with the memory of cutting-edge cities connected to contemporaneity and to the image remembered with the intention of development, with the visual parked in a memory of significant improvements. But our visual identity is undoubtedly connected to that geometric abstraction that still blinks of contemporaneity, and, day after day, that roundness still accompanies any dot of the curve.

CCS 13.06.2023

Translated by Gloria Rodríguez Montilla

(1) To feed someone nine arepas = It means to lose a sports match by a considerable difference.

(2) Arepazo: It is the Venezuelan equivalent to "hitting someone in the face with a cream pie", but instead of a pie, think of a punch to the face with an arepa.

(3) Sentirse areposado: To feel blue and in need of comfort.

(4) To look for the arepa: To collect one's salary, to earn one's keep.

IRA LEÓN was born in London, UK, in 1970. She is a designer and a visual communicator and graduated from the Caracas Design Institute in 1991. She is currently living in Caracas, Venezuela. Her projects are based on the use of typographic experiment as an intrinsic expression of visual communication, with an emphasis on editorial design and art, literary and scientific publications. She has a vast experience in the creation of brands. Some of her projects have received awards such as the Gourmand Awards, The Fork of Gold AVG with the book "Our Cooking, the Caracas Way" and "Harry Abend Sculptor" (AICA Award for Book of Art, Art Critics International Association, Venezuelan Chapter). She is currently developing several printed and digital editorial projects, the creation of branding, museum proposals, and collaborations in the field of electronic art by developing some video graphic projects with the Ccs-Flash Organization, of which she is a founding member.

The Power of an Image

by Patrick Dolande

Many things unite us as Venezuelans, but few are as constant as an arepa. No matter what your level of education, political inclination or even economic level, practically all Venezuelans eat arepas.

No matter where we are or what we have to do to get it, the arepa unites us more than the national anthem and much more than the flag (which does not represent all of us who carry the tricolor in our hearts).

But, there is always a “but”, at this moment, when we are in every corner of the planet, away from friends and family, we cannot go to eat that special arepa that grandma prepares with a little powdered milk in the dough or the fitness one of my cousin, the athlete, with more *chia* in it than will to live.

But we can share our arepa through a photo. The image has the power to fly from pole to pole in fractions of a second, and the photograph of an arepa always captures our attention in this reality saturated with lines and colors.

We have our eyes and fingers trained to consume images in a ridiculously wide spectrum. We spend hours accepting and discarding photos and videos of whatever “daddy algorithm” has decided we should consume.

But, if there is a command our finger knows how to obey, it is “neither up nor down. Stop, that’s an arepa”.

“It” is a corn sun that warms up but does not tan my skin. It is the most important invention after the wheel (that’s why it is round). “It” is not only food, it is a crunchy pleasure filled with love.

It is a sign of another Venezuelan telling the world that it does not matter if he has years of dealing with a cold weather that he never felt in the worst December in the Andean wasteland or with an absurd heat that not even the bravest of the Maracuchos(*) can stand without complaining. Never mind the new customs or the languages we must learn. Here in my hands I have my arepa, and therefore I am still more Venezuelan than... hmmm, than an AREPA! Long live redundancy!

Having established the importance of the arepa for a Venezuelan, let’s talk about this image from the point of view of a gastronomic photographer. This circular beauty is not easy to photograph.

When we depict an arepa (well done), we want to show the surface that tells the world that I know how to cook, because if you know how to make an arepa with the perfect balance—toasted but not burnt—you feel you have won a Michelin star or a Platinum Orchid (a reference not suitable for millennials). Using a side light source is ideal for highlighting the texture of the “crust”. So if you are a photographer who loves side light, you should place it next to a window, and it is always ideal to place a translucent white cloth or, if we want to be more



Photo: Patrick Dolande.

professional, a light diffuser between the light source and your arepa. On the opposite side of the arepa, a white solid surface or a bouncer will help us reduce the shadows generated by the main light source.

We also need to show the filling, beautifully varied and versatile, which sometimes makes it a challenge that is not easy to conquer. **45 degrees** is the ideal angle to photograph an arepa. We should also always try different positions in front of our model. The filling should be placed towards the main light source, as we want the different textures that scream “flavor and taste” to be appreciated.

In slightly more technical terms, you have to take into account that an arepa with filling must be in focus almost all the way around, and for this reason, your aperture cannot be less than **f4**. Depending on the intensity of the light, you will adjust your shutter speed and **ISO** according to this factor.

We must always be extra careful with arepas so as not to “burn” (ironically, not a cooking term) our round beauty. As they are practically white, we must be very careful not to overexpose them, and we have to play with the delicate balance so as not to underexpose the toasted parts or filling.

Surely by now you are remembering how complex it is to get an angle where you show “crust and filling” at the same time. Not only that, you must also look for the side that suffered the least when you pierced it with a knife, avoiding burning your hands.

As if that were not enough, you must close it to a point where the filling looks attractive but stays inside the arepa. No. It's not easy, but the arepa and the image we have of it have such a special place in our hearts that it does not matter if we do not comply with all those rules that apply to the rest of the food on the planet.

You will never see an ugly picture of an arepa.



PATRICK DOLANDE is a Venezuelan photographer with fourteen years of experience. He has specialized in food and pet photography. He is currently based in New York. Likewise, he was Director of Photography for two of the most important Venezuelan magazines: *Bienmesabe*, specializing in gastronomy, and *Dominical*, a weekly publication with the largest exposure in the last 45 years. Winner of a Kodak Award as Photographer of the Year 2018. His photos have been published on more than 150 magazine covers, calendars and books. Photography is his passion.

* **Maracaibero**. Native of Maracaibo capital of Zulia state, Venezuela.

Translated by Ronin Metsa



Arepa Mundi, mass culture, pop culture

by **Eduardo Sanabria (EDO)**

Unicode, the organization in charge of approving new emojis for their subsequent adoption in different platforms and systems, included the arepa as a new character at the end of 2020. Now, when you type in your cell phone "arep...", the image of our popular food will appear.

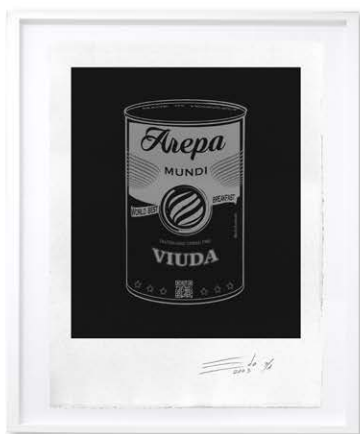
A photograph of arepas from Mono restaurant in Hong Kong was ranked as the best publication on the Instagram account of the Michelin Guide 2022.

In 2014, the arepa ranked first as "the best breakfast in the world" in a ranking by Thrillist, a website specializing in international travel, food and beverages.

These are just some news that show us the global phenomenon that our precious delicacy has become, the true Miss Universe, a pop icon for Venezuelans, and, for some time now, a global reference in gastronomy. It is, in Scannone's words, "the ambassador food in all countries, universally accepted".

It seems to me that the Arepa has had two milestones of popularity in its history, both thanks to immigration. The first is in Venezuela, thanks to those European immigrants in the 50s, and the second is almost 70 years later, thanks to the Venezuelan diaspora that makes it global. Naming the fillings of the arepas is definitely very pop culture.

I have been investigating many of these elements in recent years to transform the global phenomenon of the arepa into art. It is a project I have called "Arepa Mundi, cultura de Masas" (Arepa Mundi, mass culture). Beyond the restaurant or the family table, my goal is to give strength to this food and its fillings as pop culture through high-level innovative works, traveling exhibitions, conferences and a compilation book in Spanish and English.





What makes a product pop? Not only is it mass consumption, accessible. Also, it goes beyond social classes.

About Coca-Cola, Andy Warhol said, "You can be watching TV and see Coke, and you know the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and he thinks you can drink Coke too. A Coke is a Coke, and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than what the bum on the corner is drinking. All Coke is the same, and all Coke is good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it."

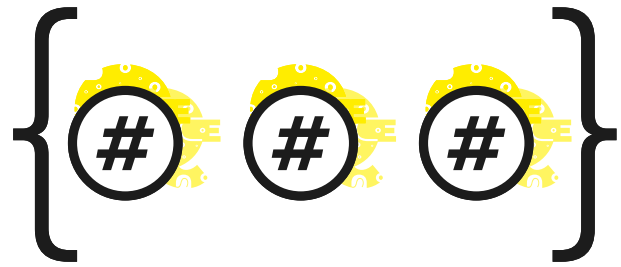
Warhol transformed this discourse into art through repetition, through serial silkscreen printing. He did it with many mass consumer products, such as Coca-Cola and its now legendary Campbell's soup cans. That is why I also visualize the arepa at this level in the not-too-distant future.

My dream is for the arepa and its fillings to be as recognizable as a taco, as pizza, or as a can of Campbell's Soup.

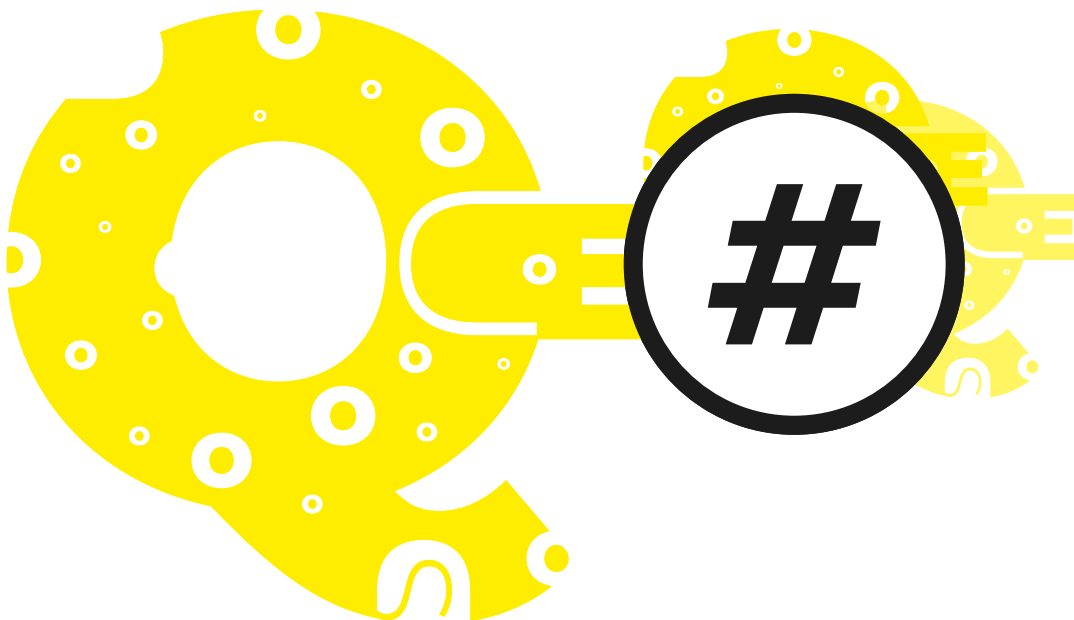
Translated by Ronin Metsa

Eduardo Sanabria, alias EDO. Born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1970. Artist, cartoonist and graphic humorist. Since 2008, he has been walking the path of pop art. His work has been exhibited in Caracas, Milan, Seoul, Shanghai, Tokyo, Chicago, New York, Las Vegas and Miami.

EDO has a permanent exhibition in the lobby of the boutique hotel Wingate at Wyndham Miami Airport.



The Twist of the Arepa



The Arepa that Lost its Passport

by Sofrito Creativo

When you want to develop an idea, you take a blank sheet of paper or whiteboard, or open a digital document. Everything is conceived there. An infinite field to create. There are no limits. It is the perfect element for creators to capture everything they want to express. When Venezuelans want to show their ideas, culture, or country, they make arepas. What are the possibilities? The same ones. With that simple dish, they have a canvas to show anything. Capture Venezuelan flavors and seasonings. Create a cultural bridge between nations. Even when we say that an arepa is about to stop being a “widow” (the way “unstuffed” arepas are popularly called), it is showing our particular sense of humor. Unknowingly, Venezuelans are filling out that blank page with their culture and going out to sell their identity to the world.

Nowadays, to carry out marketing or communication strategies, you must have technological knowledge that evolves day by day. There are tools that give you the words that are trending in a specific territory and time, and with them, paid advertising campaigns are programmed so that people feel empathy when seeing the message. With those same words, articles are written so that Google takes you into account and people visit your page. Once on the website, a journey is designed so that users see exactly what you want them to see. Thanks to technology it is easier to connect a product with a customer. But the core of these tools comes from the most obvious: humanity, empathy, and closeness. This is why Venezuelans, unknowingly, are marketing experts. We are natural promoters of our culture, especially our gastronomy. We did it without using any major technological tool, just a table.

At the beginning of this century, I was living in Montreal, Quebec. Venezuelan migration was not yet so large. Much less in a city where French is spoken and the thermometer could reach -30°C. From time to time, you would hear a *chévere* (“cool” in Venezuelan Spanish) on the subway but it was not that common. Montreal has always been characterized as a multicultural city. Living in a city like this changes your vision of the world. It was common to find spaces for cultural exchange. Obviously, the table was always a meeting point. The arepa was my business card. I used up three kilos of *Harina P.A.N* (pre-cooked corn-meal) so that I could explain to a small group of people of different nationalities that “the arepa is not a tamal.”

When the first Venezuelans went out to preach “The Word of the Arepa,” we found two big problems: One, Tex-Mex restaurants had already taken a large part of the Latin market, and two, the arepa is “a sandwich,” without being exactly “a sandwich.”

When you are a migrant, you want to share your gastronomy, but soon you find out that your guests are surrounded by a great wall of cultural biases. Tex-Mex food has dominated the Latin restaurant segment for years and, for many people, the assumption is that the entire continent eats only tacos and tamales. It is not a problem of lack of culture or knowledge, it is a marketing issue. While large chains took Mexican recipes and built their restaurants, the rest of the continent was under the shadow of this “cultural approach.”

However, when Venezuelans decided to go around the world, arepas became part of many homes. From word of mouth, and from table to table, we became the practical bread for many, the gluten-free solution for others, and the cultural bridge for those who want to try something new.

But how were we selling this dish? “It’s like a sandwich,” we liked to say, but we would get offended if they put ketchup on it, we did not like it when they ate it with cutlery, and we were “horrified” when they asked if it could be eaten with jam or *dulce de leche*. Explaining a particular food is always difficult. No matter how much a dish is explained and put in context, it is natural for all of us to look for similarities with our own rituals and cultural references.

For Venezuelans, arepas are their daily bread, the ideal breakfast after a barbecue party, the easy meal that never fails. We never sat down to learn how to make arepas, we simply mastered the technique with time. Nor is it that we eat them with a ritual or during a special festivity, as it is more commonly done with other Venezuelan food, such as the *hallaca*, which is typically eaten in December, with Thanksgiving turkey in the United States, or *sopaipilla pasadas* in Chile. Arepas are not limited to a specific date or moment, they simply exist. Even if we were experts at marketing or selling our food, how do you sell such an important dish that is the essence of our own being and culture? It is a process that takes time.

People who emigrate can leave behind many things, but never their way of eating. Venezuelans not only maintain their food, but also carry with them those traits that characterize them as Venezuelans and want others to know them. This is how we managed to create a path for the arepa. *Reina Pepiada*, *Catira*, *Rumbera*... these are some of the iconic arepa’s names that we all know, but what will happen to future generations? Will they know these names? Will they add new ones?

Nowadays, we see arepas and other Venezuelan dishes as gastronomical choices on social media and in some establishments. Little by little, we see how these dishes that were initially “ours” have lost the adjective of “Venezuelan food.” That is somehow positive. Our silent marketing plan worked. It is common to see that tacos, croissants, or pizzas do not need a passport. Everyone knows their stories and where they come from. Our humble arepa, which is part of our culture, is also achieving it. It is about time for arepas to become part of the dishes that do not need a flag, a passport, or an introduction.

There is still a long way to go. It is up to all of us to continue marketing and heating up our *budares*. There are still tables to share and recipes to invent. Each one of us with a little water, salt, and cornmeal have put an arepa “widow” on these shared tables with people from around the world, so that they can use our blank sheet of paper and, together, we can create a cultural bridge.



Creative Sofrito / @sofritocreativo



Eleazar Parra A.K.A. the Amazing Creative Director of Sofrito Creativo. He majored in Communication in Caracas. His life is divided between communication strategies and gastronomy. He has more diplomas related to gastronomy than to his bachelor's degree. Eleazar has more than 15 years doing campaigns in the industry. Although he stutters, he has a podcast and his arepas are never round.

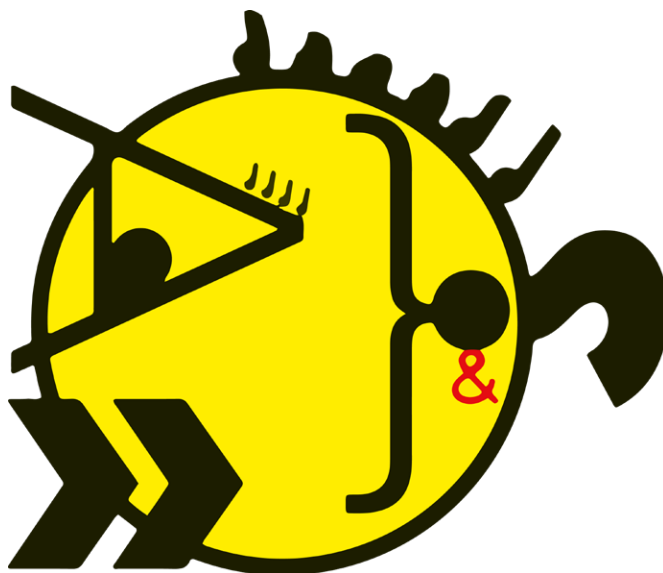


Alfredo Segnini, Executive Producer of Sofrito Creativo. With a Major in Communication, he has more than 17 years of experience in the development of multiplatform content strategies. He multiplies his time by being a husband, dad, swimmer, gamer, work and when there is some time left, he goes out for a few beers with friends. If you are going to contact him, consider that he goes to sleep early because he wakes up automatically at 5 A.M.

Translated by Jenny Y. Lam-Chowdhury

A Solid Business

by Chucho Rojas



“**S**on, your dad got on a boat, he’s going to Trinidad and well, let’s see how it goes and if he can send money to support us and get ahead... I’ll take care of things around here so that we can get by. You, my boy, you should focus on your things: study, play, and grow up, and when Raimundo comes back, he’ll see that you’ve turned out to be a big and good man...”

And so, María Salomé went to bed firmly thinking that she had to look for something to do, maybe she could work at the Gómez’s house – those are rich people and need household help – or maybe at the market, where she could clean fish and get paid by the pieces and some clients might give her something extra in gratitude or maybe... “Jeez! I only know how to make arepas and everyone says they are the best. What if I start making arepas and sell them? My cousin Asunta taught me how to make a *chanfaina* that is quite cheap, in front of the town square they sell a cheese that goes well with the arepas, and at Tuto’s *bodega** I can get credit for butter and other ingredients. I think this could be a SOLID BUSINESS!”

This story is very similar to the tales of many other Venezuelans, and this scene could have taken place in the 30s of the 20th century or the 20s of the 21st century. It could have been in Tucupita, Venezuela, where your husband boarded a steamer to go to the “far away” island of Trinidad, or could have been you, single and living in Prague because your grandparents were born there, and you are making arepas either with *pilado* corn (milled corn after soaking and mashing it) or just learned it by following the instruction in the package; but either way, I am sure you know how to make them because it is in your DNA. Your hands are on a SOLID BUSINESS that will bring home the dough. Using the arepa to start an enterprise is a common idea among Venezuelans because it is an “easy” and



versatile food, that can be stuffed with an array of fillings with Venezuelan or foreign local flavors. It is a business that requires very little logistics to initiate and, most importantly, it is food made from the soul, with the passion of someone like you who grew up sharing it in smaller scale with neighbors back home, and now want to seduce with the flavors of Venezuela that Dane or South African that sits at your table. The arepa is loved by everyone; it is simple, friendly and tasty. It is one of the greatest foods, and similar to pizza or tacos, it is the perfect product to start a SOLID BUSINESS.

