

Mexican food — from her D.C. kitchen — is the specialty of this TV chef.

A TASTE OF HOME



Fans of *Pati's Mexican Table* probably know that much of the PBS series is shot in Pati Jinich's own kitchen. Three weeks per year, a film crew takes over her home near Washington, D.C., to shoot a season's worth of real-time cooking segments.

"My husband wasn't thrilled," she says of the show's initial arrival. "Six seasons later, he's gone from, 'I'm not really liking it, Pati,' — because he's very private — to despising it. Even though he says he hates it, he's so proud. He's seen me struggle and change careers and work really hard."

Quite a change it was. Jinich was a political analyst for a Mexican think tank when she and her husband moved to the U.S. "We were planning to go back to Mexico, then he got a job offer here in D.C., so I continued studying and got a master's in Latin American studies," she says. "I worked at another think tank, then had an early existential crisis."

After coming home from work drained each night, Jinich eventually realized she was on the wrong career path. "I thought about it for two years. Then I resigned and enrolled in culinary school." She'd always loved cooking, and making recipes from home had eased her homesickness as she adjusted to the U.S.

Jinich had hoped culinary training would lend her authority as a food writer. Soon, she was writing about food and teaching cooking at D.C.'s Mexican Cultural Institute, where she still works today.

Eventually, PBS approached her about a pilot. The network provided a crash course in fundraising and securing sponsorships.

"You have to deliver, in terms of content, not only to the PBS stations and their audience, but also to sponsors," explains Jinich, who's also an executive producer. "Every season, you move to a higher benchmark, which is more challenging, but at the same time it's more exciting."

By season three, the series had evolved into a cooking-travelogue hybrid. "Every time we go to Mexico, I either revisit places, people and stories that fascinate me or go to places I've never been." Travel segments take planning, but Jinich's natural curiosity takes over. "Once we get there, it's turn on the camera and go!"

Having spent two decades raising a Mexican-American family in the U.S., Jinich, who's also Jewish, has a stronger appreciation of her roots.

"I've learned much more about Mexico — my home country — and the people of Mexico while being in the U.S." she says. "I'm also an American, and I value the culture and beauty this country has to offer. Sometimes it takes the eye of someone who might seem to be on the outside to really appreciate where you come from and where you are." — Paula Hendrickson

Season seven of *Pati's Mexican Table* will premiere on PBS in September; viewers can catch up on Amazon.