

# LATINO TOP CHEFS



[José Andrés is a chef, TV host author and businessman]

## These Standouts: Not Just the Flavor of the Month

by ana maría hansen.

**THE KITCHEN HAS ALWAYS BEEN A GOOD PLACE TO FIND LATINOS.** Contrary to stereotypes, Latinos are no longer just doing dishes or bussing tables. Latino chefs all over the United States are behind some of the most exquisite creations that are challenging the most demanding palates. Authors of the so called “Latin food revolution,” these chefs are redefining Latin food and educating the country about its diversity. While showcasing traditional Latin dishes with their own personal twist, these top chefs are also successful entrepreneurs, authors and media personalities. And that’s what’s cooking.

### { JOSÉ ANDRÉS }

#### CULINARY CONQUISTADOR

Molecular gastronomy is the science behind the physical and chemical transformations that occur while cooking. It also investigates the social, artistic and technical aspects of culinary culture. If that sounds complicated, you are better off experiencing it firsthand at chef José Andrés’ Minibar. The critically acclaimed Washington, D.C. restaurant might be best described as a Cirque du Soleil gastronomical event with its 27-course meal of mostly bite-sized portions in a space comprised of a handful of tables and six bar stools.

The man behind Minibar and creations such as chocolate and olive oil bonbon is José Andrés, a native of Spain who has become a top chef on the American restaurant scene as an innovator, artist and successful businessman.

Together with his partner Rob Wilder, he is the chef and owner of

ThinkFoodGroup, the management company behind top rated restaurants in Washington, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and recently, Miami. TFG encompasses all of José’s projects including cookbooks, TV shows, and teaching a class in science and cooking at Harvard University. “Our team believes that you can change the world through the power of food, so this is what we try to do, in small ways and in big ways.”

His definition of success is not about making money. “It’s about telling a great story. That is what I set out to do, on the menu, on the plate. I always believe in looking back in order to push forward,” he says. “The food we create is about combining tradition and modernity—whether that’s in eight seats in Las Vegas at our *é* by José Andrés or at *Pepe*, our food truck in DC.”

He won the James Beard Foundation’s “Outstanding Chef” award—its highest honor—in 2011 for Minibar.

He’s host and executive producer of the PBS series *Made in Spain* a culinary journey of his home country; has written several cookbooks and has an ardent fan following for his Spanish TV show, *Vamos a cocinar*. He was recently named dean of Spanish Studies at the International Culinary Center, which has campuses in New

York, California, and Europe. Meanwhile, Andrés has put the finishing touches on *The Bazaar* at the SLS Hotel in Miami Beach—the recently opened luxury destination created by entrepreneur Sam Nazarian in collaboration with Philippe Starck and Lenny Kravitz—and plans his next move with *The Ritz Carlton* at Dorado Beach in Puerto Rico.

Whether introducing Americans to tapas, crafting a *Nuevo Latino* menu built on Caribbean flavors or bringing together Mexico and China at his restaurant *China Poblano*, Andrés constantly redefines the concept of Latin food in America.

He recently opened the *America Eats Tavern* in Washington in partnership with the National Archives, where he explores America’s culinary history. He finds that much like the country itself, “the influence of Latin cuisine continues to evolve from humble beginnings to greatness.”



**THE CUBANO** features a light-air bread infused with cheese espuma and topped with the highest quality Iberico pork from the prized black-footed pigs of Spain, fresh cucumber and mustard. It has the flavor of tradition with the excitement of innovation.



[Anthony Llamas plans to expand to markets like Nashville, Tenn., and Charlotte N.C.]

Seviche was a family business until two investors and frequent diners offered to become partners with the goal of taking the restaurant to the next level. “They really know what they are doing. I felt like a singer does when he gets signed by a record label,” Lamas says. Lamas plans to open restaurants in Nashville, Tenn., and Charlotte, N.C. because, he says, they are “great towns with no Latin food.”

The key to preserving his cuisine’s identity while expanding is to create the right team. “Some people have been working with me for 10 years. I teach them, I keep them motivated to learn my style. I feel being a chef is like being a quarterback: I throw the ball but someone has to catch it and score.”