For those of us who work with gastronomic entrepreneurs on their journey to carry out their business ideas, an *arepera* is one of those projects

that have all what it takes to be a successful enterprise. It has procedures that are not difficult to standardize and recreate, costs are easy to calculate, and it can have a personal signature as well as include fillings adapted to local flavors. The arepa is attractive *per se* and it is considered an exotic dish (although it has become better known), and behind it, there is a story, one that tells about the country where it comes from, and the other about the hands that make it, giving it an outstanding opportunity to succeed when compared to other ideas.

A gastronomic business must have a personality with a story to tell. In this sense, our arepa has an advantage because it can be stuffed with traditional Venezuelan fillings that tell you stories of queens and forbidden love, humorous anecdotes, and tales that could bring tears to your eyes, or unimaginable fillings that can only be offered in fine dining restaurants. It can be made by humble hands as well as by those that are awarded Michelin stars. It can mutate, even leaving the corn out as its main ingredient, but continues to maintain its form and spirit when new ingredients are added to its dough to color it, “enrich” it, or flavor it. And, like any SOLID BUSINESS, there is always something for everyone.

The arepa as an enterprise goes beyond borders: from Venezuelan hands to foreign hands that want to have a successful business that might look like a novelty concept, but it is not new. Diners around the world already know the product; they can now differentiate between an arepa and a gordita, or a pupusa. You can

now see *areperas* advertising in Johannesburg, Helsinki, or Tokyo. As a business, it offers an attractive profit margin and the final product can be sold at a very competitive price. Just as in the past, a gastronomic enterprise based on “the arepa” continues to be an answer to those seeking to have a successful business.

The business of the arepa with its infinite commercial possibilities is a solid project that, if we apply the three parts of Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle – the Why? (the purpose), the What? (the process), and the How? (the result) –, we could have the following statement:

We sell emotions and stories that talk about the relationship of a group of people with their land, and we do it through the roundness and the warmth of the arepa and its fillings.

The arepa is more than a tool for entrepreneurship; it symbolizes freedom; it is root and openness; it is past, present, and future history. It is open to all the possibilities that new ideas could bring; it is a language that, although expressed with a Venezuelan accent, adopts the tones of other languages. It is a golden-vein-like-corn in the mine of the gastronomic business. The arepa feeds the soul and bodies of those who eat it, as well as providing well-being and prosperity to those who take on this SOLID BUSINESS with good judgment.

CHUCHO ROJAS, Venezuelan chef, born in Tucupita, in the Orinoco Delta, with more than 30 years of experience in the kitchen. He was trained at the prestigious Gregoire Ferrandi school in Paris and worked as a researcher for the French Academy of Sciences under the direction of Hervé This. Chucho Rojas has also been a speaker at reknown gastronomy conferences and fairs. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Bengoa Foundation, a well-known nutritional research institution of high prestige throughout the world. He participated as a chef instructor in the Master Chef Latino television franchise in 2019, as well as a guest chef in the 2022 season of the Top Chef VIP program. A gastronomic consultant for more than 14 years, he is currently dedicated to creating a new concept of consulting and mentoring based on understanding the essence of the entrepreneurship and the dream of its owners, including a more humanistic vision of the restaurant business. Today, Chucho Rojas is committed to sharing his experience through teaching and his project SOY MAESTRO, a new passion that allows him to both teach and continue learning.

* bodega: a small convenience store

Translated by Jenny Y. Lam-Chowdhury



Training as a chef:

A path to entrepreneurship for Venezuelan immigrants

by **Norah Muñoz Peralta**

In the last decade, the Venezuelan migration phenomenon has led thousands of people to seek a more promising future in different parts of the world. Venezuelan immigrants have been forced to face countless challenges when adapting to new cultures and socioeconomic systems. However, training as a professional chef is a valuable opportunity for Venezuelan immigrants who wish to start a business in their host countries. Through this training, immigrants can not only preserve and share their food culture, but also make their way in the culinary sector and generate income for themselves and their families.

Training as a professional chef offers several advantages for entrepreneurial Venezuelan immigrants. First, it allows them to access new culinary skills and techniques, which improves their ability to adapt and fuse traditional Venezuelan ingredients and dishes with local preferences and tastes. Likewise, by contributing to the enrichment of the gastronomic offer, immigrant chefs can attract a broader and more varied audience, which results in greater business opportunities when starting out in the food scene. Additionally, cooking training provides them with a solid foundation in terms of hygiene, handling, and food safety. This knowledge is essential to avoid public health problems in their host countries, thus contributing to maintaining high quality standards in their businesses.

Maintaining a good reputation and high quality in cuisine are crucial aspects to attract and retain customers for the business, which leads, over time, to sustainable growth of the immigrant community's businesses.

Likewise, professional cooking training gives Venezuelan immigrants the opportunity to create a personal and unique brand in the culinary field. Identity and authenticity are key elements to stand out in a competitive global market, where new generations of diners value proposals that revalue local repertoires of flavors, all in search of the "exotic" and the "new" in a world that is increasingly standardized, appears monotonous, and it's less diverse to the eyes of young people. In this sense, immigrant chefs can take advantage of their experience and knowledge to create a unique gastronomic proposal that attracts customers and awakens their curiosity about Venezuelan culture.



At the beginning of the first decade of the new millennium, in a climate of opinion that was not very open to national culinary and gastronomic development, along with voices that condemned our cuisine as of little or no importance for lacking a solid ethnic base such as, the Mexican or Peruvian ones, both heirs of high Amerindian cultures, emerges the Adelis Sisirucá School of Gastronomy in a local provincial context (Barquisimeto), inspired by alternative gastronomic movements such as, *Venezuela gastronómica* and Slow Food, and local educational institutions such as, CEGA. An ambitious project that is part of this national movement of promotion, development, and defense of our flavors. The year 2010 marks the beginning of this training journey and awareness building for the new generations of Venezuelan chefs, many of whom, in the years following the founding of the School, joined the list of people who, due to the economic crisis, and politics of the country, were forced to start a new life outside our borders. In light of the events of recent years, the Adelis Sisirucá School of Gastronomy has trained, without intending to, export chefs, many of whom have become disseminating agents of our culinary tradition in the world. We must not forget that the “boom” of Venezuelan gastronomy we are witnessing today around the world began here, within our borders: First, in the homes of those who are now immigrants, spaces where as children they had their first contacts and experiences with the flavors of our culture and, of course, in cooking schools, where many, as adults, and forced by circumstances, learned the universal cooking method and techniques that today they use as a means to prepare our dishes abroad.

We can say today that Venezuelan gastronomy enjoys unprecedented vitality, fueled paradoxically by the largest migratory movement in its history as a nation. Venezuelan immigrants, whether as amateurs or professional chefs, are partaking in food enterprises abroad, thus contributing in the redefinition of our identity. Our kitchen has opened up to the world, and it is in good hands.

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Norah Muñoz Peralta, professional cook, *Chef de cuisine* certified by Foro Panamericano de Asociaciones Culinarias, professor of Gastronomy. Founder and director of the Adelis Sisirucá School of Gastronomy .

Kristo Ramírez Muñoz (1994): Anthropology postgraduate student assigned to the Department of Archeology and Historical Anthropology of the Universidad Central de Venezuela. Assistant-researcher in the Department of Historical Research of the Venezuelan National Academy of History.

Translated by Jenny Y. Lam-Chowdhury



Weaving Cultural Ties through Gastronomy

by Merlín Gessen y Marcus Gessen

Dear reader, we warmly welcome you to this exciting journey through flavors that cross borders and touch hearts. In this fascinating journey, we will explore the role of immigrants in the development of gastronomic culture from the perspective of applied neurogastronomy. We will discover how food, beyond its ingredients, becomes a powerful bridge that connects cultures, emotions and experiences.

Culinary fact has become a warm embrace between nations, thanks to the courageous influence of those who left home in search of new horizons. Immigrants carry with them a suitcase full of culinary traditions, preserving a legacy that transcends generations. We are excited to immerse ourselves in the richness of these flavors, passed down consciously or unconsciously, that have enriched our lives and intertwined with other cultures and traditions.

The secrets of the taste that conquers hearts

Every bite tells a story, and every dish reveals a unique culinary adventure. Neurogastronomy, that fascinating science that explores the relationship between the brain and food, shows us how flavors evoke memories and emotions. Let's say that for a Venezuelan living in Reykjavik, Iceland, eating an arepa turns him into a time traveler exploring his past, while for an Icelander, it is a chance to enrich and celebrate cultural diversity without having to leave home.

Let's see, for an ethnic restaurant, local customers play an essential role in its success. The hospitality and warmth of immigrants can make diners feel at home, providing a proposal where, even though they are thousands of miles away - their smiles and attentions create a genuine connection that transcends language barriers, making them feel part of their history.

Merlín



Marcus



The diaspora of flavors represents a great opportunity to start a business, a new beginning. Immigrants settling in new countries bring with them their culinary heritage, thus enriching the local gastronomic scene with unique and authentic flavors.

Imagine a small bistro on a quiet street where an immigrant chef from Thailand fuses the exquisite flavors of his homeland with fresh local ingredients. Each dish is a symphony of aromas and textures that captivate and transport you to the bustling streets of Bangkok. Here, Thai cuisine has been integrated into the local culture, becoming a special corner that attracts diners of all nationalities.

In another city, an Ethiopian proposal invites us to taste the authentic flavor of “injera”, a traditional bread, and the unforgettable aroma of coffee from those lands. Ethiopian immigrants have created a place where people gather around the table to share stories, traditions and, of course, their unique cuisine. Ethnic food has become a celebration of culture, bringing people together through an unforgettable sensory experience.

We have seen how, in recent years, our compatriots, the so-called “Venezuelan diaspora”, have taken the world by surprise, giving way to a proliferation of small businesses, restaurants, food trucks, cheese factories, and food industries, impacting the gastronomic scene significantly, adapting to local palates and even attracting the attention of specialized television programs. The arepa,

among other dishes, has become a symbol of possibilities. We could say that, without looking for it, in cities all over the world, its popularity is such that we can see it present in restaurants as part of the menu.

Immigrants, with love and passion, have woven a web of flavors that enrich the lives of those who receive them, allowing them to appreciate that behind each preparation there is much more than a recipe. By tasting dishes from an immigrant's homeland, we take an imaginary journey through time and space, experiencing multiple emotions, while better discovering their history, creating new experiences.

In this fascinating culinary journey, ethnic food has become a magnet for seekers of unique experiences. Diners are eager to try new flavors and discover different cultures. Restaurants have the potential, by offering authentic delicacies, to become popular destinations for those looking for more than just a meal.

Cuisine as a cultural bridge

Cuisine is much more than just food, it is a powerful cultural bridge that unites people of different origins and nationalities. In each dish is woven a story, a tradition and a piece of home that transcends language barriers and geographical borders. In restaurants and gastronomic businesses run by immigrants, we can find cultural meeting places where people come together to share experiences and knowledge from different parts of the world.

Imagine a cozy gastronomic corner in a cosmopolitan city where the aroma of freshly made arepas welcomes us. Here, the owner, a talented Venezuelan immigrant, welcomes us with a smile and invites us to taste his culinary heritage. Each arepa he prepares is not just an arepa, for him, it is a tribute to his traditions, a fusion of flavors and fillings that transports us to the streets of Caracas.

In this little corner, which we will call "Sabor Venezolano", the kitchen is a bridge that unites people of different origins and nationalities. Here, Venezuelans, Latin Americans and food lovers meet to enjoy an authentic arepa and share stories that intertwine with the flavors. For the owner, each filling represents a region or a family tradition, making each dish a window into Venezuelan culture that brings back memories for him. The colors of the ingredients, the aroma of the roasted corn, and the perfect texture come together to create a culinary experience that fills you with joy. At Sabor Venezolano, the cuisine is inescapably a reflection of the owner's passion and dedication, and this is key.

This anonymous story is a reflection of thousands of others, showing how cooking becomes a universal language and a means to share our roots and values. Today, studies on consumer habits teach us that these authentic dining experiences create deep emotional connections. Diners are drawn to the authenticity and passion that immigrants put into every dish they serve. Food becomes a catalyst for forging friendships and enriching our lives with new perspectives.

Culinary fusions

In the gastronomic world, the fusion of culinary traditions becomes a fascinating canvas where flavors, techniques and cultures intertwine to give life to new and surprising creations. When the cuisines of different countries meet, magic happens, giving rise to a unique and constantly evolving culinary experience.

These fusions not only remain within the confines of a restaurant, but transcend borders and conquer palates around the world. An iconic example is the case of Peruvian cuisine, which has captivated thousands with its fusion of indigenous, European, African and Asian influences. Peruvian ceviche is a true symphony of flavors, where fresh fish is marinated in lime and mixed with chili, onion and cilantro, creating an explosion of flavors that has become a global delight.

These culinary fusions attract attention and arouse curiosity. Market trend specialists show us that diners are looking for new and exciting experiences and find in these creations the opportunity to explore new culinary dimensions. Fusions capture the imagination and become an experience that lingers in the customer's memory.

In recent years, we have seen our beloved arepa move away from traditional fillings, receiving proposals such as chicken satay, garlic shrimp, gravlaks or BBQ pulled pork. Also, the names and presentations are adjusted to connect with local markets, for example, our pavilion today is a Latin Bowl, and the cachapas are corn pancakes.

Combining ingredients from different latitudes or adapting presentations is a reflection of the interconnected world we live in. Cuisine is a canvas where borders are blurred and traditions are embraced to create something completely new. Restaurants that dare to explore these fusions become ambassadors of creativity and gastronomic diversity.

Preserving traditions

On the other hand, in the midst of an ever-changing world, the culinary traditions of immigrant communities become pillars that keep their identity and cultural roots alive. The preservation of these traditions is a tribute to the collective memory and resilience of those who, far from their homeland, find in gastronomy a way to preserve their legacy.

It is in the kitchen where grandmothers, parents and children gather to share the secrets of ancestral recipes. The intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge is an act of love and a bridge that unites the past with the present. In these encounters, techniques, flavors and aromas that evoke childhood memories and remain intact over time are passed on.

A moving example of preserving traditions is the Lebanese community in Latin America. Despite being far from their country of origin, they have managed to preserve their rich culinary heritage. Their grandmothers' recipes become a precious treasure, and each dish they prepare is filled with history and meaning. Dishes such as falafel, tabbouleh and hummus have transcended borders and are now part of the culinary identity of the region.

We can affirm from Neurogastronomy that these authentic and rooted flavors generate an emotional connection with diners. For this, the entrepreneur must know that authenticity, personality and ethnicity are highly relevant for those seeking a genuine experience. If, on the other hand, the restaurant that embraces traditions is generic in décor and does not project its essence, it may run the risk of quickly falling into troubled waters.

The preservation of culinary traditions is a valuable contribution to the world's gastronomic and cultural diversity. Restaurants that honor these traditions in every way not only offer delicious dishes but also transmit a legacy of love and care that transcends borders. Every bite becomes a tribute to roots, perpetuates the flavor of tradition, and strengthens the bond between communities and cultures.

Culinary innovation is another fascinating aspect of immigrant-led gastronomy. These talented entrepreneurs not only preserve their culinary traditions, but also find creative ways to fuse their roots with local influences to offer something unique and memorable. Through innovative techniques, combinations of local ingredients, and cutting-edge presentations, these restaurants are able to appeal to a wider audience, captivating diners with new experiences while maintaining the essence and authentic flavor of their culture of origin.

The Challenges and Triumphs of Entrepreneurship in Gastronomy

Entrepreneurship in the culinary industry as an immigrant brings with it a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Faced with different cultures and markets, these courageous entrepreneurs must overcome obstacles to realize their culinary vision. However, behind each challenge lie triumphs and achievements that inspire all those who seek to follow their passion. Most obviously, they must face language barriers and legal red tape and adapt to new social and commercial dynamics.

The process of establishing a business in a foreign land can be complicated and daunting, and you will face moments of uncertainty. However, it is precisely your determination, passion and perseverance that will drive you forward and make your gastronomic dream come true.

One example we love is the story of May, a Venezuelan who immigrated to the United States in search of new opportunities. Despite the challenges she faced upon her arrival, she decided to share the richness of Venezuelan cuisine through a small restaurant. Her passion and dedication managed to conquer the hearts of local diners and other immigrants who felt welcomed and connected through food, to the point that she was invited to the local television station in her city to talk about “immigration and its gastronomy”.

Despite the challenges, these courageous entrepreneurs have managed to achieve success and leave a mark on the industry. Their stories of triumph inspire others to follow in their footsteps and become protagonists in their own right. That said, it is important to talk about the responsibility that comes with an ethnic business model.

When deciding to open a restaurant, very few are aware of the expectations that diners have about what they will experience at the site. On the one hand, we have the nationals who expect the place to become a place that makes them feel at home and where the dishes taste like those of their family; on the other hand, we have the locals who consider the space to be a sort of embassy where tradition is part of the experience but where the flavors are adjusted to their palates. These responsibilities can generate stress, they are two different markets, with different needs, and understanding this is key. You can't ignore them, so you have to work to identify the target market to ensure that expectations are met.

In today's culinary world, having a clear value proposition is critical to the success of any restaurant, especially those run by immigrants seeking to share their culinary traditions. The value proposition must be authentic, reflecting the entrepreneur's passion and dedication to his or her cuisine and culture.

It is essential to understand the needs and preferences of the target customers in the location where the restaurant is to be opened. By knowing their tastes and expectations, the entrepreneur can tailor its offerings to meet those specific demands with specific products and deliver a unique and meaningful experience. The emotional connection generated by offering authentic flavors and traditions that resonate with diners creates a lasting and loyal bond, leading to sustainable success in an increasingly competitive market. The key for an immigrant-run restaurant is to honor its cultural identity while adapting to local preferences, thus creating a space that offers authenticity, charm and a cultural connection that appeals to people of all nationalities.

Opening a restaurant is not easy for locals, and opening as immigrants is a journey of courage, passion and resilience. The challenges are myriad, but so are the opportunities to share flavors, build cultural bridges and make a mark on the industry. Their triumphs are a collective celebration.

As the years go by, immigrant parents become guides for their children, who begin to explore the traditions rooted in the country where they live. At school, they come into contact with friends from different cultures and taste foods very different from what they are used to at home, which gives rise to new taste registers. As time goes by, these children grow up surrounded by multicultural friends, and their roots become intertwined with those of their parents as well as those of the country in which they have grown up. While parents will try to remain faithful to their rituals, it is inevitable that children will begin to accept others and their palates will change.

An example that illustrates this phenomenon is Peru, where waves of immigrants from countries such as Japan and China, among others, left their culinary mark. At the beginning, we could speak of Japanese or Chinese food, but over time, these gastronomic proposals have evolved and acquired new identities or names, such as “nikkei” and “chifa” respectively. These nomenclatures confirm that the gastronomic proposal offered is no longer that of the first immigrants but that of their children, grandchildren and all their descendants, who, now Peruvians, present recipes integrating ingredients from different origins.

Similarly, Venezuela has welcomed immigrants from all over the world, and in its cuisine, you can see this influence in the diversity of ingredients in its pantry. However, what we know today in Venezuela as Italian, Spanish, Portuguese or Chinese cuisines are far from faithful copies of the originals, and we can not label them as authentic. The seasoning and the recipes presented have been transformed and adapted thanks to later generations.

In both cases, these culinary fusions represent a rich legacy of intertwined histories, traditions and flavors, showing how gastronomy is a living reflection of the cultural evolution and diversity that enrich our daily lives.

