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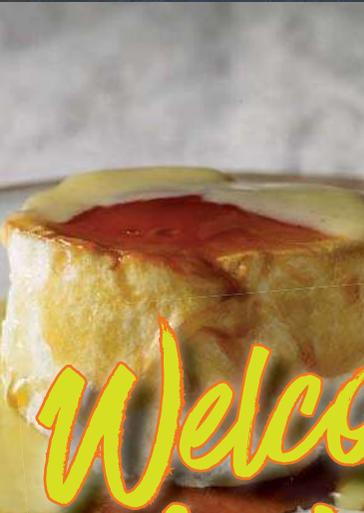
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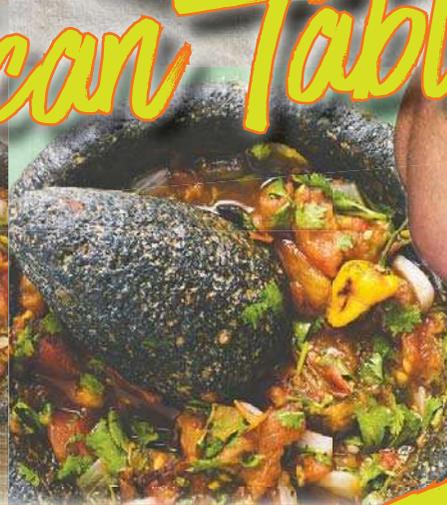
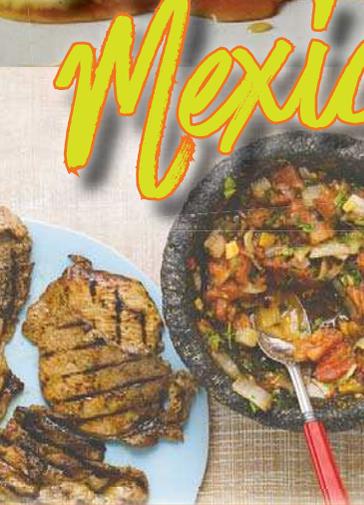


IBF Winner
Pati Jinich
Invites You to Her Mexican Table

IN THE SPOTLIGHT | Lisa Keathley



Welcome to my Mexican Table!



2018 James Beard Award Winner Pati Jinich

Photo: Kent Miller

Photos: Penny De Los Santos



ati Jinich is an outstanding personal



Jinich won the 2018 JBF broadcast media award in the host category at a ceremony in New York City in late April. She had been nominated for the award twice before, but this time, the announcement caught her by surprise. "Unbelievable! I have never had feelings like those when they announced my name. I didn't think I'd get it because of the high level of the others nominated. I didn't even prepare a speech."

Though she may have been speechless that night, rarely is she at a loss for words! The engaging, personable Pati Jinich is host of the PBS television program *Pati's Mexican Table*, a series that explores the richness of food, history, and culture in Pati's home country, Mexico. Now in production for its seventh season to premiere this fall, Pati and her film crew have traveled throughout Mexico — from the capital Mexico City to the eastern Mexican vacation town of San Miguel de Allende to the coastal city of Champotón in southwestern Mexico, with many stops along the way to explore food, family, and fun. The upcoming season focuses on the Baja Peninsula in Mexico's north.

"By receiving the award, I felt validation from the professional culinary world that I've been working so hard to be part of. It felt like an embrace from the culinary community."

The roots of Pati's passion

Patricia Jinich — known to pretty much everyone as Pati — was born in Mexico, one of four sisters in a very food-centric family, where social life centered around the table. With their mom as a good cook, they enjoyed not only Mexican cuisine, with its native Mexican, Spanish, and French influences, but also meals reflective of their grandparents,



Photo: Pati's Mexican Table

*"Food connects cultures and countries.
One recipe at a time. One story at a time."*

Though she was not much of a cook herself, Pati says she always felt a pull to the kitchen. However, "I yanked myself out of it to be my own woman. Because I came from a divorced family, my mom always told me to be self-reliant, resourceful, and independent." At that time, she saw the kitchen as a place where women took orders, so she chose a degree and a career in policy analysis, where she thought she might make more of a difference.

nuts, and sear meat. "Comals have a history," Pati notes, "and they get seasoned with age. You usually don't pass down a comal until someone dies. You might get a new one, but not a used one. My mom gave me hers as a sign of desperation because she knew I couldn't even cook a quesadilla!" It was a sign of desperation, maybe — but perhaps also a good sign for Pati's future.