**{ SAM GORENSTEIN }**

**SO(BE) FRESH**

My Ceviche just might be the country’s smallest restaurant. But its size is inversely proportional to the delicious fresh seafood that chef Sam Gorenstein, 28, makes on-the-spot for take-out or delivery. Originally from Barranquilla, Colombia, Gorenstein moved to Miami when he was 14.

After high school he pursued his dream of becoming a chef by enrolling at Johnson & Wales University. In 2004 he moved to New York City where he worked with culinary star Laurent Tourondel. He started at Union Pacific and then was asked to join the team that would open BLT Fish. Two years later, Gorenstein moved to Miami where he worked with chef Michael Schwartz. And call it fate; he reunited

with Tourondel, who asked him to be part of BLT Steak at a South Beach hotel. After learning from such mentors, Gorenstein decided the time had come for him to branch out on his own.

Gorenstein and his partner do it all: answer phones, take orders, prepare the food and clean up. That allows them to connect with customers and truly see, day-to-day what is working. Ceviche is likely to expand eventually, but first they want to perfect the concept. “I’ve always wanted to create a product and build a brand around it. My Ceviche is a dream come true for me,” he says. His ceviches are not Peruvian, Colombian or Mexican. “Instead, we bring a bunch of tropical flavors to the menu and try to educate our customers about the food, but the menu is constantly



**THE CREMA DE ROCOTO** is cilantro, lime, tomato, red onions and radishes. The version pictured contains shrimp, local fish and octopus. Guests can pick which seafood goes into the different kinds of ceviche styles.

evolving,” he says. “I love working with fish and seafood and I feel it should shine.”

Considered by *Forbes* magazine as one of the 30 most influential people under 30, Gorenstein cooks around seasons and has a philosophy that examines the history behind every ingredient. My Ceviche: a fabulous little restaurant run by a rising star.



[It's all about freshness for Sam Gorenstein]

**{ ANTHONY LLAMAS }**

**KITCHEN QUARTERBACK**

Fried chicken and southern fare come to mind when you think of Louisville, Ky. But since chef Anthony Llamas moved to town in 1992, people go to Louisville looking for much more than



**TUNA TAQUITOS** with wasabi mustard, yuzu, avocado and Bluegrass Soy Sauce sesame powder.

the Derby. Seviche, which opened in 2005 immediately made Llamas the talk of the town. With a consistent four star rating from the *Louisville Courier Journal* and 96 points from food critic Robin Garr, chef Llamas has even garnered national attention. Born and raised in central California and of Mexican and Puerto Rican heritage, Llamas’ cooking is a delightful melting pot.

Llamas was practicing the “farm to table” philosophy before it became popular. And he wasn’t trying to follow a trend. It was just an approach that came naturally after growing up on a farm, raising healthy animals and cooking with fresh, seasonal ingredients.



[Fany Gerson with a sweet treat]

**{ FANY GERSON }**

**A MEXICAN GIRL FROM NEW YORK**

She is “La Newyorkina”, the girl from New York. How is that possible if she’s Mexican? Well, she is both: Mexican at heart but a true New Yorker as well. Thanks to her, you can find authentic Mexican paletas (*popsicles*) on the streets of New York. Gerson, owner and creator of La Newyorkina, a mobile popsicles shop, is the most authoritative voice in the country when it comes to Mexican sweets. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, she has worked in fine dining kitchens around the world and written two books: *My Sweet Mexico*,

nominated for a James Beard award in 2010, and *Paletas*. Both reflect her passion for sharing the sweetness of her home country. After she wrote the first book, she found her mission. “I want people to understand that Mexican sweets are incredibly special, our ice creams are just as good as gelati, and our confections as intricate as the French.”

Her paleta carts are the sweetest thing to be found at the Hester Street Fair and other places in New York such as Brooklyn Bridge Park, where you can enjoy Horchata filled with raspberry as well as her frozen treats which come in different flavors and forms:

nieves (*water based sorbets*), helados (*ice cream*) and aguas frescas (*beverage made from fruit, seed and/or flowers*). Her next venture is to open a gourmet Mexican ice cream and candy shop. Her passion for sweets also translates into using sustainable ingredients.