We can't help but think about the future that awaits us. In about three decades, we may contemplate how Venezuelan cuisine will be transformed, adapting to the palates of the first and second generations of the diaspora. It will be a cuisine full of varied flavors, influenced by the different latitudes in which they find themselves, thus creating restaurants that will be very different from the ones their parents started. And this is wonderful! It is the law of life that gastronomic traditions evolve not because of what is advocated, but because of what they mean to both those who prepare them and those who enjoy them. In essence, it is a dialogue between generations, a meeting of cultures through the pleasure of sharing and tasting new and old flavors.

In summary

In this chapter, we have reflected on the potential of immigrants and their businesses in a world of flavors, traditions and experiences that transcend borders. Every dish, every recipe and every culinary story shows us that food is not only a means to satiate our appetite, but also a bridge that connects cultures and unites hearts.

The presence of immigrants in the evolution of gastronomy is an invaluable legacy that enriches our daily lives. From street food stalls to fine dining restaurants, every corner can offer an opportunity to explore new culinary traditions and delight in the diversity of flavors. Through Neurogastronomy, we have understood the relevance of the fact that each dish not only stimulates our senses and awakens emotions, but also transforms into flavors that represent the identity of the cook and a new experience for the eater.

Therefore, today more than ever, it is necessary to value and celebrate culinary diversity as a common heritage that unites us as human beings, helping to preserve traditions, support entrepreneurs and enrich our own culinary experience.

We may not be fully aware of the educational potential of opening a restaurant as immigrants. For this reason, we must keep in mind that every time we serve a table, we have the opportunity to share more than just a plate of food. We have the opportunity to celebrate our heritage and pay homage to the history and efforts of those who, through their recipes, have left an indelible mark.

So, the next time you visit an ethnic restaurant and try one of their dishes, remember that there is a story behind every bite that deserves to be valued and appreciated.

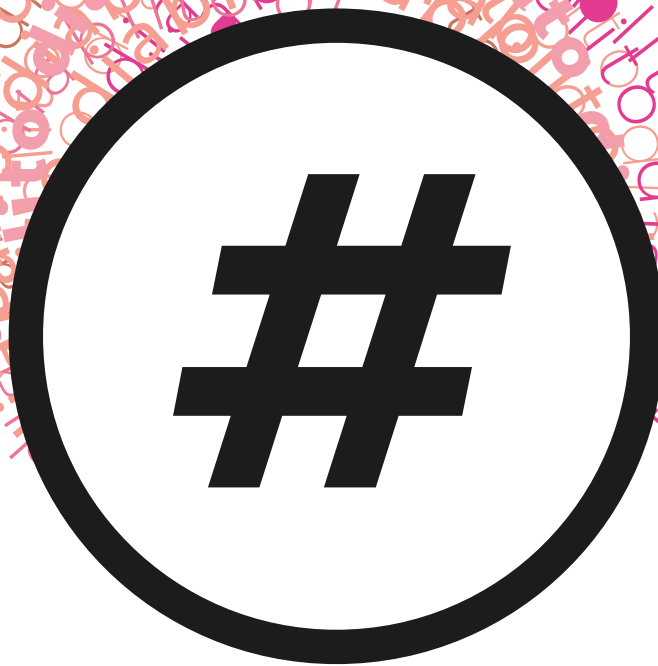
Merlin Gessen is a pioneer in Venezuela and Latin America in the innovative branch of Neurogastronomy. More than 20 years of experience in gastronomic management.

Marcus Gessen is a consultant with more than 20 years of experience in business development, product management, and gastronomic project management.

Translated by Ronin Metsa

A Parisian Anecdote with Diablitos

by Rafael Cartay



1. When speaking of tradition, it is important to point out that this first story I am going to tell is already half a century old. It happened to me in 1974 in Paris, when I was a doctoral student at the Sorbonne. Pressed by my gastronomic memory, which demanded proof of my love for my distant homeland, I asked a friend who was traveling to Venezuela to bring me back four things. No big deal for a nostalgic Venezuelan: a box of assorted Savoy chocolates; a bottle of Santa Teresa aged rum; a packet of Harina Pan and two tins of *Diablitos Underwood*. That list of orders spread like gossip among my compatriots in Paris in the Quartier Latin, and I was the object of ridicule for several months, because how could I think of being so corny, especially when I was in Paris and doing a doctorate!
2. Tradition is the memory of the past validated by the collective recognition of a social group. Not just any asset can achieve the status of a heritage asset. Only that which is worth passing on, i.e., “heritage-worthy”. Tradition derives from the Latin word *traditare*, from the verb *tradere*, which designates that which is transmitted as a legacy between the generations that share a culture. How many generations? Several! But what is a generation? Experts say that, apart from variations determined by different levels of urbanization, industrialization or the development of science and technology, a generation lasts, on average, twenty years, a period in which a group of people of the same age can share a relevant historical experience. For example, those born between 1981 and 1997, generation Y, or millennials, and those born between 1997 and 2010, generation Centennials, are marked by the fact that they have been beneficiaries of digital technology and the use of the internet and social media since childhood. They were born with a smartphone and a laptop computer in their hands. I belong to another generation, the Baby Boomers, born in the midst of the Second World War and immediately after it, between 1941 and 1961. That generation, especially the one that grew up in Venezuela, was educated with rigor and discipline, closely tied to the family values of respect, effort, honesty and sacrifice, and raised hearing the parental discourse that “the letter enters with blood” and that the only way for a person to rise socially and prosper economically, without the help of a “good family name” or a family fortune, was through education. I was born in an era of transition from a rural to an urban society, and from an agricultural to an oil economy, in which most Venezuelans were born with an arepa under their arm. And some, more and more, including me, with an arepa with deviled cheese, grated cheese, a fried egg and coffee with milk on the family table.
3. The order to my friend was very simple. Firstly, a box of assorted Savoy chocolates, i.e., Toronto chocolates (a chocolate-covered hazelnut) and Susy

biscuits (wafers with chocolate filling), and Cocosette (wafers with coconut cream filling), my favorite treats since I was a child. I have been eating them since 1949, when I was only eight years old. It has been almost four generations since then. I remember we had a president called Luis Herrera Campins (1979-1984), who people remember because he went out of his way for torontos, not because he was enlightened and honest. Do we deny the symbolic importance of these sweets as part of our cultural heritage? Do we ignore the history of the entrepreneurial constancy behind Savoy, from its foundation in 1941 until it was acquired by the multinational Nestlé in the 1980s? Did you know that history so closely linked to the excellence of the legendary Venezuelan cacao? Although, in truth, we had to wait until the 1980s for the company Chocolates El Rey to represent us in the most demanding international markets with the highest quality chocolate. Savoy was, then, the result of a dream in the midst of war-related shortages. In the midst of World War II, four immigrants arrived in Venezuela: the Pole Ernst Weitz and three Austrian brothers with the surname Beer. They created the Savoy chocolate shop and La Vienesia *patisserie*. How could I not thank them for their efforts?

4. My youth at university was washed down with the effluvia of Venezuelan rum when there was classes of Economics at the UCV¹ and for our university homework, we were asked for information on the evolution of the rum business. An example of tenacity in entrepreneurship and excellent organization and marketing. In 2003, they achieved the unthinkable: they unified the purposes of more than thirteen previously rival rum manufacturers to launch fifteen high-quality commercial brands on the market. That same year, they secured the protection of the Denomination of Controlled Origin (DOC) Ron de Venezuela. Over the years, this business arrangement has become the most awarded collective rum brand in the world. Its standards are strict: a product made with high quality raw materials, aged in American white oak barrels, and reaching a range between 40 and 50 degrees G.L. with a minimum of two years of aging. Every time a Venezuelan tastes Venezuelan rum, he or she drinks a story of perseverance and love for the product associated with a territory. It is almost a love story between the raw material, the territory, the product and its producers. It is pure tradition what you drink when you drink a Venezuelan rum. How can you not be proud of this achievement? Is it possible to mock this yearning?
5. A long time ago, I wrote one of my most personal books, *El pan nuestro de cada día* (Our Daily Bread) (Fundación Bigott, 1995). I wrote it in Quebec, Canada, at a time when I was freezing cold and missing the warmth of the tropics. I remember it because I was walking through the snow in the shops

of Lower Quebec, chasing the packets of Harina Pan as only one does after the scent of the skin of a loved one. In those writings, I reconstructed the time of my high school youth when my brother and I had to grind the cooked corn in a Corona machine that jammed all the time. We had to do it so that my mother could prepare the arepas that were part of our breakfast before we left for high school. On those mornings, I made a pact of loyalty with the pre-cooked corn flour so that I could have my daily frugal breakfast quickly and wherever I was.

6. However, the most unusual part of my request was the two tins of Diablitos, which gave structure to the fraternal gathering I was organizing. It was a Parisian party with rum, in which we would serve arepas stuffed with diablitos and some complements such as avocado and cheese, in addition to the torontos and stuffed biscuits, to celebrate the circumstance of being alive, surrounded by friends, and gratefully remembering the distant and beloved homeland. It was the best. In the background, you could hear the unforgettable voice of uncle Simón² singing “La vaca mariposa tuvo un terné...”.
7. Yes, with Diablitos, the party was with Diablitos. A product processed by the food industry that many are prejudiced against because of the allegedly low quality of the meat and fat it uses. A product under suspicion, but one that our taste buds surrender to its presence, and we all end up longing for and consuming. In a large Venezuelan chat room, “Cocina de los Amigos” (A Friends’ Kitchen), where I am a member, we recently debated freely and passionately about the product. There we heard conflicting positions: detractors and lovers of Diablitos. So we decided to conduct a survey.
8. It seemed that Diablitos was going to be condemned before a firing squad of suspicious palates. Until one, the wisest veterinarian of all, arrived to explain that he saw “with his own eyes” how the Diablitos was made with selected pieces of pork leg and back in processes where the quality and hygiene of the product were carefully controlled. But that is as far as it goes: I am neither a meat taster nor a specialist in meat, marketing or food hygiene, nor do I own shares in the company. I am just a simple Venezuelan mortal who has liked Diablitos since I was a child and who enjoys eating it. The survey democratically processed 216 opinions: 215 voted in favor and only one against.
9. I can only tell a part of the story of a product as appreciated as Diablitos. Being a storyteller is really my job and my passion. Besides, this subject is what I moderately know about. My personal mission is to historicize the mentalities, cultures, and cuisine of Latin America. Diablitos was created in Boston under the name of Devil Ham by the English engineer William Underwood in 1868. In a short time, the product became popular in the

United States. I have always wondered why the Diablitos was so clearly introduced to the Venezuelan palate. There are probably several reasons for this. One of them is that the Diablitos flavor goes very well with the arepa as a filling, forming a harmonious and compatible combination of flavors. I believe that the old politician and warrior José Antonio Páez (1790–1873), several times president of the country, must have tasted it during his stay of several years in New York, where he died in 1873, surrounded by compatriots who talked to him about their homeland and made him Venezuelan food. For some years before that, at least since 1872, Diablitos had been sold in the large grocery stores of New York. There were no supermarkets then, as the first one opened there in 1930. President Joaquín Crespo (1841–1888), twice president of Venezuela despite his relatively short existence, visited the United States during his second term in office (1893–1898). A document states that he ate Diablitos then and that he liked it. In February 1896, the first imported shipment of Diablitos arrived in Puerto Cabello. In March 1896, the product was already available in grocery stores in Caracas.

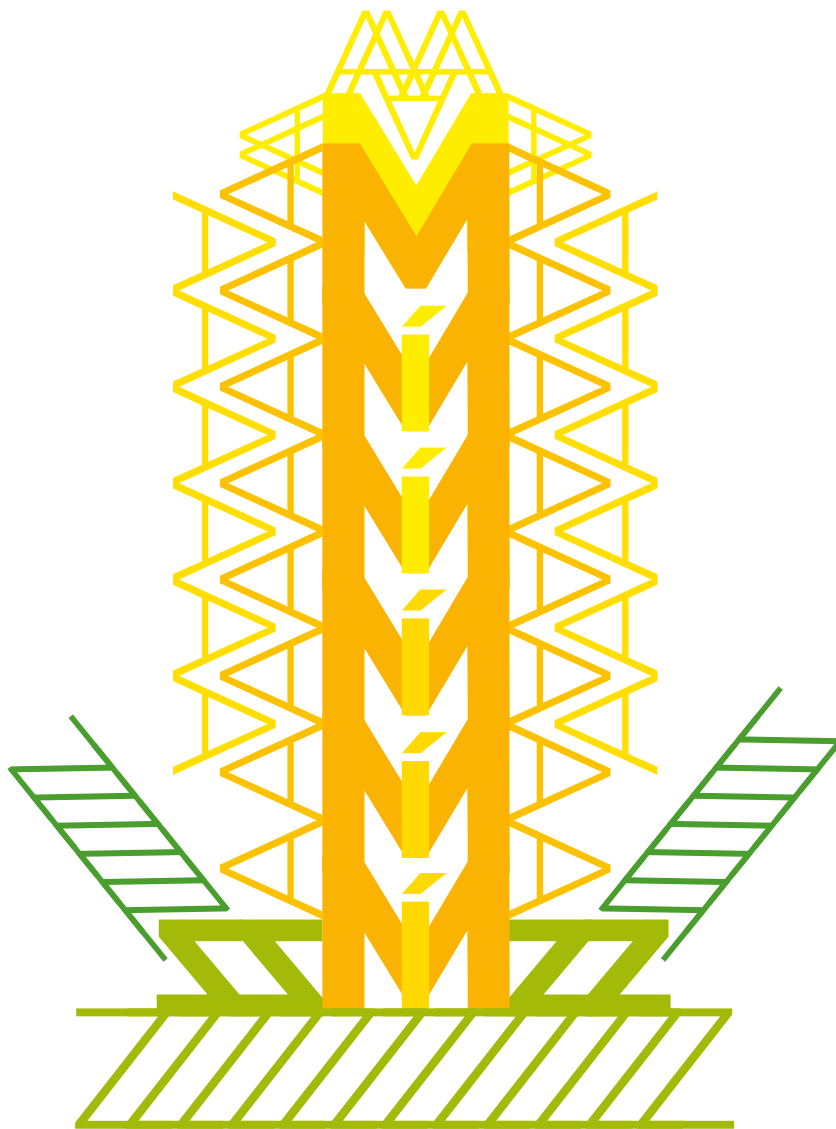
- 10.** Almost half a century later, in the 1940s, at the height of the expansion of the oil industry in Venezuela, the first large food stores were established in the oil camps: the commissaries, where many new products of the American food industry were offered, among them Diablitos, Corn Flakes, jams, canned juices, etc. Since then, Diablitos and arepa have shared a perfect pairing, which in many palates has produced a torrid romance. And so the story continued with the Diablitos we imported. Until 1961, when the company Diablitos Venezolanos C.A. (DIVECA) was established in Cagua, in the state of Aragua, to start producing them in the country. Two years later, in 1963, the jingle “Diablitos Underwood, the best way to eat ham”, created by the musician Aníbal Abreu, became popular. Now, after a century and a quarter of being introduced to the taste of Venezuelans, it seems idle to wonder if the Diablitos is a food and if it is a traditional Venezuelan product.

Diablitos is food made with meat selected from the pork leg and back of the pig, seasoned with spices, and to which sodium nitrate is added to preserve it and salt and sugar to balance its flavor. A product that has been on the Venezuelan table for more than 125 years, it is proven traditional because it has been enjoyed with pleasure by more than six generations of Venezuelans. How dare some of my friends mock my simple order of Diablitos from almost fifty years ago?

- (a) Universidad Central de Venezuela
(b) Simón Díaz (Venezuelan musician)

Translated by Ronin Metsa

Around Women and Men of Corn





ZAGA

the World of Corn Cultivation as Part
of a Sustainable Food System

Interview by Ximena Montilla

The Maíz Pelao' Project seeks to promote the preservation of corn biodiversity and the independent production of seeds, offering autonomy to farmers, and strengthening our ancestral traditions around the cultivation and consumption of this sacred food. Its founder, José Bernardo Eizaga, tells us about the origin of this important undertaking and gives us more details about the project.

How did this project around corn start?

The pandemic was undoubtedly a moment that touched us all, there was a lot of information and, at the same time, misinformation. After countless talks with people I admire, and at the end of my course with the Mexican Corn Tortilla Foundation, I was left wanting to investigate more about the corn in Venezuela, the gastronomic traditions that surround this cereal, and the most traditional way of preparing arepa and corn dough. This is how this initiative emerged. The Maíz Pelao' Project is not just an Instagram account, we will hold workshops, and we are currently working on a book that will try to compile valuable information on techniques, recipes, and stories about corn in our country.

What countries participate in this project?

At first the project was only oriented to Venezuelan corn, but today the information on the page is global; we are continually researching corn all over the planet.

How important is this project for the promotion of sustainable food culture?

I believe that sowing solid foundations and information on good agricultural and gastronomic practices are essential to understanding the situation in Venezuela's countryside, and even worldwide. The project seeks to educate people, show the diversity of corn that exists, teach how to cook with them, how to transform the grains into dough, and provide information about our native cultivation systems.

Tell us about Venezuelan corn races: *criolla*, native or endemic seeds, and hybrid seeds. What are their advantages and disadvantages?

Many Venezuelan corn races are in extinction, if they have not already disappeared. There are some "seed guardians" left in some towns in the country, and this has to do with many factors: the industrial sector attracted farmers and seduced them; immediately afterwards, many people abandoned the countryside. The poor payment for produce coming from the countryside, a problem that has continued for several years, and the industry with its thirst to make each square meter of land more profitable, regardless of the diversity that already existed, took only the most

efficient seeds to generate higher profitability from higher yield. The intellectual property of the seed; and this is just to name some of the problems that affect our farmers. Regarding the races and the existence of our endemic corn, we must take into account that little or nothing is known. The last classification of corn races in Venezuela was carried out (at least the one that is reflected bibliographically) in 1963. The search was carried out by Ulysses Grant, at that time Director of Agriculture of the Rockefeller Foundation, and the geneticist Climaco Cassaletti of the Program of Corn Reintroduction from the Colombian Department of Agriculture. The book is called “Races of Maíz in Venezuela,” and 19 races of endemic corn were described, although they only studied a third of the country. The selection of kernels from the cobs of the strongest and healthiest plants or those with “desirable traits” as agronomists call it, should not represent a danger to diversity if this system were implemented for our native corn. I think it would be an advantage, since it is not very different from the selection system that was used to improve corn before the arrival of Europeans colonizers to the American continent, and we would have more vigorous and stronger plants. As for hybrids, a hybrid seed is the result of genetic improvement “that comes from” somewhere.

Let’s now talk about genetically modified seeds. What are they and why a small seed can cause a big environmental disaster?

GMOs are genetically modified seeds. Often, in their genes, they carry DNA from things that are not even plants, which makes them more resistant to droughts and pests. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. Not satisfied with this, agribusiness proposes cultivation methods that are not very friendly to the soil, and these plants are also sprayed with chemicals to control what they call pests, contaminating the soil and body of waters closeby, and putting at risk people, fauna, native flora, and pollinating insects that are so important in the biodiversity chain.

GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) corns cause the disappearance of native species due to biological competition. Genetically improved corn grows better compared to endemic species, and this makes it much more attractive and profitable for agribusiness. The debate is on the table: food with or without poison. *Cariaco* is one of the most used corn in Venezuelan regional gastronomy. It is believed to be endemic to the town with the same name – Cariaco – which is the capital of the Ribero municipality in the beautiful Sucre state. It is believed that this variety traveled through part of the national territory, which might be true because it’s used in many preparations such as, *pan de horno*, arepas, cakes, and drinks. In the northeast of the country, it is common to find it as white as a pearl, but there are also a yellow and a striped Cariaco–these two less common in the northeast of Venezuela. The white variety is starchy, and in some places of the country it is also known as “*maíz tiza*.” It is a popular corn because it can be transformed easily into dough. It has a thin pericarp (the outer layer that covers the grain), with a conical shape, and often with 18 rows of grains. This is the favorite and best known corn of Venezuela.

