

Marcia Selden Catering offers a variety of mini empanadas, with flavors influenced by the chefs' backgrounds.



A Taste of Tradition

How my family's heritage influenced my love for Latin cuisine—and our menu

BY ROBIN SELDEN,
MANAGING PARTNER
AND EXECUTIVE CHEF OF
MARCIA SELDEN CATERING

Lucky for me, I grew up in a family where food was an expression of love. My Cuban grandmother affectionally referred to us as “Cubish” (Cuban and Jewish), which meant that we had some serious food coming across our dinner table, combining the flavors of Latin and Jewish/Russian/American cuisine, depending on who was cooking.

As a young child, I remember being fascinated watching my glamorous Nanny Edilia, a former Miss Cuba, tottering in the kitchen in her stilettos, smashing plantains with her bare hands as they came out of the hot oil so that she could drop them into the oil again. She created the most insanely *delicioso* tostones, sprinkling them ever so lightly with flaky sea salt. They were crispy perfection, and we always gobbled them up as fast as she could make them. Her handcrafted empanadas, savory gazpacho and seafood paella were my other favorite dishes that she seemed to effortlessly whip up at a moment's notice.

Latin Melting Pot

The influences of Spanish, African and Caribbean food culture come across in a colorful mash-up through Cuban cuisine. My great-grandparents came to Cuba from southern Spain, so much of what we tasted was influenced by those Andalusian Spanish flavors.

If you look to the Americas, you will find the staples of plantains, rice and beans still prevalent but done differently in every country, from Guatemala to Argentina. This, in my opinion, is what is so incredible about the melting pot of Latin food.

As I got older and had the opportunity to study in Spain and travel to other Latin countries—including Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Chile and so on—what I learned is that traditional recipes, including paella and empanadas, vary depending on where you are. Methods and ingredients can change even from town to town.

This really fascinated me, as I'm all about tradition and family recipes, but I also love to cook and make things

my own. At Marcia Selden Catering, we have chefs hailing from Argentina, Spain, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Puerto Rico, and each makes a different style of empanada. Everything from the pastry to the filling to the sauce is different. We celebrate the variety and get excited when a client wants a station where we can showcase the different options.

Inspired Adaptations

Let's “taco” about gazpacho and Latin cultures. Many Latin countries have adapted the original Spanish gazpacho recipe and put their own spin on it, adding corn, avocado and beans to their versions of this yummy tomato-based soup. Taking it a step further is avocado gazpacho, which is typically pureed and made creamy from the healthy vitamin-packed fruit. We make one that is so rich and delicious that you'd swear it's made with cream. We top it with jumbo lump crab, crispy fried jalapeños and sometimes even caviar to elevate the dish.

Marcia Selden Catering's veggie-packed gazpacho



robot coupe® FOOD PROCESSOR: CUTTER AND VEG PREP MACHINE



R2N SAVE TIME!

- 3 liters Cutter bowl
- 23 discs and 3 blades available
- Serve up to 30 place settings



Robot Coupe USA, Inc.
1-800-824-1646
www.robot-coupe.com



Paella is another popular dish that originated in Spain. This tasty dish has so many varieties that it can spin your head. The seafood paella recipe that we use dates to my great-grandmother and is made with a rich base of saffron rice. My mother, Marcia, enhanced the recipe through the years, and it's what we use to this day. We incorporate all types of seafood and shellfish, plus everything from capers and green olives to grilled onions and artichokes. Cooking the seafood in the rice develops flavors that are so special as those juices meld together and make it taste so delicious. My mom's secret ingredient (shhhhh... don't tell anyone) is dry vermouth, which adds a little tart punch that you just can't put your finger on when you taste it but adds so much to the dish.



Menu options at Marcia Selden Catering include paella (top), based on Robin's great-grandmother's recipe, and such Latin desserts as churros (above) and flan (right).

To round out the meal, we can't forget one of the most beloved Latin desserts: flan. We make a sweet and savory coconut version that is sure to bring you to your knees! While it's a heart attack on a plate, it is worth every single delicious bite... and then some.

Speaking of delicious bites, churros are at the top of my list. To this day they are one of the most popular passed desserts that we make. I mean, how can you go wrong eating fried dough tossed in a sugary mixture and dipped in a rich and thick chocolatey sauce or dulce de leche?

While not everything on the Marcia Selden Catering menu has a Latin flair, I'm proud to be passing on some of the traditions of my Nanny Edilia. Food connects us to the past, and when we share it, food connects us to each other. ●



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robin Selden is the managing partner and executive chef of Connecticut- and New York City-based Marcia Selden Catering and Naked Fig Catering. At the Catersource conference in May, Marcia Selden Catering won Best Caterer of the Year from the International Caterers Association.

Along with her brother, Jeffrey, the "Dynamic Sibling Duo" were named two of the "100 Most Inspiring People" in the wedding industry by The Knot. Robin was also named to the BizBash 500, celebrating the top 500 event professionals in 2020 in the U.S.

Robin is on the President's Council of the International Caterers Association and won their coveted Chef of the Year award. She's a past Innovative Chef of the Year and a current Ambassador Chef for the Greenwich Wine & Food Festival. Robin and Jeffrey teach a catering class at Cornell University's School of Hospitality in the fall as well as a special events class at the Boston University School of Hospitality in the spring.

For more information, visit marciaselden.com.

FAT BADGER BAKERY COOKIES ARE ALWAYS VEGAN (PLANT BASED) IN A DEDICATED DAIRY AND EGG FREE BAKERY.

Non-GMO Project Certified, Kosher Certified, Vegan Certified



BAKED FRESH, SHIPPED THE SAME DAY!

Call or Email to Request a FREE 8-Piece Cookie Sampler Package!

fatbadgerbakery.com | Sales (wholesale/catering) 267.362.5326 x150



Skorr Products

AS ALWAYS 4X SAFER

NEW INNOVATIVE DESIGN!

WE'VE TAKEN OUR SKORR CHAFER™ TO THE NEXT LEVEL!

SKORR LID LOCK™

**FOOD STAYS HOTTER, LONGER • WINDPROOF
NO FLIES ON FOOD • EASIER TO CARRY - LESS SPILLS
HANDLES PROVIDE LOWER CENTER OF GRAVITY**



SEE HOW IT WORKS



"I feel safer using a Skorr Chafers"
- Professional Caterer from Tennessee

VISIT SKORR.COM TO LEARN MORE

Patented and Patents Pending USA & Worldwide.