“I use a lot of locally grown or made ingredients. I use organic eggs for the ice cream and all kinds of summer fruit from farmers (depending on the season) and I also import fair trade ingredients from Mexico.” When frozen treats are too cold for the weather, La Newyorkina delights you with candies and confections. How sweet is that?



**PALETAS DE AGUACATE** (*avocado ice pops*) Water, sugar, a pinch of salt, lime juice and ripe avocados are mixed to create a tasty and creamy texture without any dairy. The lime juice not only helps to keep the paleta green, it also enhances the flavor of the avocados.



[Julieta Ballesteros is out to change the perception of Mexican food]

**{ JULIETA BALLESTEROS }**  
**THE CREMA OF THE CROP**

You may feel as if you are eating a masterpiece if you go to Crema, Julieta Ballesteros' New York City restaurant. Cooking, for this Monterrey native, is a visual and sensual



**ALAMBRES DE FILET MIGNON** are a beer-lime marinated Filet Mignon skewers with apple wood smoked bacon, red onion, mushrooms, poblano and bell peppers, beer batter onion rings, with lemon-basil chimichurri, garnish with green aioli on top.

experience. With colors, flavors and textures, she brings Mexican traditional dishes to a refined and elegant level. She is on a mission to change the perception that Mexican food is heavy, greasy and casual. With that in mind, plus traditional ingredients at her disposal as well as training from the French Culinary Institute, Ballesteros found success as executive chef of Mexicana Mama in the West Village. Then she opened Crema, in Chelsea, where she serves authentically flavorful Mexican food with a French flair. Soon after, Zagat named her a "celebrity chef." Ballesteros counters, "Not yet." But she has what it takes. She knows how to cook, she directs and manages her kitchen, has boundless creativity, discipline, charisma, and pretty much

knows everything about the ingredients she mixes to create her signature dishes.

Ballesteros' cuisine is not simple. She likes bold, strong flavors and sophisticated ingredients. The description of Pastel Azteca in her menu, is an example: "Multilayered tortilla casserole with shredded chicken, beans, fresh corn, three cheeses, salsa roja, hoja santa drizzled with truffle oil."

"Dedication, desire, discipline, experience and passion for what I do" is the key to combining art with a successful business model, says Ballesteros, who plans on opening more restaurants. Her goal: That people remember her food. And so far, they certainly do.

**{ RICARDO ZÁRATE }**  
**PERU TASTES BETTER IN LOS ANGELES**

When he was 12, Ricardo Zárate would post menus on his family's fridge. Twelve was also the number of people he first cooked for: his brothers and sisters. He learned to cook traditional Peruvian dishes like lomo saltado (*marinated steak and potatoes*) and chanfaina (*organ meat stew and potatoes*). He studied to be a chef at Instituto de las Américas in Lima, Peru and then left to find his future in London.

He started as a dishwasher. And as if 12 were his lucky number, he lived in London for 12 years, working in various positions at top restaurants such as the Japanese Zuma. In 2003 he was offered a position as chef

at the Biltmore in Los Angeles. Two years later he moved back to London as an executive chef for Zuma Events where he took part in a dining revolution integrating French and Japanese techniques with the flavors of his native Peru. In 2009, he went back to Los Angeles and opened Mo-Chica, "a hidden gem, a