Tell us, what is an arepa for you? And how is it part of this project?

The arepa for our project is everything. Truthfully, when we began, we were very committed to getting the “arepa *pelada*” off the roads, which is the only place where you can find it today due to a lack of interest in perfecting this processing technique. Making this technique more efficient is a task that we carry on with more enthusiasm today. Our role is to educate people and encourage them to continue this beautiful technique that is full of history. The pure corn arepa deserves a better place in modern Venezuelan gastronomy and we are here to help make it happen.

Education plays a fundamental role in any change we wish to orchestrate in society. Does the Maíz Pelao’ Project hold educational workshops that invite our communities to learn more about the lineage of ancestral corn and their role as “guardians of corn seeds”?

Yes, we have in mind to hold workshops, but we still have a lot to prepare, especially researching and verifying information on Venezuelan corn, and creating a real connection with the countryside so that we can tell the history of our corn, who produces it, and what we can make with this wonderful grain.



Jose Eizaga

@zagacook_

A Venezuelan chef, born in the state of Cojedes, trained in Valencia, and with experience in kitchens such as that of Carme Ruscalleda and Claude Troisgros. He lives in Buenos Aires and is the director and founder of @proyecto_maízpelao



Ximena Montilla Arreaza

@ximenamontillaarreaza

@claseslistas

@historiadelaarepa

A teacher with a Master’s degree in Direction and Management of Educational Centers. Author of the books “Soy la arepa” and “Arepa” (English version.) TEDx speaker. Director of the publishing house “Clases Listas” where she creates material and books to teach Spanish. Creator of the methodology “Spanish as an Affective Language.” In her blog, Ximena with X, she shares tips for bilingual families and teachers, and highlights the importance of teaching Spanish at home as an affective language, through reading and learning about the culture that accompanies the language.

Translated by Jenny Y. Lam-Chowdhury

The arepa

A Treasure of Nutrients and Venezuelan Tradition

by Bethania Blanco



I never thought that I would emigrate, and I would be motivated and interested in making known beautiful and rich things from my country, such as arepas.

The original arepa of the Cumanagotos¹, who gave it its name, must have been a yellow corn arepa because this is the corn that grows best in Venezuelan lands. Its low cost has made it the queen of most homes, both in Venezuela and in the rest of the countries to which Venezuelans have emigrated. Colombians and Panamanians have also made the arepa the center of their diets.

The peak year for the arepa was 1954, when Engineer Luis Caballero Mejías invented pre-cooked corn flour, saving time and labor in the preparation of the arepa. Before this invention, its preparation was very laborious. I remember how people used to get up early in the morning to thresh the corn in order to extract the husk and the germ; then cook the corn until it was soft; then pass it through a special mill that was adjusted to the table; and finally elaborate the arepas and cook them in budare. Some homes were dedicated to the first steps, and every day, very early in the morning, they sold the already elaborate dough.

¹Amerindian people of the Carib family that inhabited the former province of Nueva Andalucía or Cumaná, Vzla.

The multi-flavored, multicolor and multidimensional arepa

Multi-flavored because its neutral flavor allows it to be graciously accompanied by an almost infinite number of fillings of animal or vegetable origin. Of animal origin are grated cheeses, shredded meat (stuffing of the Pelúa), ground meat, chicken, shredded fish, chigüire or capybara, dogfish (a small shark from the Caribbean Sea), tuna, eggs, sardines, etc. In short, an endless number of foods that complement its nutritional value, making it a complete dish that satisfies the hunger of all members of Latin American households. Of vegetable origin, there are: avocado, sautéed spinach, sautéed mushrooms, black beans (the base of the Domino's filling), legumes or pulses, as this food is known in Spain.

Amino acids from arepa corn and beans complete a high biological value protein that can very well substitute any animal protein and be of lower cost.

The variety of the arepa is not limited to its fillings, the corn flour allows the addition of interesting ingredients such as anise, grated cheese, quinoa, oatmeal, bran and the well-known vegetables of intense colors that allow it to change its cream color to green, pink or orange according to whether spinach, beet or carrot is added, respectively. These last ingredients make it **multicolored** without losing its wonderful flavor, increasing its nutritional value in fiber and beta-carotene, and expanding the range of new palates that will be fascinated by these colors never seen before in breads.

This variety of fillings and the idiosyncrasies of Venezuelans have given rise to a nice list of names for arepas such as *Reina Pepeada*, *Rompe-colchón*, *Rumbera*, *Pelúa*, *Llanera*, *Sifrina*, *Dominó*, and many others. Its versatility is infinite; depending on the size and fillings, the arepa can be a snack, a breakfast or a main meal. That is why we say it is **multidimensional**.

And the winner is... Miss Arepa!

The HBA Food Balance Sheets, a document published by the National Institute of Nutrition in Caracas, Venezuela, reports the availability of foods and the nutrients they provide; it lets us know the place that corn flour, and therefore, the arepa, occupies in the Venezuelan diet. This document indicates that on average, each Venezuelan consumes a little more than 100 grams of precooked corn flour, almost all in the form of arepas, surpassing rice in second place with 85 grams per person. The National Consumption Survey has even indicated that in some years, each Venezuelan consumes 3 arepas per day.

An arepa made with 30 grams of precooked corn flour provides 110 calories, 2 grams of fiber, and 2 grams of protein. In relation to vitamins and minerals, it provides between 8% and 15% of the most important ones.

Its high consumption and excellent acceptance by the Venezuelan population led the national government to choose it in 1993 to enrich it and reduce the deficiency of iron and B-complex vitamins such as niacin, thiamine and riboflavin. Its acceptance continued to be excellent.

Arepa in infant feeding

Arepa is one of the first solid foods that mothers give their children after the period of exclusive breastfeeding. Its neutral flavor is ideal for the delicate palates of babies after six months of age. Its soft texture makes it one of the favorite foods for young children, who are not yet fully teething, and the toasted shell is useful to relieve teething in the little ones.

The “fit” arepa

The arepa, being made with corn flour, is gluten-free; its versatility allows it to be mixed with trendy foods such as quinoa, oats or chia seeds. It goes great with fillings such as cheese, eggs, and “perico” (scrambled eggs with tomato and onion) for a vegetarian version, or with fillings such as avocado and/or black beans or red beans for a vegan version. The classic arepa does not require sugar for its preparation, unless you prepare the famous and delicious sweet arepas that have anise, sugar and wheat flour, which, when fried in very hot oil, bulge.

A Venezuelan company has launched a flour for arepas that contains whole corn, black chia, sesame and red quinoa. It is rich in fiber and healthy fats and differs from the classic arepa by the graceful freckles produced by its ingredients in the white dough.

The social arepa

The attendees of any self-respecting Venezuelan party, such as a birthday, graduation, anniversary or wedding, end up at an arepera. The end of a medical, nursing or any other late-night job is undoubtedly marked with a visit to an arepera.

Finally, the arepa, with its unique flavor and excellent nutritional value, will be Venezuela’s ambassador, together with the Alma Llanera², our misses and the tricolor flag.

Bethania Blanco. Medical Nutritionist, graduated from Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV) with a Master’s Degree in Nutrition from Harvard University. Work experience at the National Institute of Nutrition, Unicef and World Bank. Teacher at the Universidad Simón Bolívar (USB).

²Traditional song.

Translated by Ronin Metsa



Arepas in the Life of Regional Cuisines

by José Medina Bastidas

The transformation in the forms and ways of consuming food for the Andean society begins with the introduction of wheat throughout Venezuela and its incorporation into the production systems in the Andes; despite the pressures, for the people of Los Andes, the set of recipes has not been lost. However, it becomes even more complicated with the introduction of new operations and the resemantization of others, which we can see in the literature when talking about the corn arepa as the bread of Venezuelans, even more as a typical dish of Venezuelan cuisine, while in the daily life of the Andes region, where wheat reaches a place in the regional pantry, there is talk of a kind of arepa with this cereal.

The diversity of our cuisine (still in need of study) and the energy of our food go beyond the screen of electronic devices, translating into the real world a present that needs to be revitalized. In the most visible area, we have a compendium of necessary research to be carried out given the changing lifestyles. Today we miss the corn because of the multiplicity of preparations we have that require a particular corn, for example, for the arepa pela' that is prepared in the east or west of the country, a very large arepa that is to be shared.

That is why the memory takes us to the stoves of Rita in the municipality of Rangel in the state of Merida. In the morning, after getting to know each other, we immersed ourselves in the chores of preparing the corncobs, which bonded us to other kitchens, where at the same time, other similar hands would get into their own corncobs.

The husking of the corncobs initiated the ceremonial act for the morning elaboration of the arepa. The white grains went out to the wooden pan to be washed and cleaned. The hands moved quickly to vent and grind the grains in the *metate*; and, in the blink of an eye, the dough was ready.

While Ana Julia, her daughter, lit the stove where she had cooked the grains and prepared with pork lard the clay *budare* that she keeps in the family, the balls of dough returned to the pan and the two of them, mother and daughter, were ready for the swift movement of placing, turning and stoking the fire to finally have the golden and thin Andean arepas.

The arepa in that historical journey since time immemorial, by dwelling in the memory of the peoples, becomes Venezuelan from the distant Andean mountains,

and in the hectic streets of the cities, its different forms and infinite techniques are an interlude on corn as food. This justifies the claim of knowledge, forms and preparations of corn in regional cuisines, avoiding the silencing of hybrid forms with nutritional discourses that judge and often disqualify culturally significant forms as harmful.

In Merida, in the tropical Andes, we have experiences where the arepa takes the leading role, whether in the everyday or in social responsibility. The “Mercado de Las Arepas Rafael Vivas”, or the well-known “Calle del Hambre” where the preparation of arepas has a very important location in the city; it is a place of reference for tourists or students, where the past merges into the present and becomes a witness of the daily existence of the “Merideño”¹ accompanied by the arepa, whether it is from corn or wheat

The fillings, as served in the more than 37 places, are very varied. A characteristic of this market is that it allows for a diverse cuisine full of Andean flavor principles. In this place, the arepa becomes part of the warp that allows the formation of social ties between producers, cooks and consumers that make up the physical and spiritual environment of the city. The Andean culture had three hundred years in the evolution of historical time to sediment certain characteristics that gave this region a face of its own, inexorably associated with corn and arepa.

On the other hand, the movement of Cursillos in Christianity has in the stuffed arepa the motive with which it celebrates the retreat in the shade. With the example of Father Cesáreo Gil, last Holy Wednesday 2023, the active members of the Cursillo collected arepas to share in the parishes of the state; donating stuffed arepas is shared with the neediest people. This experience brings together parishioners who are dedicated to the preparation of corn or wheat. This year approximately 4,000 arepas were donated.

In synthesis, the value of ancestral and traditional foods by regions, has as its ultimate goal the satisfaction of the food habits that reflect the localities, the continuity in the ancestral techniques of elaboration and therefore traditional in the regions, as well as closing the gaps in the consumption of native products by our relatives, which made them lose their productive capacity and disappear their products from our tables, leaving only in the memory the recipes and the own techniques. Today, the phrase “we were arepa eaters and poor” is contradictory and used to refer to someone who has nothing else to eat, since paradoxically, an “arepa pela” today can only be consumed in gourmet or exclusive spaces.

Therefore, we must socialize with millions of people the importance of our cuisine while carrying out an activity of dissemination and research that delves into particular topics, for example, the documentation of the Afro-descendant cuisine of the Venezuelan Andes, the cuisine of our Piedmont, where the products of the western plains converge, and the confluence of the Orinoco with the high Andean pantry. It also enriches us with various forms of activism, from the exchange of seeds and planting technology to ways of transforming food.

The cooks who are trained in our regions must be in tune with the environments that surround them, aware of seasonal changes, and knowledgeable about the cultural values that lie behind them. For example, knowing how to elaborate corn flour, the differences in the grains of the different corn, the proper use of a wooden spoon and the handling of strong heat, the subtle wisdom of touching the budare to finally enjoy those flavors contained in a corn arepa “*huevito*”² or “*Cariaco*”³ that will accompany a pea soup, where the mixture with the pumpkin and the black arbolona potato, reflects us to the Andes, evoking tastefully that feeling that the poet José Pulido expresses so well in his poem, Amarillo:

You could feel the presence of a country capable of offering
alternatives for the soul
through flavors that are like
trunks in the air
drawers guarding
the memory of people who would never forget
the flavors of the countryside.

José Medina Bastidas Anthropologist of the Universidad Central de Venezuela.
Director of Cocina Andina Iniciativa.

“Our proposal is fundamentally structured in three instances of work that we will describe below: A first line of work that is related to the construction of Venezuelanness in multicultural spaces. Secondly, we approach social representations from the culinary experience in times of resignification of Venezuelanness. As a third characteristic aspect, we focus on Venezuelanness emerging in contexts of revaluation framed in the cultural business of the culinary. Our work is focused on promoting the culinary diversity of Venezuela, which translates into carrying out an initiative whose accent is placed on turning the essential look towards our Venezuelan cuisine. We consider it a necessary work, very delicate and that suffers from many gaps from the anthropological perspective of food; that is why we do it proudly from the loving brigade that we have called Andean Cuisine”.

Translated by Ronin Metsa

¹ Native of Mérida

² Type of corn

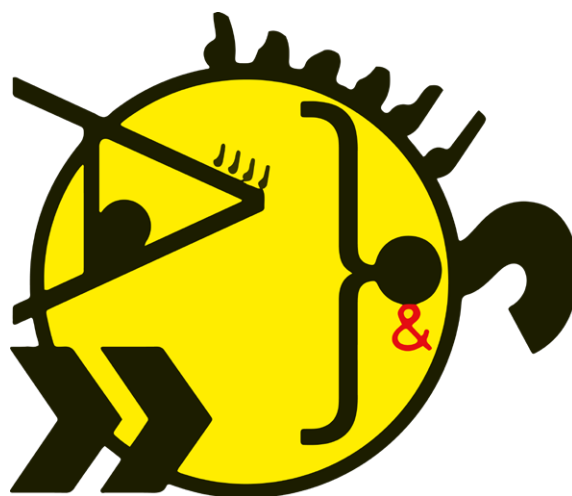
³ Type of corn

Arepas in Táchira

by Leonor Peña

Pictures of Isrrael Sayaverde

Our arepa of yellow corn *pelado*—a process where dry corn is boiled with ash and lime to soften and hull the corn—is highly appreciated and considered our daily bread at breakfast time, but it can also accompany snacks, or be the first course or side dish of other meals at different times in a Tachirenses (from Táchira) table. In our Gastronomic Dictionary of Táchira we define it like this:



Arepa*

It is a round dough, flattened into the shape of a plate, made of cooked and ground corn dough, cooked on a *tiesto*, a sort of flat clay cookware, or *budare*, a griddle, and it is considered the main food in our province.

It is important to highlight that the traditional arepas from Táchira are made of yellow corn *pelado*, and those made from white corn *pilado*—corn that is mashed by hand, boiled, and milled—are less common.

This arepa is identified by its large shape, i.e., wide and thin. It is 15 cm wide by 0.5 cm thick. To cook it, it has to be done well, without burning, but toasting it. They said that the arepa should never be burned so as not to “soot” the table towels in which they are wrapped when on the basket or tray that carry them to the table.

It can be served whole or, if it's a large one, cut into quarters, with each quarter served as one portion per person.

At breakfast, it is served with *piscas*, *caldos cuajados*, and *consomés*, all different types of regional soups.

It is also served with scrambled eggs, *pericos*, a Venezuelan-style scrambled egg, omelets, or meat in that first meal of the morning that is accompanied with *café con leche*, a Venezuelan-style coffee. This quarter-of-an-arepa is served during breakfast, as a snack, or as a side dish to accompany soups and other dishes during lunch.

At dinner, the arepa is stuffed with cheese that melt when grilled or toasted, so we call them *tostadas*.

Each portion is highly appreciated, hence the popular saying from Táchira: “I would even give up my quarter-of-an-arepa.”

*Gastronomic Dictionary of Táchira. Leonor Peña

My book about the Cuisine of Táchira

El Libro de la Cocina tachirenses (The Book of Tachirenses Cuisine) is not just a cookbook, it is a book of love for Táchira. And it is that love for their roots, their need to maintain the regional memory, to find and to rediscover, to love and to remember, that made possible this work of collecting individually each recipe, each secret, and each way of naming, as they all required many hours of patient listening, asking, and questioning; of writing, reading, and rereading; of cooking and tasting. And above all, of understanding that each recipe is different depending on who prepares it, because the magical world of the other reality, the non-ordinary one, means that “depending on the mood of the cook when they wake up” a cake can turn out to be more or less spongy, due to the “simple” reason—believed by all good cooks—that “a good or bad temper is absorbed by the ingredients”, and that “having a good hand in the kitchen” is a strange virtue that fate grants indiscriminately to some fortunate farmers, matrons of yesteryear, inn’s keepers, or market cooks; and that today, the new generations, without distinction of sex or social status, begin to invoke, to make these traditional recipes.

Searching through old notebooks of culinary notes, exploring market’s foods, conversing with patient cooks, consulting old libraries, or talking with experts would not give us a recipe book of rigid formulas with lists of ingredients and exact measurements. We understood that it was an almost impossible task to unify measurements and criteria. Those old notebooks would ask for a good pumpkin cake, for example, a “centavo” (1 cent) or a “locha” (12.5 cents) of *panela*. Or to season a stew, we were instructed to add a touch of spiciness or a “pinch” of annatto. Formulas that were impossible to translate exactly, but they were rewritten thanks to the good disposition and eagerness to rescue those almost forgotten flavors and textures.

Learning about the delicious culinary tradition of peasant soups, wraps, and *mestizos* sausages; of intoxicating and aromatic drinks of our aboriginal ancestors; of delicate and abundant confections and sweets, reminiscent of European cuisines that came with the immigrant’s palates and later got transferred to the kitchens of our people, it should help us, in part, to value our cultural heritage and give us one more reason to feel proud for being part of this land.

This book is written with the intention of revaluing our Gastronomic Cultural Heritage. It is the result of all the compilation made thanks to the memory of the wonderful cooks who kept in their old “Kitchen Notebooks” a whole legacy of love and nostalgia for the times gone by. We’re also grateful to the councils of market cooks and farmer families who, after Sunday’s meal, spent some afternoons with us sharing their memories wrapped in aromatic spices and herbs to tell us how, a few decades ago, soups, stews, games, and fishes, were prepared decades ago.

To these nostalgic meetings, we also listened to the wonderful stories of Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, a native of San Cristóbal, the city capital of Táchira, and who, out of love for this land, undertook a long pilgrimage that he maintained throughout his life, in an eternal expedition along the paths of being Tachirense. Love also moved Isabel Aretz to leave her dear Argentina to accompany Luis Felipe along the most recondite paths of Táchira, and thus with her research discipline, collaborated in the rescue of the greatest legacy: the necessary log to journey through the landscapes of regional memory and rediscover our roots, and with it, learn to love what is ours to feel fully Tachirense.

It is important to mention that the compilation of these notes, both recipes and chronicles, as well as lexicon and testimonies of our gastronomy in general, was a task that Dr. Ramón J. Velásquez entrusted me to carry on: to investigate and research meticulously the pantry of the regional memory, this heritage of flavors and careful work that our grandmothers left us as legacy. When editing them in the Biblioteca de Autores y Temas Tachirenses BATT volume 113, Dr. Velásquez stated: “This book on Tachirense Cuisine is a true treatise, a rigorous study where the tastiest pages of the history of Táchira will live forever” .

Miriam Perdomo: “This is my recipe for Tachirense Arepas”

“My great friend Doromilda Gómez taught me this recipe of Tachirense arepas with yellow corn *pelado*. She gave me the instructions to make them authentically Tachirense. They are 15 cm wide by 1 cm thick and I learned to cook them over a woodfire.”



Tachirense Arepas

Ingredients:

Yellow corn *pelado*

Salt

Butter

Plastic wrap

Cook 1 kg (~2.20 lb) of yellow corn *pelado* in 3 lt (~12.5 US cups) of water. Once cooked, strain and discard the water, and hull the corn. Pass the corn through the mill twice to obtain the dough, then knead it combined with 20 g (~0.70 oz) of salt and 100 g (~3.5 oz) of butter until obtaining a well-kneaded, smooth dough without lumps. Portion the dough into 200 g (~7 oz) and 100 g (~3.5 oz) balls. On a piece of plastic wrap brushed with corn oil or water, place the 200 g (~7 oz) dough ball and shape it into arepas of 15 cm wide by 1 cm thick. Repeat the same process with the 100 g (~3.5 oz) ball and shape it into arepas of 8 cm wide by 0.5 cm thick. Heat the *budare* over medium high heat, brush both sides of the arepa with corn oil, place it in the *budare*, and cook each side for 7 minutes. They are “wide and thin”, and the largest one is cut into four pieces and served in portions known as “quarters”.

Ronald Duque

ICC Intern

Culinary Institute of Caracas

Standardization of traditional recipe; Yellow corn *pelado* dough

Source: Cook Miriam Perdomo

Tostadas: These are made from the same yellow corn *pelado* dough, but shaped a little thinner. These arepas are called “Tostadas.” They should be crispy, i.e., well toasted, but not burned.

Miriam Perdomo: The noble profession of cooking

My memory goes back in time to remember the first dish I prepared as a girl. I remember that we were playing and we chose to make coconut rice under the loving and watchful eye of my mother. It was like this, playing, happy and smiling, that I prepared this Caribbean dish, so common on our family table in Barranquilla, Colombia. As the years went by, through observation, I learned to know and appreciate food. I also learned about cooking methods and techniques and, most importantly, how tasks are executed daily in the kitchen. One day, I traveled to Táchira and when we arrived, around Palmira, I saw the



city of San Cristóbal for the first time. I was so touched that I felt a very intense sensation, a hunch...

It was 1975, and I was journeying through Venezuela with my co-workers. When we arrived we looked for a viewpoint, a place to see the capital city of Táchira state from a distance... My heart began to beat vigorously and I couldn't explain what was happening to me. I understood it later: The most important events of my life would happen in this city.

After a few years, my husband and I opened a restaurant in San Cristóbal. He had extensive experience in hospitality and hired employees that came mostly from the kitchen team at the Tama Hotel. That was a great learning experience that solidified my cooking knowledge. This is how I started in the kitchen, approximately forty years ago, building a business with my family, which, given the quality of our work, became a successful gastronomic enterprise serving the most traditional dishes of Táchira.

Thanks to our excellent gastronomic offer, we were a reference for good Tachirenses dishes. That is why we were called in 2003 to participate in the preparation of a menu to compete with other regions of Venezuela in a tasting contest in Caracas. The winner would be hosting the National Youth Games. We won the venue and, in addition to Táchira, we represented The Andes region.

Then Venezuela won the venue for the Copa América of Soccer and we were hired again. We were settled at the Soccer Stadium of Pueblo Nuevo, in San Cristóbal. From the central stand, we provided a great dining service with a menu strictly based on Tachirenses cuisine, serving guests from several countries as well as members of the sport delegations and FIFA's authorities and staff.

Years have passed, and life has given me the joy of seeing my grandson, Ronald Duque Garcés, graduate as a Venezuelan chef in Caracas in that great school led by chef Héctor Romero, where they use *El Libro de la Cocina tachirense* (The Book of Tachirenses Cuisine) of Leonor Peña.

My grandson Ronald inherited from us, his paternal and maternal grandparents, that love for cooking, and his commitment to Táchira brought him back to work with his family. I am very proud of him because he was still very young when he decided to go by himself to Caracas to study at the Culinary Institute, where he was also recognized for his good behavior and academic achievements. I am rejoiced when I see the love he shows for his Venezuelan culinary roots, and more so, for the Tachirenses cuisine and gastronomic traditions...

I send him my blessings, and I hope that wisdom and the divine omnipresence will continue to guide and protect him.

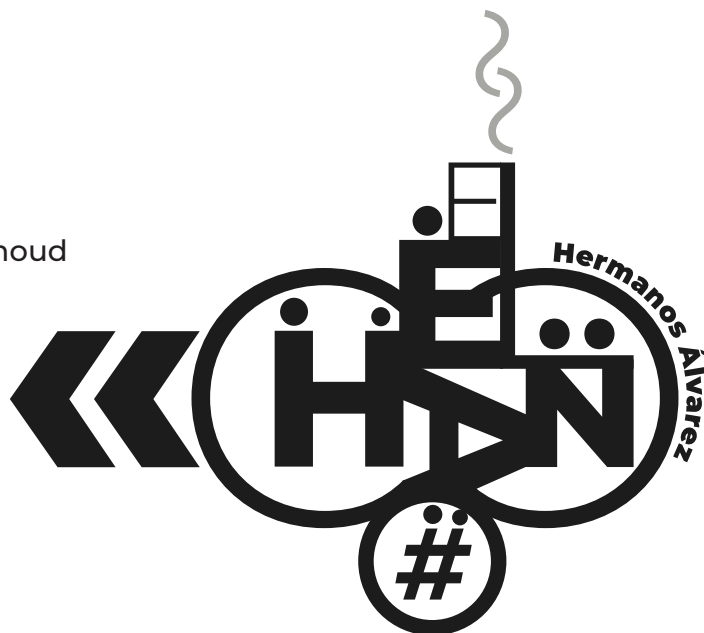
Leonor Peña was born in the state of Táchira. She is a writer and researcher specialized in Venezuelan gastronomic culture. Author of the Gastronomic Dictionary of Táchira and *El Libro de la Cocina tachirense* (The Book of Tachirense Cuisine.) Editor. Cultural Manager. She is the recipient of the Armando Scannone National Gastronomy Award 2013, awarded by the AVC, Venezuelan Academy of Gastronomy, for the research and promotion of the gastronomic heritage of Táchira.



Translated by Jenny Y. Lam-Chowdhury

The Oldest Areperas in Caracas

by Marianella Abadi Abilahoud



Contrary to what many might think, the areperas *caraqueñas*¹, as we know them today, are not as old as we imagine, at most, they were established in the second half of 1940. Before continuing with the story, we must consider three definitions proposed by the historian Rafael Cartay (1997) in his *Diccionario de Alimentación y Gastronomía en Venezuela* (pp. 31)

Arepera: establishment where arepas are made, sold, and/or served.

Arepa: a type of bread prepared with corn (cooked, pre-cooked, or peeled), water and salt in the form of a disk that is used to accompany other foods. It is cooked in budare, grilled, baked, or fried and can be eaten alone or stuffed with other foods.

Tostadas: Previously, they were arepas from the previous day, which were opened with a wet knife, filled with grated white cheese, and spread with butter. They were moistened with a slightly damp cloth and toasted with embers in the heat of the stove. They were crunchy when bitten. Nowadays, they are freshly made arepas filled with shredded meat, cheese, chicken or some other ingredient.

¹Belonging to or relating to Caracas.



If we analyze these definitions a little, we can realize that although arepas were already prepared and cooked by the native inhabitants of these lands before the arrival of Christopher Columbus, as the renowned historian José Rafael Lovera (1988) comments in chapter I Origins and Formation of Venezuelan Food Regimes 1500–1750, in his book *Historia de la alimentación en Venezuela* (pp. 33–65), arepas for many centuries were eaten as an accompaniment to other meals and not as a meal per se. Going a little deeper, we can distinguish that originally, when an arepa was not used as an accompaniment but contained some filling, it was called a tostada and was cooked on the embers. For this reason, there are many who claim that tostadas were the predecessor of stuffed arepas.

Having these concepts clear, we can go into our research on the oldest areperas. When we begin to investigate, we find that, although it is true that at the end of the XIX century and in the first years of the XX century arepas were sold in Caracas, they were offered by street vendors in baskets, in some corner of the municipal market, and later in street kiosks, generally sold alone, without fillings. Most of the time, they were made by humble ladies who sent their children to the street to sell them in order to earn their daily sustenance.

Already in the 30s and early 40s of the last century, these street sales of arepas were very popular, as historian Mariano Picón Salas (1945) tells us in *Pequeña historia de la arepa*, first published in *El Farol* N°145, April. (pp. 2-5). Caracas.

In the spoiled Caracas, the arepas vendor's cart, with its romantic oil lamp and its ambulant stove, is transformed into a snack for night owls, like a sleepless pupil of the city, when everything begins to quiet down and go to sleep. There are midnight processions of ladies with make-up in ball gowns and gentlemen in tails who, returning from the feast and before returning to their homes, stop popularly in front of the nomadic little stores or invade, like a strange troupe that Goya would have painted, the last inns where they sell the venerable *cumanagoto* bread. At that livid hour of the late night and in the very Venezuelan counters of the “ventorrillos”², with their smell of *mondongo* and *pernil*, the social classes disappear, and the people who got off the Cadillac—as if subjected to the same egalitarian law of hunger, are not afraid of being confused with the carter who eats his breakfast while the others take the last supper, or with the nocturnal drunkard who keeps repeating between sleepy head nods the phrases of his monologue. For many years, it was the very Creole restaurant Jaime Vivas, great *compadre* and supplier of arepas, as the last night shelter of the city, the supplied and bustling anteroom of the insomniacs. Now that the metropolis grows with tender and folkloric names like Alma Llanera, Mi Arepa y Yo, the universal offer of arepas is spread in

²A wine cellar or eating house on the outskirts of a town.

all neighborhoods... So much fits in the absorbing mass that in certain sophisticated Caracas restaurants they already add cosmopolitan modernity—truffled liver French style and Rodel sardines.

Many arepas kiosks as well as tostada establishments were dedicated to manufacturing corn flour for their products; this was the case of the naval engineer Eustasi Sarasola, of Basque origin, who in 1945 created a machine to make corn flour for his arepa manufactory called Las Blancas, in Naiguatá. At that time, Alfredo Armas Alfonzo (1945) related in his article Ingeniero, in the magazine Elite that the mentioned manufactory produced 5,000 arepas per day, and for its elaboration, they used 250 kilos of corn, 11 workers and 10 ovens built in Venezuela. Armas Alfonzo commented that while he was visiting the factory, several customers arrived, among them the National Guard, who daily bought a large batch of tostadas and arepas to take to the Guard School.

The story of the oldest areperas in Caracas would not be complete without including the Álvarez brothers, creators of the well-known Reina Pepiada. Paraphrasing the story of Heriberto Álvarez, one of the famous brothers, expressed in an interview at the age of 83, Álvarez, H. in Gámez, A. (2008) tells us that the family is originally from Caracas. (2008) tells us that the family is originally from Las Arujas, Trujillo state, and that when his father died in the mid-40s, he moved with his six siblings and his mother to Caracas. They settled in the corner of Cola e'Pato, in El Guarataro, where they set up an *empanada* business. People came from El Paraíso -at that time an urbanization of wealthy people—and they did so well that by 1949 they decided to establish another store, called El Chance, between the corners of Madero and Bucare, near Plaza Miranda in downtown Caracas, and it was there where they sold their first tostadas. Their first customer was a young man named Alfredo Sánchez, later known as Alfredo Sadel, a famous Venezuelan tenor, to whom they explained that “tostadas” were called “stuffed arepas” in Trujillo.

They continued to grow, and in 1955, they moved to Gran Avenida, which connected Plaza Venezuela with Sabana Grande, where they opened Los Hermanos Alvarez. That same year, the Venezuelan Susana Duijm won the Miss World contest, and Mr. Heriberto says that to honor the newly elected queen, they decided to dress a 12-year-old niece in a costume, sash and crown of a queen and sit her in a corner of the store. One day, a man arrived and asked them why they had that girl there. They answered that it was in honor of the new Miss World. The astonished gentleman answered, “That is my daughter; I am Susana Duijm’s father; one day I will bring her here”

Indeed, the gentleman kept his word, one Friday at 10:00 pm he appeared with the Miss World, the Alvarez brothers could not believe it, but perhaps the most excited was their mother, they say that she went immediately to

the kitchen, took a freshly made arepa, opened it in half, spread it with butter, put a special chicken, which she previously parboiled, then marinated for 24 hours with Creole seasonings, Then she looked in the kitchen to see what other refined ingredient she could find, she saw the can of petit pois, which contrary to what it may seem at the moment, that can represented status, it was the era of modernity of the 50s in Venezuela, then the lady thought of a garnish and placed the avocado slices on it. Immediately, Mr. Heriberto came out to deliver the specialty, telling Susan Duijm that this arepa had just been lovingly prepared by her mother and that they would call it “reina”, in honor of her: “A queen for another queen”. After a while, and since at that time women of good figure like Susan Duijm were called “pepiadas”, they decided to give that name to the arepa, calling it “*Reina Pepiada*” (Queen Pepiada). As we can see, the original reina pepiada did not have mayonnaise, it is not known exactly when or why. The chicken was simply parboiled, and the petit pois were eliminated to give way to the version we know today.

Mr. Heriberto continues recalling the important clientele that paraded through the place, among them: the maestro Billo Frómeta, Aquiles Nazoa, Oscar Yanes, Abelardo Raidi, Renny Ottolina, but he points out that perhaps the most important client they had was the engineer Luis Caballero Mejías who one night showed up at the place with a small bag and told them that he had prepared a mixture to see if the arepas were the same as theirs. Caballero Mejías explained that it was two kilos of parboiled corn, ground and then dried. Heriberto recalls that they did wonderfully with the mixture.

To be more precise, in 1954, mechanical engineer Luis Caballero Mejías invented the industrial procedure to develop the formula for precooked corn flour and its manufacturing method, which he patented and marketed under the brand name La Arepera.

On December 10, 1960, Polar Enterprise began to commercialize Harina Pan (a national food product). Taking up the last part of Mr. Heriberto Álvarez's story, he makes us understand that thanks to the invention of this type of flour by Luis Caballero Mejías and later to the creation of P.A.N. flour, the process of elaboration of arepas is simplified, and with it, the areperas proliferate as we know them today all over the city. Although some say that with the popularity of the arepa in the street, going from being a simple accompaniment to a meal for a dish, together with the growth of the Caracas infrastructure—built in the 50s, the era of modernity—there was an accelerated increase in the number of areperas and tostadas where the filled arepas were sold. It is estimated that by 1954, there were more than 56 of these places in Caracas, selling some 25,000 arepas a day. It is always important to remember that areperas not only sell arepas with an infinity of fillings, combinations and all kinds of names but also regularly offer, depending on the establishment, other Creole preparations,

such as: cachapas, soups of all kinds, mondongos, pabellón, to name a few, also in Creole food restaurants.

The following are some of the areperas, tostada sales and Creole food restaurants registered up to 1959. This list is part of a compilation made for a thesis of the Culinary Institute of Caracas, in which the author was the tutor.

- Álvarez - Veroes a Jesuitas, Downtown Caracas
- Arepera N°15 - Urbanización Artigas
- Arepera Alma Llanera
- Arepera Doña Juana - El Silencio
- Mi Arepa y Yo
- Popular eateries
- El Chance, tostadas - Madero a Bucare, Downtown Caracas
- El Mombino, tostadas - Quebrada Honda, Downtown Caracas
- El Trolly - San Bernardino / El Paraíso / Las Mercedes
- El Tropezón, tostadas - Bello Monte, downtown Caracas
- Hermanos Álvarez - Gran Avenida Shopping Center, between Plaza Venezuela and Sabana Grande
- Jaime Vivas - La Pastora / Los Caobos / Sabana Grande
- La Guaira Passenger Terminal, soda fountain - La Guaira

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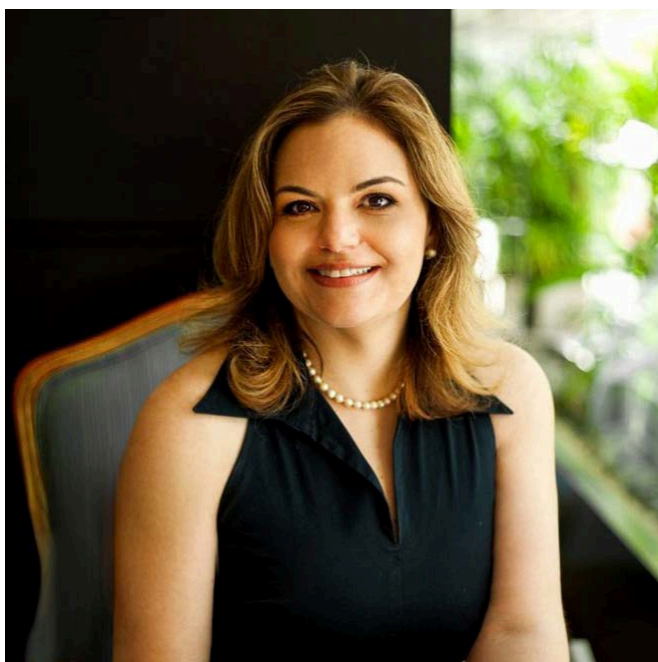
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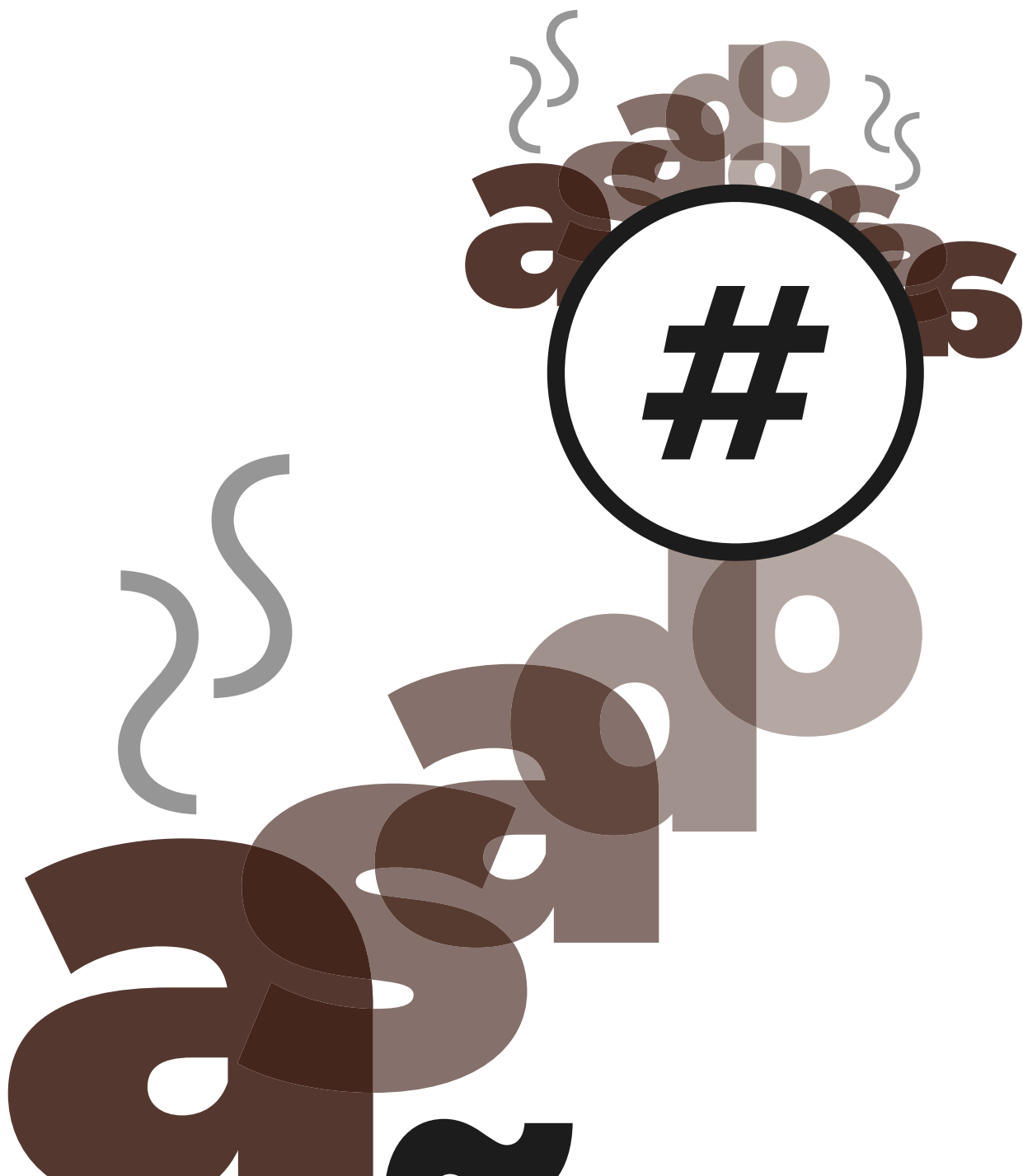
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Marianella Abadi Abilahoud is a communication crisis advisor, enogastronomic consultant, author of the book *El sabor de la tradición libanesa* winner of the Gourmand Cookbooks Awards 2017 as the best book in the world in the category of Mediterranean cuisine, author of articles related to the subject, both for national and foreign publications, member of the board of directors and treasurer of the Venezuelan Academy of Gastronomy, and academic and gastronomic tutor of graduate thesis at the Culinary Institute of Caracas.