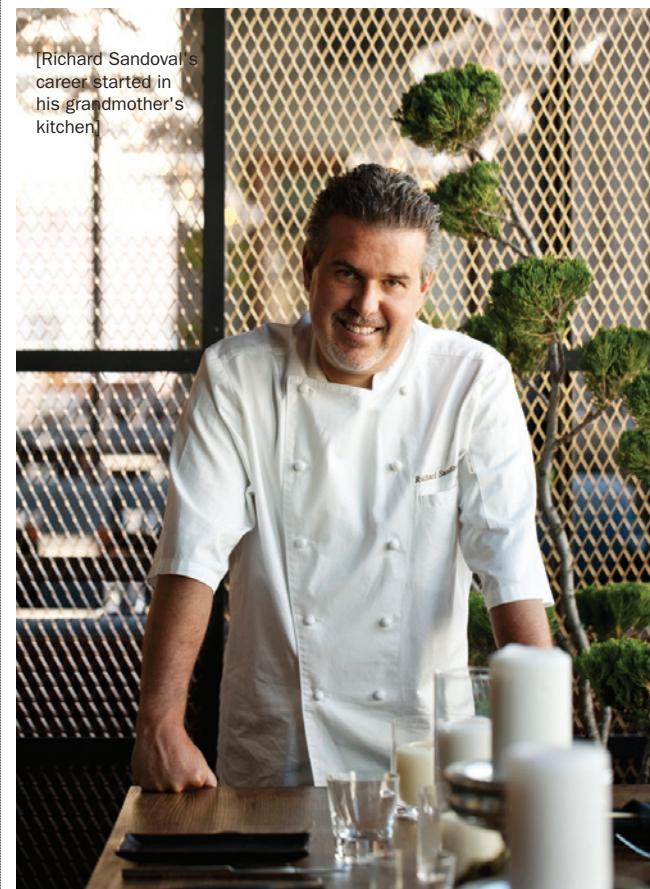
**MO-CHICA ARROZ CON MARISCOS** is a peruvian seafood paella which includes calamari, mussels, scallops, shrimp mixed with flavored rice and garnished with toasted corn and salsa criolla.

hole in the wall" as some of his patrons have called it; a small restaurant located in a strip mall in Southeast L.A. Before long, Mo-Chica was voted 4th best restaurant in Los Angeles.

His restaurant Picca has been the talk of the town since its 2011 opening. Exquisite Peruvian dishes with a Japanese touch are passed around the table to nibble on or *picar* as this ritual is called in Spanish and which gave the restaurant its name. Patrons enjoy Zárate's interpretation of Peruvian cuisine, which is strongly influenced by Japanese traditions. "I maintain Japanese techniques because that's what I studied in culinary school, so I create very subtle yet delicious flavors in a simple but striking presentation," he says.



[Dishes like those created by Ricardo Zárate are helping redefine Latin food]



[Richard Sandoval's career started in his grandmother's kitchen]

**{ RICHARD SANDOVAL }**  
**A COMPANY RUN FROM THE KITCHEN**

The Mexico City dining room table of Richard Sandoval's grandmother was where the large and lively family met for meals. But Sandoval was not waiting to be served. He was in the kitchen with his grandmother, watching her prepare delicious Mexican food from scratch. His father owned two restaurants in Acapulco, and it was there that Sandoval learned everything about running a business. Today, he is the chef and owner of Richard Sandoval Restaurants, a group with more than 26 locations in places such as Washington D.C., New York City, Denver, Santa Monica, Calif., Las Vegas, Virginia, Mexico, Dubai and Qatar. He is bringing Latin American flavors—or as he defines them Pan Latin—to audiences all over the world.

Fifteen years ago, when he moved to the United States to study at the Culinary Institute of America, he had one goal: to change the image of Mexican food as unhealthy and heavy.

"Mexican food has evolved and nowadays you can consider it high-end," he says. Though Mexican, he brings out flavors from across Latin culture in his menus. He knows that the stereotype of Latin being only Mexican must be broken and he does so with fusions that include an Asian twist. "Balance is the most important thing. I want the customer to experience a roller coaster of flavors," he says.

Recently, Sandoval brought Kokoriko, a Colombian-based fast casual rotisserie chicken concept, to the United States. Miami is its first location, but Sandoval believes it has the potential to become a country-

wide chain. Even though most of his restaurants are high end, Sandoval is excited to add a more casual and fun option to his growing portfolio; giving his own twist to traditional Colombian recipes—and he is excited about the opportunity to bring more Latin food to the United States.

Considered by many as the best Mexican chef in the country, his restaurants all over the world have been highly rated—and there's a good reason for that. He understands the diversity of audiences in different cities and countries. The key, as he says, is adapting to what they want and offering delicious food for small or big budgets.

And, like the other top Latin chefs, Sandoval, is not only an artist or a businessman, but an ambassador of

Latin American foods, translating tastes from across the entire region to new audiences in cities across the United States. ●



**CHICKEN TINGA TACOS** encompass flour tortillas stuffed with chicken rotisserie "al chipotle," garnished with fresh shredded lettuce, pico de gallo, diced red onions, cilantro and crema fresca.