Translated by Ronin Metsa

Arepa Conquers the Formal Dinner



The Story of Failure for Success

by **Federico Tischler**



I am a cook, by training and vocation, with more than 25 years of a career where I worked in very good kitchens, some of them awarded Michelin stars, and in others where we cooked without pressure and with simple ingredients in a very honest and unprejudiced way.

Cooking not only transformed my professional life, but above all, it made me grow, took away my sorrows, and helped me develop in a much more sociable way.

Having gone through several schools, including several countries and several universities, trying to find my vocation only made me more closed and shy.

And so, one day, after banging around between university careers with medium success, I discovered a character that changed my life completely. She was a beautiful woman who talked about thoughtful cooking, encouraged people to study and be curious to make unique recipes, but who also quoted traditional recipes while reading Brugnier, Paul Eluard and writing songs for Sentimiento Muerto, which was my favorite Venezuelan rock band while I was growing up.

Upon contacting her, from the very genesis of her school, I got hooked up on her and her philosophy and her ways of looking at gastronomy, which turned out to be the answer I was looking for in my life.

Helena became my tutor, my teacher, but also, and above else, a great friend. And with her, I now only began to cook, discovering my skills in this trade, but I also began to come out of the shell of shyness that covered me.

And so I began to take charge of kitchens and gastronomic projects, I began to travel cooking and eating. I discovered that I possessed many culinary tools and skills that were shaping my career, while at the same time fattening my ego.

Then I entered luxurious kitchens where competition was raw and wild.

I discovered that markets were magical stalls, not only of ingredients but also of wisdom.

But moving forward with the experience I was gaining, I became a monster who did not always communicate well and ended up doing everything “by myself” because I believed that no one else would do it better, only on certain occasions.

One day I decided to leave for good the country that had welcomed me many years ago, when my family emigrated from our homeland due to political problems. I found myself in a strange and foreign city. A city far away from everything I had known up to that moment, but with a recently opened restaurant, it was also receiving awards as one of the best options in that place, so my ego kept growing, although those achievements did not bring happiness, and I knew that no matter how much love and effort I had put into the project, it was to fulfill the dream of the owner in question.

The days went by, and I was still feeling a bit sad about having moved away from the city where I grew up. That place that smelled of fresh cheese, mango and sweet bell pepper, where there were incredible sunrises surrounded by the magical mountain we call Avila.

Then, I received a call from a group of entrepreneurs who wanted to clean up one of the most complicated areas of the city and dreamed of a project where Venezuelan arepas would be present. So, I decided to leave the stability that gave me the restaurant where I was not only the executive chef but where I had helped to design, load tables and remodel the kitchen.

I embarked on a beautiful but challenging journey. An uncertain journey where I would no longer have a guaranteed salary every fifteen days, but a lot of freedom, a lot of commitment, and above all, a beautiful opportunity to pay back to that country that was going through bad times, the opportunity to clean its image through the kitchen and its flavors.

I opened an ‘arepera’, where simplicity rewarded, but it was also full of complexities without noise or fuss, but full of techniques, local products and a lot of fun.

I was joined by a great friend and tremendous cook, with whom we made an incredible duo, not only cooking, but also conceptualizing a life project through arepas.

And this is how arepas changed my life.

Simple corn breads, made in a millenary way and with enormous mythical implications between the corn kernels, the sun, the stars and the circle of stones that serves as a tool to protect these magical circles from fire while roasting, became what I was looking for without even knowing it.

Thanks to the arepas I was not only able to undertake this beautiful project that showed Venezuela in a fun and tasty way, but I was also able to introduce strangers to the Venezuelan gastronomy full of seasoning, flavor and a lot of culture.

But not everything was easy and simple. We started in a complex place, far from everything. A city with little media exposure. A place where people are not used to eating anything Latino beyond tacos.

So, as beautiful as it was making arepas and cooking with passion every day, we could not achieve the commercial success that a business aims for; so I had to reduce my income, cover more than two or three positions each day, do magic to take care of the food costs, and, at the same time, be creative with events and seek the greatest possible public exposure.

I worked days of at least 14 or 16 hours, with some days of almost 20... I slept the minimum, and I also felt alien to the environment where I lived, but every day I grew more emotionally; I was getting rid of fears and doubts that for years made me seclude myself in little social expressiveness.

Then one day I received a call from the president of the Academy of Gastronomy of Venezuela congratulating me for having won the Armando Scannone award as a Venezuelan chef. And the nicest thing of all was that it was the first and only time that it was given to someone outside the country and, above all, to someone who was cooking arepas, something little associated with serious gastronomy until that moment.

And there I not only ended up finding my vision for gastronomy, but I also found myself as a new secure, confident and calm being.

It did not matter anymore if I had sacrificed income for so many years or if the rest was utopia.

I lost so many things, but I gained so many more!!!!

And very recently, I understood that one must lose to win. That sacrifice brings rewards, and in the end, if you row, you will reach the shore, even if sometimes it seems to be a lake of *dulce de leche*.

Then, when the road brings obstacles, you understand what you have gained and appreciate each achievement, and you will surely reach that carrot you have been searching for so long and that for so long has been in front of your eyes, and that seemed like a dream.

Do not let the complexity blind you or make simplicity seem worthless. In everything, there is brightness and shadow. What we must learn is to make shine what does not seem shiny, and to close our eyes a little to the excessive brightness that could blind us at first sight.

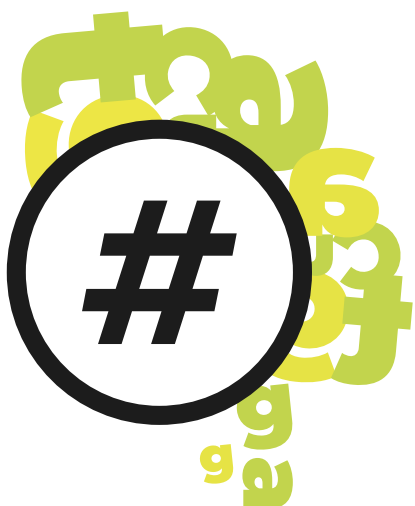


FEDERICO TISCHLER

 Instagram @fetischler

He studied at the Centro de Gastronomía y Salud Cocido a Mano, Helena Ibarra's school. After passing through some kitchens in his country, he left to try his luck in the United States as an ambassador of our cuisine. He undertakes his project in Baltimore, White Envelope Arepa Bar, with which he achieves in 2018 what no one had achieved: the Venezuelan Academy of Gastronomy awarded the Armando Scanonne Award to a cook abroad. He is currently executive chef at Bodegas Alpasi3n, Valle del Uco, Mendoza, Argentina.





An Arepa under the Arm*

by Chef James

I left Venezuela in search of new horizons and opportunities, pursuing the elusive American dream in the US. Upon arriving, I realized that the arepa, that culinary treasure of my homeland, was unknown to most people. But even before I immersed myself into the fascinating world of gastronomy, the arepa was a faithful companion, reminding me of my roots and family traditions being a descendant of an Arab family established in Venezuela.

Over time, my passion for food led me to cooking school, where I dream up an ambitious plan: to turn the arepa into that vehicle that will connect people from different cultures. I wanted to share this traditional dish with the world and demonstrate that generosity and cultural openness are the very soul of the arepa.

Imagine a juicy Argentine *asado* with *chimichurri* between the two golden sides of an arepa, or delight yourself with an exquisite *cochinita pibil* that has found its home inside this ancestral bread, that arepa that you open halfway and has a tremendous capacity to hold up sauces, cooking juices, stews and more! Creativity and freedom in gastronomy has no limits and the arepa has proven to be a blank canvas, a mosaic that adapts wonderfully to any recipe.

Of course, when I wrote my cookbooks, the best-sellers *Cooking at Home with Chef James* and *The Homemade Chef*, I had to include arepa recipes! And certainly, it has to be about the most famous queen, the “Reina Pepiada” (*Reina* is Queen in Spanish!), a chicken-and-avocado salad, a classic filling in Venezuela. A recipe that has to be present in the stories I tell about the emblematic dishes that influenced my life throughout my career. My *Reina* with variations that—I promise you—are not too far from the authentic recipe! Chives only give it a little more aroma, and the homemade mayonnaise, although it might sound fancy, I assure you it is worth every dollop of it. Because if she is a *Reina* you have to treat her like one.

From cooking school to my career in television, my mission has been clear: Spread the word about the richness of Venezuelan cuisine and share the versatility of the arepa with the world. In each program, I try to imbue the screen with aromas

and flavors that evoke memories of my childhood, making it clear that all the colors and flavors of the world fit into an arepa.

So here I am, carrying a message of unity and fraternity in each arepa. The arepa, symbol of Venezuela and the world, is more than a typical dish, it is an expression of our global identity, where flavors intertwine to create a unique and moving experience. The arepa has always been generous, and my passion is to share that generosity with each bite that reaches the hearts of everyone who tries it.

**Every child is born with an arepa under their arm* is an expression used in Venezuela to say that a child is a blessing for a family and despite adversity, we will always look for and find a way to feed and raise our children.

Recipe for an arepa *Reina*

For the octopus:

Ingredients:

- 1 octopus
- 3 medium carrots
- 1 lb onion
- 2 lt (~8 US cups) oil
- 1 lt (~4 US cups) vinegar
- Bay leaves
- Black pepper to taste
- 1/2 tablespoon salt



Directions:

1. Begin by placing all the ingredients on a baking pan. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Cover the pan with plastic wrap, followed by aluminum foil, and then put it in the oven and cook for 1.5 hours.
3. Remove from the oven, let it rest, and cut the octopus into pieces. Reserve the liquid and put the octopus back in.

For the arepa:

Ingredients:

- 1 cup pre-cooked cornmeal
- 2 tbsp melted butter
- 1 1/4 cup water
- 4 sprigs of chives
- 1/2 cup homemade mayonnaise
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1/2 cup chopped cilantro
- 1 mashed avocado
- 1/2 cup of octopus *en escabeche*, prepared previously

Directions:

1. Mix the water with the melted butter and salt in a container. Add the cornmeal and mix well until everything is incorporated.
2. Once the dough is compact, form balls the size of a tennis ball. Flatten them slightly and then brown them in a frying pan or *budare*, a traditional metal griddle. Turn them over and let it cook until a crispier surface is formed on the other side.
3. In a separate container, mix well the rest of the ingredients, then add the octopus pieces to taste, and serve inside or on top of the arepa.



Chef James Tahhan, known as Chef James, is one of the most influential Hispanic chefs in the United States. Born in Venezuela to Syrian parents, he moved to the United States when he was 13. He is recognized for being the chef and co-host of the Telemundo morning show *Un Nuevo Día*, for more than ten years; as well as a judge on major culinary competitions such as, *Master Chef*, *Chopped*, *Puro Chef*, *Top Chef* and *Top Chef Middle East*, and recently, on the season finale of *Worst Cooks in America* on the Food Network.

Chef James is also the author of *Cooking at Home with Chef James* that has been on the best-selling list for 39 weeks. A winner of three National Emmy Awards, Chef James has become a leader in the culinary world thanks to his love of food, both in front of and behind the cameras. His philosophy is that food can change the world.

Translated by Jenny Y. Lam-Chowdhury

MONO

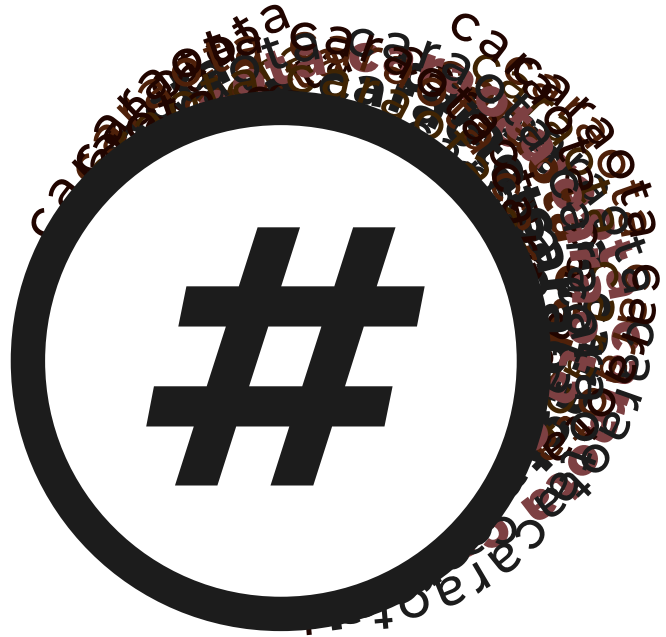
by **Ricardo Chanetón**



@MonoHKG
@RChaneton

Hong Kong SAR

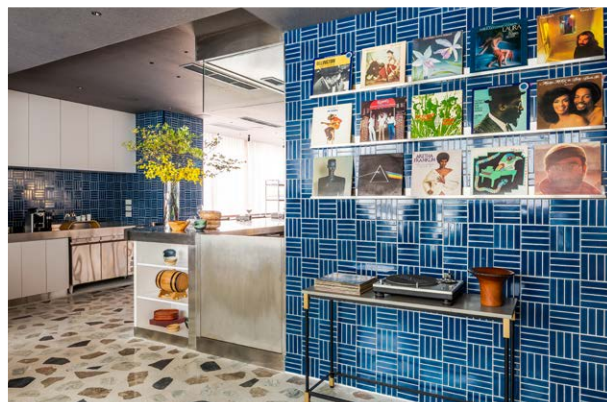
¡¡¡Qué sifrina que es esta arepa!!
How posh is this arepa!!!



My story with the arepa is a testament to the power of food in connecting cultures and preserving one's culinary heritage. I was born in Venezuela and grew up with the arepa — a beloved staple food in my hometown. In Venezuela, the arepa is more than just a dish; it is a symbol of comfort, home, and tradition. For many Venezuelans, the arepa holds a special place in their hearts, as it is often the first solid food they consume as babies.

The arepa represents a profound culinary heritage deeply rooted in Venezuelan culture. It is an ancestral bread made with a native Latin American ingredient – corn. Arepa is considered the national dish of Venezuela and is a signature dish that reflects our country's culinary identity. In fact, the arepa is so iconic that it has its own emoji on your phone, highlighting its significance to Venezuelans.

Arepas are more than just a dish for me; they evoke memories from my childhood and represent a strong connection to my Venezuelan heritage. Similar to the onigiri in Japan, arepas are lovingly prepared by mothers and grandmothers for their children. They are often enjoyed for breakfast and hold a special place in the hearts of Venezuelans. The arepa reminds me of the mornings when I would savour this delicious bread, filled with cheese and ham or any other desired ingredients. The aroma of the arepa would fill the car on the way to school, but it could only be eaten during recess, making it a cherished treat. It serves as a reminder of my roots and the love shared by my mother and grandmother—a comforting embrace in the form of food.





Moving to Hong Kong offered me a new and vibrant culinary landscape to explore. The city's dynamic and diverse food scene provides endless opportunities for culinary professionals and food enthusiasts alike. Hong Kong is a melting pot of different cuisines, offering a wide variety of dining options from around the world, but I recognized that many people aren't aware of the incredible diversity and complexity of Latin American cuisine, particularly in Asia, and saw an opportunity to showcase refined Latin American flavours at my restaurant, MONO.

Interestingly, there are notable parallels between Chinese and Latin American cooking. Both regions boast incredible cultural and culinary diversity, with each locality having its distinct gastronomic traditions. Chinese cuisine itself encompasses a wide range of regional variations, each with its unique flavours and cooking techniques. Similarly, Latin America is a vast continent with diverse culinary traditions, from the rich and flavourful dishes of Peru to the hearty barbecues of Argentina. Both Chinese and Latin American cuisines share a variety of ingredients (such as chayote and jicama) and cooking methods, reflecting the cultural and geographical similarities of their respective regions. My journey from Venezuela to Europe and finally to Hong Kong brought with it an appreciation for my Latin American background and a desire to introduce the flavours of my homeland to a new audience.

Mono is not just a restaurant for me; it is a deeply personal endeavour. It serves as a platform for me to share my life's story — my roots, my experiences, and my aspirations. The restaurant is drenched in nostalgia and curated with

intention, creating a dining experience that is both personal and reflective of my journey. Each dish on the menu tells a story and represents a part of my culinary heritage. At MONO, I have carefully curated a menu that combines my Latin American heritage with my training in French fine dining. The arepa holds a special place on this menu, serving as a bridge between my Venezuelan roots and my current culinary exploration. By including the arepa on my menu, I offer diners a taste of my childhood, a connection to my past, and an introduction to the vibrant flavours of Latin America.

While the arepa served at MONO retains the essence of the original dish, I add my own twist to elevate it to fine dining standards. Instead of traditional fillings like chicken, I incorporate luxurious ingredients such as crab meat, fish, and, at times, even sea urchin. This innovative approach showcases the restaurant's commitment to pushing culinary boundaries and creating unique flavour combinations. The arepa at MONO becomes a reflection of my culinary journey.

In conclusion, to me, the arepa exemplifies the power of food in preserving cultural heritage and bridging gaps between different culinary traditions. The arepa, a beloved dish from my hometown in Venezuela, has found a new home on the menu at MONO in Hong Kong. Through my culinary creations, I have the opportunity showcase the diverse flavours and beautiful produce of Latin America while paying homage to my roots and my new environment. The result is a dining experience that is both nostalgic and innovative, offering a taste of Venezuela and a window to refined Latin American cuisine in Asia.



The Venezuelan Arepa on the World's Table

by Ivanova Decán Gambús

On August 6, 2003, New York Times readers came across a review by Eric Asimov, a wine and food critic, dedicated to Caracas Arepa Bar: "A tiny spot in the East Village that may finally win for Venezuelan arepas the recognition they deserve (...) The arepas are superb, with a subtle corn flavor that is amplified by the various fillings." With a trained palate and visionary gaze, Asimov did nothing other than predict the successful arrival of our arepa to the world's table, an enthusiastic and vigorous arrival that, by the way, since 2012 has summoned us every second Saturday in September to celebrate World Arepa Day.

Twelve years after the article in the NYT, the Eater portal publishes an article that also refers to the presence of the arepa in the New York gastronomic scene. Under the title "Arepa, Patacones y Perros con Todo: Is Venezuelan New York's Next Food Fad?" restaurant critic Robert Sietsema wrote the following:

"Gradually our Venezuelan menu has been fleshed out and we've gone beyond stuffed arepas to other forms of street and casual food (a category Venezuelans are inordinately fond of), such as deep-fried *empanadas* with corn casings, plantain sandwiches called *patacones*, elaborately dressed hot dogs and hamburgers, and *cachapas*—giant flapjacks made from fresh corn stuffed and folded over like crepes. So, too, have we learned to appreciate more traditional types of Venezuelan cooking, and even had a taste of what might be viewed as Venezuelan haute cuisine."

On the other side of the Atlantic, references to the arepa multiply in gastronomy pages of important media outlets. For example, El Comidista, the famous online portal of El País, published in 2019 a recipe for arepas with chicken and mango sauce preceded by the following comment: "It's time for the arepa. Crunchy, tender, simple, and with all the flavors you can imagine, it is the summer sandwich with a gluten-free bread prepared in a pan in the twinkling of an eye."

And in 2020, journalist Philip Sweeney wrote an article in the British newspaper *The Independent* titled “How Venezuelan food is slowly finding its way to the UK”. The summary reads: “You may already be familiar with the Colombian *arepa*, but Venezuela’s is bigger and better—and political unrest is driving its spread to other countries.”

With an international visa without an expiration date granted by almost 8 million Venezuelan emigrants, for more than two decades, our arepa began its incessant journey, crossing borders, recreating its own flavors, embracing foreign flavors. Never like now, the arepa—and particularly the stuffed arepa—travels around the world showing off its versatility, added to its ability to open business opportunities for Venezuelans in the gastronomic sector.

Food is part of our cultural baggage and it is impossible to leave behind the memory that holds our gastronomic traditions, which are forms of representation that integrate practical values and symbolic values. Food is also a vehicle to establish bridges with others and their culture. When immigrants find themselves in a foreign territory, their manners in the kitchen and at the table is a way to approach and even to insert themselves into societies different than their own. The exchange of ingredients, techniques, and formulas, turns food into a mediator and a connector between different cultures. Hence, the arepa has become a kind of culinary ambassador for Venezuela and, in this spontaneous process of internationalization, it has been successfully incorporated into fast food offerings in cities like New York, Madrid, or Buenos Aires. In this regard, the journalist and expert in food and wine Miro Popic wrote in the newspaper *Tal Cual* (2017) the following:

“The interest for the arepa as a new food option by those trying it for the first time is increasing rapidly. The global recognition that this bread made out of corn is experiencing today is occurring mainly in the context of ethnic cuisines with which migrant groups introduce new culinary options to the societies where they arrive. Many of these culinary initiatives emerged originally to satisfy the needs of Venezuelans themselves as they acquired population representation in their hosting countries. In most cases, its consumer base widened to include not only fellow countrymen and neighbors, but other communities eager to experience the exotic, thus the arepa is ceasing to be a trend to becoming mainstream.”

It is worth noting that the presence of Venezuelan gastronomy—particularly of the arepa on the world’s table—is not due to a marketing strategy to export our foodways as a product with cultural and touristic values. Unfortunately, it is the consequence of the deepest political, economic, and social crisis in the contemporary history of the country, which has led millions of Venezuelans to go abroad in search of better living conditions. Thus, we began to talk about the “Venezuelan diaspora” to refer to an unprecedented migratory phenomenon in this country.

The Venezuelan diaspora in numbers

There are **7,320,225** Venezuelans who are migrants and refugees around the world, according to data from the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V), coordinated by the agencies UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) of the UN, and associated with more than 200 different organizations (including civil society institutions, religious organizations, and NGOs.) This figure leaves evidence that these Venezuelans constitute one of the largest migratory groups in the world.

Of the aforementioned total, **6,136,402** of these migrants—which is equivalent to 84%—are concentrated in Latin American countries, with Colombia in the lead (2.48 million), followed by Peru (1.52 million), Ecuador (502,000), Brazil (449,000), Chile (444,000), and Argentina (221,000). Further north, Mexico and the countries of Central America and the Caribbean also host large numbers of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, totaling just under 525,000 migrants.

The remaining 16%, equivalent to **1,183,823** people, are distributed among the US and Canada with 575,500, three European countries—Spain with 438,380, Italy with 59,400, and Portugal with 27,700—, and the rest of the world with 85,843 Venezuelans.

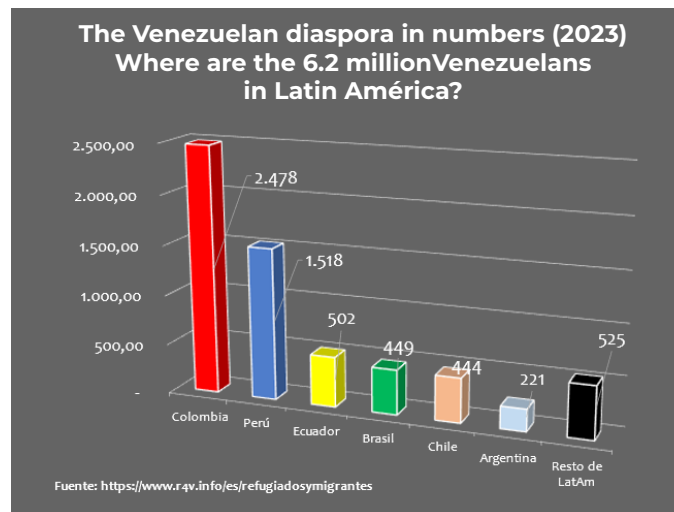
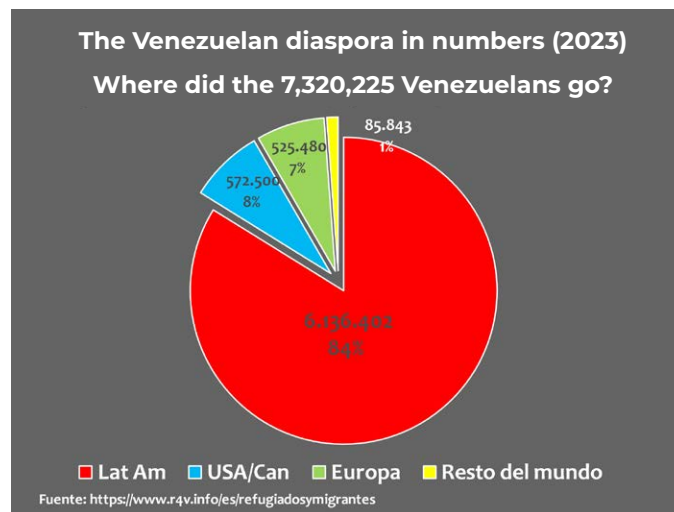
How does the Venezuelan arepa taste like outside our borders?

For those who were born in this land, the arepa carries a symbolic load that connect us emotionally with the country, but if we dare to set aside those things that prevent us from seeing it with different eyes, it can also become an opportunity to open up dialogue and communication, to begin showing how diverse our gastronomic culture is, and create new paths in other latitudes. In this sense, the colloquial expression, “you have to seek a way to earn the arepa”, which refers to the need to work in order to eat, it’s quite suitable when you have to start from scratch in another country.

Throughout these twenty years, this Venezuelan food icon continues to show its great potential to make less heavy the burden and vicissitudes—emotional and financial—that every emigrant must endure. In addition to the fact that making and eating an arepa on foreign soil maintains a sense of belonging, it can also enable the possibility of connecting with the food system of the new country and become an opportunity to earn a living.

Seen as a tool for entrepreneurship, initiatives around the arepa can have an easy start, at least to ensure basic sustainability: its business model is built on the basis of low start-up costs and a technology that is quite easy to replicate and, from there, it must adapt to the tastes and preferences of its markets, preserving what distinguishes it and makes it different.

Given that the organ of taste is not the tongue but the brain, that the evaluation criteria when enjoying or rejecting a food are actually learned, and that food is



part of the cultural heritage of an individual and their society, for those who left Venezuela, an arepa consumed outside the terroir will always have—beyond its organoleptic characteristics—the flavor of intangibles such as, roots, tradition, identity, and affections. If instead of *telita* cheese they accompany it with *halloumi* cheese or if, in the absence of *asado negro*, they stuff it with *cochinita pibil*, the soft and steaming arepa combined with foreign flavors, will help them recreate the treasured dish, not only to satiate their hunger, but to connect with the remote and familiar table and with the sentiment of being Venezuelan, because with each bite, they will also eat memories and savor longings.

IDG

Caracas, August 2023

Translated by Jenny Y. Lam-Chowdhury

Ivanova Decán Gambús

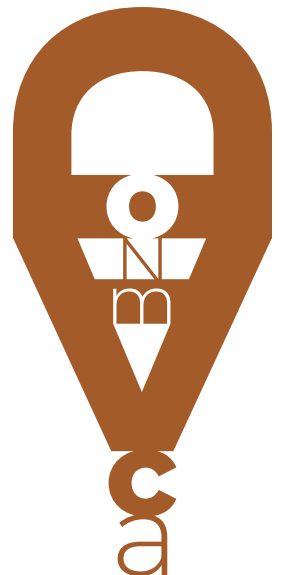
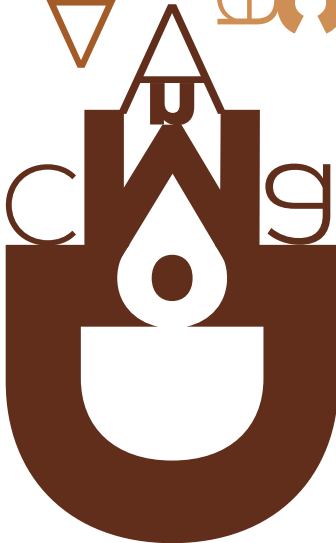
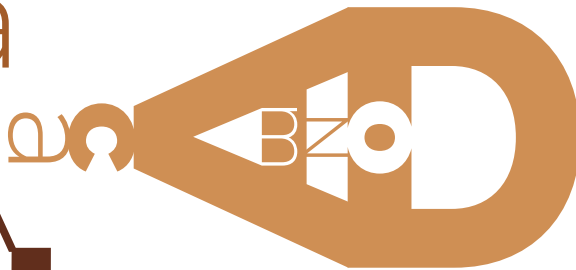
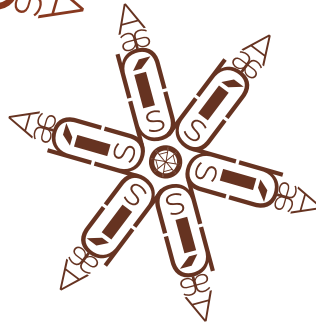
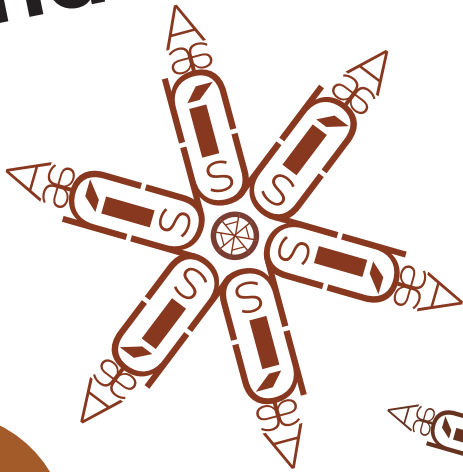
 @ivanovadecan

 @ivanovadecan

With a Degree in Art from Universidad Central de Venezuela, Ivanova has an extensive professional career in the field of cultural management. Among the institutions she has directed are the Francisco Narváez Museum of Contemporary Art, the Espacios Culturales de la CANTV, and the Jesús Soto Museum of Modern Art. Cultural manager, university professor, lecturer, communicator, art and gastronomy projects consultant, she has several published works on gastronomic culture. Editorial co-director and co-author of “Nuestra Cocina a la manera de Caracas. Tributo al libro Rojo de Armando Scannone” (Balsam/Alto, 2013) and co-author of “Italia en Venezuela: Inmigración y Gastronomía” (Fundavag, 2017). Ivanova is currently a member of the Superior Council of the Francisco Narváez Museum of Contemporary Art and the Culinary Institute of Caracas. Since 2010, she has been a member of the Venezuelan Academy of Gastronomy, an institution where she is currently the President.



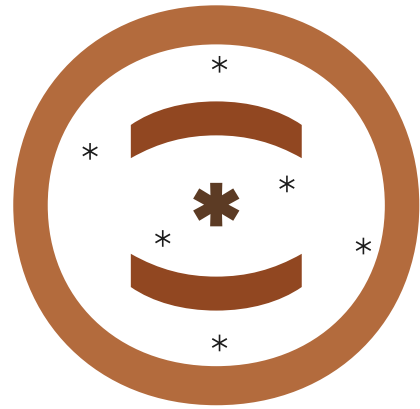
And for the dessert...



Translated by Jenny Y. Lam-Chowdhury

Sweet Anise Arepitas

by Katiuska Ramírez



Ingredients:

- ½ kg (~1.10 lb) pre-cooked cornmeal
- 30 g (~1 oz) wheat flour with leavening agent
- 1 g (~0.03 oz) salt (pinch)
- ½ brick of shredded *papelón* (evaporated unrefined whole cane sugar), preferably, one with a lighter color
- 6 cups of water
- 4 tablespoons of anise seeds
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 3 grains of allspice
- 2 cups of neutral-flavored vegetable oil for frying
- ½ kg (~1.10 lb) fresh white cheese: *Guayanés, Mano, Telita, Santa Bárbara...*

Directions:

1. In a bowl, add 4 cups of water and add the *papelón* to dilute it.
2. In a pot, add the diluted *papelón* and 2 tablespoons of anise seed, cinnamon, allspice, and over medium high heat, cook until it boils. When it comes to a boil, turn it off immediately. Let it cool and pass through a sieve. Add the remaining 2 cups of water; this will be the liquid to make the dough.
3. In a deep bowl, add the dry ingredients. Mix the cornmeal with the wheat flour, a pinch of salt, and 2 tablespoons of anise seeds. Start pouring the liquid little by little until it completely covers it. You won't always need all the liquid. Mix with the help of a spoon until the liquid has been completely absorbed by the dry ingredients. Let the mixture rest so that the flour can hydrate.
4. With clean hands, begin to knead gently until obtaining a compact but soft dough.

5. In a deep frying pan, add the oil and put it on the stove over medium heat.
6. Divide the dough into small portions. Make a ball, flatten it with your palms until the arepa is 1/2 centimeter thick or thinner.
7. Add the sweet arepa to the hot oil and with a spoon, cook it until it puffs up and begins to brown, approximately 1 minute per side.
8. Flip the arepa with tongs, and repeat the process until finishing up all the dough.
9. It can be stuffed by opening it in the middle and adding plenty of fresh white cheese.
10. It can also remain closed and served with cheese on top.
11. Serve and enjoy while they are warm.



Katiuska Ramírez was born in Venezuela. A cook from heart and soul. Chef in French pastry and chocolate. Sommelier. Neurogastro-nomer. Gastronomic business consultant.



Arepa Mandoca

by Víctor Moreno

Ingredients:

- 1 kg (~2.20 lb) of plantain, ripe
- 1 kg (~2.20 lb) pre-cooked cornmeal
- 500 g (~1.10 lb) hard white (fresh) cheese, grated
- 375 g (~0.80 lb) sugar
- 133 g (~4.7 oz) *papelón* (evaporated unrefined whole cane sugar)



Directions:

1. Peel the plantain and cut into thick slices. Place it with the *papelón* in a pot, add water to cover, and boil until it is soft to puree, and water has reduced by half. With a food processor, mix the plantain with the same warm water until obtaining a smooth puree. Let it cool.
2. In a large bowl, place the plantain puree, cornmeal flour, cheese, and sugar. Mix well. Knead until all the ingredients are well combined. If the dough dries out, add water little by little. Make sure the dough remains homogeneous and firm.
3. Take small portions and shape them as arepas. Fry in a cauldron with plenty of very hot oil.

Note: If the plantains are not completely ripe, add 160g (~5.7 oz) *papelón* to the water.



VÍCTOR MORENO

www.morenocaracas.com

 @geopaladar90.3fm
@victormorenoc

Víctor was born in Caracas in 1979. Trained at the Centro de Estudios Gastronómicos (CEGA) in 1998, he was a disciple of Santí Santamaría and Andrés Madrigal at El Raco de Can Fabes restaurant, with three Michelin stars, in Catalonia, Spain, 2001-2002. He completed his training as a chef at El Señorío del Sulco in Lima, Peru, in 2003, returned to Venezuela, and worked as a professor at CEGA for 6 years. He is recognized by the Venezuelan Academy of Gastronomy with the Tenedor De Oro 2007. Víctor is currently the executive chef and partner at Moreno, a restaurant located in the Centro Turístico Altamira Village, in the city of Caracas. He defines himself as a guardian of the culinary tradition of his country and an eternal lover of its flavors. He's an unconditional collaborator of chef José Andrés' NGO World Central Kitchen in Venezuela, and as its ambassador, he organizes and gathers people and foundations that are in sync with the objectives of the organization.



Alfarepas or Alfajor of arepa

by Briceida Barragán



Jorge D'Agostini, author of the book “Alfajor, an Argentine icon”, tells us that alfajores arrived from Spain to the American continent in the 15th century. But Spaniards inherited it from the Arabs, who lived there for 700 years and influenced all of Europe with many culinary preparations. It was called “al-hasú” which in Arabic means stuffed. Like many words, it evolved and ended up as “alfajor.” It is in Argentina where dulce de leche is incorporated and given that sandwich shape. The alfajor is another story of successful migration; it went through a process of adaptation and achieved its new identity by combining it with typical ingredients from the new place.

Merienda, a midday break and snack time, is a tradition that plays a fundamental role in Argentine culture, not only as a break to satisfy hunger, but as a typical social moment, rooted in everyday life. *Alfajores*, croissants, or *facturas*, sweet pastries, accompanied by *mate*, a typical Argentine drink, or coffee are the most common snacks, and they are conducive to interactions between friends and family, creating a space for conversation and relaxation. In my process of adaptation, socializing, and creating new rituals, I was inspired by the alfajor and wanted to combine it with my traditions. My result was this recipe, where you can identify the flavor of corn and where we preserved the technique of shaping the arepas with our hands to be the sides of the alfajor, that will then be filled with dulce de leche to enjoy and share with friends.

Ingredients:

- 210 g (~0.5 lb) cornmeal
- 80 g (~3 oz) sugar
- 80 g (~3 oz) unsalted butter, room temperature
- 2 eggs, room temperature
- 5 g (~0.20 oz) baking powder



- 1 tbsp vanilla essence
- Enough dulce de leche (also known as *arequipe*, *manjar*, or *cajeta*)
- Parchment paper and plastic wrap
- A baking tray

Directions:

1. In a bowl, add the sugar and eggs at room temperature. Integrate everything with a whisk. Add the melted butter at room temperature and the tablespoon of vanilla. Beat until everything is integrated.
2. Sift the cornmeal and baking powder into the mixture in two batches to avoid lumps. Finish integrating with your hands. Cover with plastic wrap and keep it in the refrigerator for 1 or 2 hours.
3. Preheat the oven to 180°C (356°F)
4. Cover the tray with parchment paper.
5. Take the dough out of the refrigerator and make *arepitas*, mini arepas, with your hands. For this amount of dough you can make 12 to 24 arepitas depending on the size you make them. Put them on the tray keeping a distance, because they will grow a little. Bake for 15 minutes or until golden. Remove from the oven and let them cool on the tray until completely cold.
6. Take an arepita and on the flat side, put a generous amount of dulce de leche (*arequipe*, *manjar*, or *cajeta*), and then with another arepita make a “sandwich” and press lightly so that it sticks and the filling reaches the edge.



BRICEIDA BARRAGÁN

 @obarragandr

A native of Barquisimeto, Briceida is a chef, business woman, and dog lover. She has managed several kitchens, including a LatAm 50 Best. In 2010, she founded the Adelis Sisirucá Venezuelan Cooking School with her friends, and has contributed to the training of several graduating classes of chefs. In 2021 they obtained the *Mención Tenedor de Oro*, awarded by the Venezuelan Academy of Gastronomy. She currently lives in Buenos Aires.

Sweet Wheat Arepa

by Daniel Molina *



Ingredients:

- 575 g (~1.30 lb) wheat flour
- 225 g (~½ lb) warm water
- 100 g (~3.5 oz) panela honey, a syrup made from boiling *papelón* (evaporated unrefined whole cane sugar) in water, sometimes flavored with spices like cinnamon or cloves.
- 3 g (~0.10 oz) of salt

Directions:

1. In a deep container, mix the warm water with the panela honey until everything is homogeneous. Add the flour and mix well but without kneading. Let it rest for 30 minutes in the container covered with a table towel.
2. After 30 minutes, incorporate the ingredients and knead.
3. Separate in balls, knead, and let it rest for 15 minutes. With the help of a rolling pin, roll out in a circular shape and proceed to place them on a hot *budare*, a traditional metal griddle, prick with a fork, and cook until they are golden brown on both sides. Serve with *nata*, a cross between cream and sour cream, smoked cheese, and hot chocolate.

Daniel Molina An autodidactic Andean chef. Venezuelan. With 25 years of professional career. Writer and researcher of Andean and Venezuelan cuisine. In 2016, he created the Kitchen Without Ego Movement and offered a talk at the School of Gastronomy of the University Institute of Technology, during which he revealed his interest in turning Venezuela into a reference brand based on Andean cuisine. At the same time, he has underpinned the processes of preparation, culinary literacy, and commensality for future generations. His permanent research and exploration of the popular and ancestral Andean recipes, as well as the permanent revision and revitalization of the surrounding ingredients, vitally nourish his cuisine and proposal.





The Venezuelan Academy of Gastronomy rewards Daniel Molina's perseverance with the mention of the Don Armando Scanonne 2023 award. Today he is in charge of several kitchens in the city of Maracaibo.



TO OUR DAILY AREPA



Translated by Ronin Metsa



MY WANDERING AREPA (OR THOUSANDS OF THEM)

(Photographs for the memory)

by Luis Ricardo Dávila

*To Doña Zoila, who, at 17 years old, kneaded my first arepas.
It was she who set the table and the splendor of the world.*

*From white and yellow corn was the flesh made,
and from the dough were molded arms and legs.*

Popol Vuh

I

In a small town of farmers, scholars, jurisconsults and ecclesiastics called Santiago de los Caballeros de Merida, an austere Andean province where peace and work are sung, with few but very steep streets and only two directions, everything was either up or down, the sides were forbidden because they led to dizzying precipices, “the little hells”, only suitable to deposit cattle or other species that perished in the plateau. I was born there and lived my first years there during the second half of the 20th century. I appreciated, out of curiosity, the little birds in the air; I hunted squirrels for fun; I conjugated words out of passion, and I tasted my first food out of gluttony. Among my first meals, sitting on a high rustic wooden chair amid the chirping of those same little birds or near the bugles of the roosters that unleashed the fog of the neighboring lots, was the ineffable, steaming and smoky arepa. Crumbs of a dough without shell, impregnated with butter, and put almost by force in my mouth constitute the region of my gustatory and alimentary formation.

II

But the experience of the arepa disenchanted me; its flavor displeased me because it tasted like nothing. Only the so-called Creole butter, made with fresh cow’s milk and grain salt, made my taste buds explode, giving flavor to everything I swallowed

because I chewed very little. As the arepas were made in the legendary *pilón*, a grain or two would sneak into the insipid dough and that made me burst with joy, which I expressed with the language of my hands and legs, waving them up, down and to the sides. These first experiences under the yoke of the arepa remind me today, when I remember them, of the endearing world of fables and dreams. It was a game, or its ingestion was passed off as a game, to achieve my first diet, with the usual results of roundness and obesity. “Chubby boy is always pretty”, my elders used to exclaim.

III

I am still looking for myself in that past, in relation to the “arepeutic” feeding (a set of practices and knowledge directed to the experience, the appetites and flavors of the arepa), and this is what I am finding. In those times, I often heard the popular Creole adage that every child who comes into the world brings his arepa under his arm, or that of the responsible adult who, with the sweat of his brow, brings the arepa home. Searching for my childhood, my adolescence and my youth means returning, I do not know if with the arepa under my arm. I really do not know. But what I do know is that this exercise of returning to an imaginary past formation of my palate goes through a search for my origins, where diminutives abound: “arepita de manteca, masita de maíz”¹ processed by the industrious arms of Lorenzita, and kneaded by the silky hands of my mommy, made my food a tender story. Welcome, then, to that playful place of the *abracadabra, pata de cabra!*² Where life is celebrated by eating arepa with butter, even without knowing the legend of the alligator-man of the carnival of Barranquilla. The flavors were structured in my tender palate as a joyful game, as much as the joyful mysteries of the Holy Rosary were prayed in family, usually after loading the belly with succulent dishes.

Some faces and aromas emerge in the half-light of the distant smoke from the stove. Later in my life, variants of the arepa appeared. One of them was called “*pira*”, loved by my father and assembled by my mother. It consisted of breaking an arepa with the hands, at the same table and on the plate, into disparate pieces that we then mixed with grated Creole cheese or curd from the moors wrapped in *frailejon*³ leaves, garnished with oily, ripe avocados almost in cream, and a fried egg that crowned the succulent delicacy. It was a dinner dish, and if my elders got too gluttonous or the day’s agitation had been strong, Spam strips or Rödel’s sardines in olive oil, flavored with truffle and pickle, were placed on it. Passing that kind of digestive trigger forced us to take big sips of a sweet *guarapo*⁴ or a coffee with milk, creamy, sweet and fatty because it was made with the fresh milk of the cow, avoiding the risk of choking. Once in a while, gluttony would bring me a steaming cup of Ovomaltine⁵, the best infant food, according to what I heard. Delicious variants of the arepa and its accompaniments, no doubt. They honored the structure acquired by the reshy-piled white corn, cooked in an earthenware *budare*.

IV

There is no literary variant more prone to the formation of food sensibility than the memory of the first tastes, which are usually unstable and unpredictable. Through them, we can glimpse the dawn of life, particularly with the arepa because it is an early riser. When aromas and flavors, tastes and colors, joys and loves are something that is learned, memories like this one of my first arepas are even more attractive. Obviously, later things become more complex, and the variants show their sensual faces. We go through stages in which flavors are discovered day by day, in a kind of movement that does not stop, hour after hour, three times a day, it is the space we have to master the taste and what is linked to food. The characters that embodied this space, which is none other than the kitchen, showed no limitations in the peculiar vision of the world that reigned in that agrarian, literate and ecclesiastical region of my childhood and adolescence. A special place in this memory is occupied by the moment when the so-called “Andean arepa” appeared in my gustatory and nutritional repertoire.

Now, corn has given way to wheat. It was brought down from our high moors, where it was cultivated, and its grains were processed, turned into flour and mixed with water, milk, and pieces of butter, “*papelón* or *panela*”⁶. A mixture ready to be kneaded by skilled hands and rounded by geometrician fingers, the result was a perfect figure that resembled a flying saucer, just as we imagined it back then. Thus was born for my palate the so-called “*arepa de harina*” (arepa of flour), to distinguish it from the other arepa. In the budare and stove, they were forged, but not before sinking the fork into them, to open some dimples that would allow the succulent dough to breathe during its cooking. This idea of the stove or the newly appearing modern “gasplan” kitchen was like an oasis growing inexhaustibly. For us children in formation, all of this, including cooking techniques, was like an enchanted forest of sleeping silences, from which we would not emerge unless we oriented ourselves by leaving bread crumbs, corn arepa balls, or bits of wheat arepas. It was to reproduce life. What at one time meant one thing could later represent another. With the arrival and popularization of pre-cooked corn flour, it was the turn of Tomasita’s spongy arepas. They released the shell as if they were inflated with hot air that, like a balloon, ascended through my senses, forming an extensive and thin disc ready to please the palate. Not without first placing in them the most desired passengers or fillings.

V

I do not remember how old I was when I reconciled with the arepas, but I do know that I was already quite old. Having become a cooking animal, my “arepeutic” repertoire grew as my food self-awareness. The expansion of the menu was a guarantee of greater diversity in variations on the same theme. Then the fried arepa appeared in my imagination. It was the same basic arepa but taken to the budare greased with lard Los Tres Cochinitos⁷, where it remained until it became golden on both sides, like a solar disk. We covered it with Creole cheese or curd, sometimes we used the ineffable Diablitos Underwood, and from there it showed all its strength as a native food. My impressions of the arepa were beginning to distance themselves from the anger it had caused me in my early years. There was an irrefutable fact in my perception of the marvel that was the filling inside the absorbing dough. Something magical whose only measure was the limits of imagination. That the filling moved on the scale of the simple cheese to that of the complex *pabellón*⁸ is somewhat surprising. How many of us today yearn for the arepa stuffed with “*pabellón criollo*”, with fried plantains and everything! It is also surprising to go from the shredded meat to the octopus, or from the *reina pepeada* with chicken to the *perico*⁹ with its greasy *chicharrones*¹⁰. The magic of the filling differentiates the arepa from other corn-based foods.

Little by little, I was coming out of my childish confinement, and I was beginning to become an adult. Then, food reception and representation began to operate in more complex territories. And yet, its impact on the formation of my food sensibility became much more powerful than what we registered in the infantile instance. I now understand food as a laboratory for life. To which, I owe an unwavering respect for flavors, aromas, preparation techniques, and forms that not only define themselves but are expressions that carry within them other forms, desires and satisfactions.

Like all myths, food ones have a beginning that is usually nebulous. My first relationship with the arepa was rather disappointing, but its understanding enriched the environment of my food sensibility in an absolute and irreversible way. To the point that today, not only outside my native region but also outside the country where I was born, the arepa always accompanies my food saddlebags. Mérida was the seat of my first land. There I learned and caressed the three syllables that make up the arepa. Then I escaped and wandered the world. My home now is the words, and my land hangs in the air, stoking the fire of my memory and my senses. This pure arepa of the lineage, whispered in the previous lines, makes a great joy burn in the palate. This joy clears all sorrow and sadness with a simple piece. The brief story of my arepa and I is the first of unforgettable crumbs, at the same time, a powerful demonstration that art can make a pact with eating, with gastronomy and with life itself. It is that cosmic

link that we establish with the fruits of the earth and with the way of preparing and consuming them, but above all with the way of loving and remembering them. A marvelous and splendid act, a magnificent and stupendous act—what more can be said? How else can it be qualified? The tree of life puts us in the midst of unique fruits, only for us to lose our heads among them. This is my story, where - according to the opinion of a certain doña Pepa - love and passion have no effect without the arepa. Or as the Popol Vuh says: “Only corn dough went into the flesh of our fathers (...)”.

In New York City, May 1st, 2023.

¹Typical Venezuelan expressions meaning little arepa of lard and little dough of corn respectively.

²Folkloric magic expression.

³Andean moorland plant with puvecent leaves.

⁴(Quechua voice) Hot drink made from raw sugar cane and water.

⁵Ovaltine

⁶Unrefined cane sugar in cone or rectangular shape.

⁷Lard brand.

⁸Venezuelan national dish, based on black beans, rice, shredded meat, and fried sweet plattains.

⁹Scrambled egg recipe with tomato and onion

¹⁰. Young pork skin, roasted and fried.

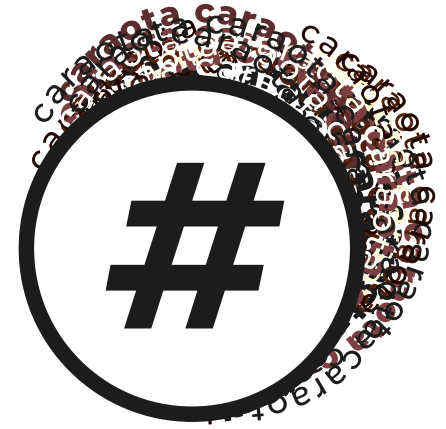


Luis Ricardo Dávila Writer, editor and university professor. Researcher at Columbia University. Author of an extensive work in the field of the history of discursive formations in Hispanic America.

National Prize of History (Venezuela, 2016). His latest work, co-authored with Rafael Cartay, is *Historia y Semiología de la Alimentación en América Latina* (Generis Publishing, 2023).

Arbitrary Conversations about Arepa Illustrations

by Tulio Hernández



— I always wanted to make a children's book about arepa.

— And how do you imagine it?

— Simple. First, a very brief text explaining the arepa and its special meaning for Venezuelans. And a first drawing of a very nice arepa waving a welcoming greeting.

— Then?

— Then we associate the arepa with many objects, or on many objects, and you illustrate them.

— Give me a case.

— For example, in the next two pages, because I imagine the drawings on a double page - the arepa is a full moon shining over mountains like the *Merideñas*. Shyly peeking over the peaks and the mountains.

— Not a bad idea. Easy to draw

— And the moon — sorry, the arepa, smiles.

— And what else?

— The following image is a bicycle that instead of the typical wheels with spokes, is made with two arepas.

— Hehehehe, it would be an arepa bike.

— Yes. -Good name. And the person riding it is disguised as an ear of corn, it could be that they are in a carnival parade.

— I see it. What's next?

— In a kind of laboratory, an engineer or carpenter with rulers, compasses and a vernier makes the calculations and accurately measures the diameter and thickness while molding a perfect arepa, round and harmonious as in the architects' drawings.

— And what is this descriptive geometry all about?

— It would be the reply to a Venezuelan song popularized by Gualberto Ibarreto

that went something like “My grandmother never learned what geometry is, but a very round arepa always came out of her hands”. We could draw the grandmother and put the two round arepas, the one made with geometry and the one made by manual experience, together.

— I saw that. It’s easy to represent that. We could be inspired by illustrations of Leonardo da Vinci working in a laboratory. We’re already a few pages in. Then?

— You know that in baseball, an arepa is equivalent to a zero. And when a team loses without scoring a single run, it is said that they got nine arepas.

— So?

— We could paint a handmade board of an amateur baseball game with the nine innings, and in the boxes of each inning of the losing team, we would place an arepa with a mocking expression. Nine arepas.

— That drawing is also easy. A little silly for my taste. I don’t like baseball.

— But among the fans it’s one of the most amusing jokes they make when they beat the opposing team.

— Well. Let’s go on.

— Then we take a frame and instead of transparent lenses, we put an arepa in each eye. Half-translucent arepas. To continue with your nominations would be the arepa glasses. Or in Colombia and Spain, the “gafarepas”.

— Next?

— It would be good to draw a big dog, if possible a St. Bernard, and instead of a leather muzzle, we put a muzzle made of arepas, it would be like a collar; several arepas surround his mouth and fall down to his neck.

— How so? My designer friend, who is Colombian, asks me.

— In Venezuela, “muzzle of arepas” is a kind of metaphor for bribery or intimidation. How they shut you up so that you don’t denounce or be an accomplice to an act of corruption. As the arepa is so precious and valued, the best way to keep you quiet is an arepa muzzle.

— Good one. Another one?

— There is a very important one. You put a child of one or two years old, one of those who are learning to walk, and you put an arepa in the place of the armpit. The left or the right.

— I don’t understand.

— In Venezuela, they say that every child comes with an arepa under his arm.

— Oh, that's nice. And?

— Well, later, we make a kind of collage with the types of arepas. That has already been done a lot. They are women's arepas. Because the arepa is a woman. Arepas with legs and, if possible, wallets or necklaces. The "Reina Pepeada", one of the most prized, is filled with chicken breasts or shredded chicken, with avocado and mayonnaise that intermingle to form a paste. We draw her very flirtatious, obviously with a dress of black circles on a white background, and her very vintage purse. The "Dominó", stuffed with white cheese and black beans, is obviously presented as a domino stone, preferably the double six, and a very Creole hat. The "Peluda", stuffed with shredded cheese and shredded meat, if possible, go with long curly hair and a somewhat hippie dress. And so on.

— At the end, we put an immense arepa that covers a part of the maps of Colombia and Venezuela that has no borders. And a text: Is it Colombian or Venezuelan? And a wise-looking indigenous grandfather says: "It is as Colombian as Venezuelan because it is from the original pre-Columbian peoples".

— Then, in a starry night, we put a spaceship flying, which we already know, as we imagine all of them circular, and a Mexican tortilla, and in the middle an arepa with a superhero's cape that flies ahead. Underneath a text that says: "It's not a spaceship; it's not a tortilla; it's the Super Arepa!"

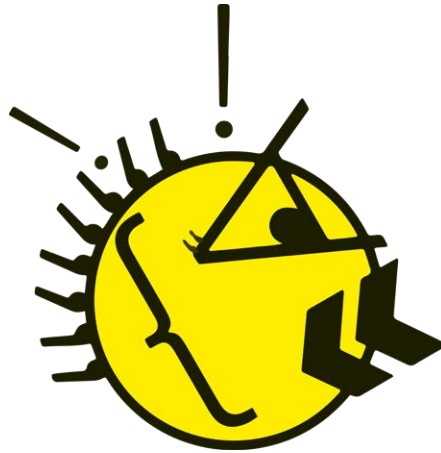
— We can imagine many other drawings. We listen to suggestions... And at the end, a super nice arepa says "goodbye".



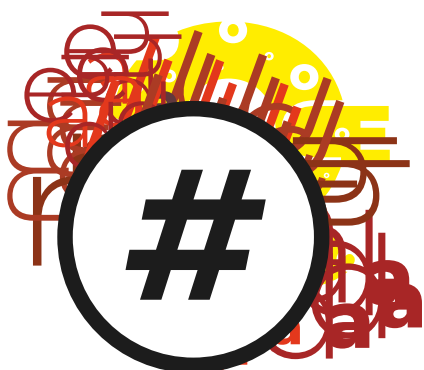
Tulio Hernández is a Venezuelan sociologist, writer and editor. He has combined academic activity with public and private cultural management and the profession of press columnist. Among other publications, he directed, in the newspaper *El Nacional*, the collectible products "*Cocinar a la venezolana*" and "*Cocina del mundo a la venezolana*". He currently resides in Bogotá.

AREPA DECALOGUE

by **Miro Popić**



1. You will love the arepa as much as you love your loved ones and yourself.
2. You will make the arepa with your own hands and share it with those around you.
3. Your arepa will always be round no matter how square the situation is.
4. You will not desire your neighbor's arepa no matter how good it is.
5. You will knead your arepa with sweat and tears, and it will taste better.
6. Remember that neither the sun is cheese nor the moon is arepa.
7. No arepa is safe until you eat it.
8. Every arepa has a silver lining.
9. There is no hard arepa, no matter how much of a widow it may be.
10. Always remember that the first arepa was made in Venezuela.



MIRO POPIC

 @miropopiceditor

"There are four things that identify a people, territory, language, religion and cuisine. What we eat is what identifies us wherever we are."

Of Croatian origin, he was born in Chile and has lived in Venezuela for more than 40 years. Gastronomic journalist, food history researcher, writer and editor of books related to the plurality and identity of the cuisines on this continent, such as his trilogy *Comer en Venezuela: del cazavi a la espuma de yuca*. (2013), winner of the 2013 Golden Fork for Gastronomic Publication, an award granted by the Venezuelan Academy of Gastronomy (AVG). *El pastel que somos*. Identity and cuisine in Venezuela (2015), *El señor de los aliños: en busca del sabor perdido* (2017). And his book *Venezuela on the rocks!* (2018), winner of the 2018 Golden Fork for Gastronomic Publication by the AVG.



«GIVEN THAT THE ORGAN OF TASTE
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THAT THE EVALUATION CRITERIA WHEN
ENJOYING OR REJECTING A PARTICULAR
FOOD ARE ACTUALLY LEARNED, AND
THAT FOOD IS PART OF THE CULTURAL
HERITAGE OF AN INDIVIDUAL AND THEIR
SOCIETY...» IDG





This business model that we call «arepera» has been able to survive through time due to its qualities and innovations, and today, 70 years after the advent of El Chance, the Álvarez Siblings' store, it has become an institution. It is evident that it is a business model to be exported as well as a cultural, gastronomic, and industrial patrimony of our nation, and its influence will be felt in the stories that we share with you in this book.