Texas proved to be a lonely place for Pati, whose new husband traveled a lot. But that isolation forced her to

connected with and rediscovered my own country while being away."

Pati also listened constantly to public radio and became what she calls a "super fan." That led her to knock on the door of the local public TV station, KERA-TV, where she became a production assistant for a TV program about Texan and southwestern cuisine. She found she loved the research, the travel, and the focus on food.

A move to D.C...

...pulled Pati back into the policy world. She got a graduate degree in Latin American studies from Georgetown University, followed by a job at the Inter-American Dialogue think tank. But the policy job was "so boring," she says. "I got zero satisfaction. I fought it until I couldn't fight it any longer." Pati realized that she found meaning through food. "The only way to grow roots in America was to nurture myself and my growing family through food. Food was home to me. I realized that food was the way to communicate about my roots."

With the urging and support of her husband, Pati took what she calls "a leap of faith." "I thought about it for a year and a half. It was agony. What am I doing, throwing these years of research, and study, and policy away?" she remembers. "But I had to go with my gut. It was

ty and host. And now the James Beard Foundation thinks so, too!

who had immigrated from Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. "For us," she said, "every food tradition had meaning, and the hours we spent together over meals were my favorite."

The gift of a comal

When Pati got married to her husband Daniel and moved to Texas, her mother gave her the gift of her own comal, a flat griddle used to cook tortillas, toast spices and

reach out in new ways. She started speaking to people in grocery stores, asking what they were making and what ingredients they were using. "I met people from the Mexican diaspora, learned new recipes, and

not rational. If I had researched it, I would not have done it. I just jumped. But I thought it was better to take the risk, better to know I had

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CUBA

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Más Cubano

Back in D.C., we continued our local culinary exploration at the Colada Shop at 1405 T St., NW. At first glance, Colada resembles a crowded carryout, but the small space opens up into a spacious first-floor dining area, plus an upstairs bar and rooftop garden. After placing our orders at the busy counter, we settled inside at a comfy couch and awaited our food, which arrived in paper bags.

The Colada menu seemed more authentic than we'd anticipated. Empanadas are filled with picadillo (spicy ground beef), spinach, and cheese. Ham croquetas are crisp on the outside, moist and flavorful inside. Pastelitos, pastries with cream cheese and guava, are enveloped in a flakey crust. The Cuban sandwich, while not really Cuban, is the best rendition we've tasted north of Tampa.

Colada Shop, which has an offshoot in Sterling, is open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Call 202-332-8800 or visit www.coladashop.com.

And newcomer to the scene is Little Havana at 3704 14th St., NW, in Washington's Petworth neighborhood. The 70-seat Caribbean eatery is the creation of Alfredo Solis, who brought us local taquerias El Sol and Mezcalera. Helming the central kitchen — lined with white subway tiles — is Joseph Osorio, whose Cuban godmother taught him to cook. He is an alum of Clyde's Restaurant Group and Alexandria Restaurant Partners.

The Washington-Baltimore area boasts other Cuban eateries, too, including the charming Sabor de Cuba, 9 East Patrick St., in Frederick, Maryland. While not necessarily authentic, Sabor's sizzling shrimp in white wine with tomatoes and avocado is dynamite. For more information on Cuban restaurants in the area, visit https://www.yelp.com/search?cflt=cuban&find_loc=Baltimore%2C+MD.

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tried, and that I had given my three boys a positive example of taking chances."

The right decision

In 2006, Pati earned a certificate from L'Academie de Cuisine in Gaithersburg (now closed). She loved the experience and says, "It confirmed my decision to jump 100 percent." Her intent was to be a food writer and teacher who would teach cooking, along with Mexican history and culture, in the intimacy of her Chevy Chase home. A chance meeting with the executive director of the Mexican Cultural Institute led her to develop a curriculum for a cooking series at the Institute and a much broader stage. She called the live cooking series "Mexican Table," and the rest, as they say, is... ahem... Mexican history!

Pati's first cooking lectures focused on topics such as the Mexican Revolution, when rebel fighters ate foods that had to be cooked on the run and would fit in a pouch or saddlebag. She taught another class about Mexican convents, where, for over 300 years, the Catholic nuns intermingled colonial and local ingredients to create new food delights, such as the delicious mole sauce.

"I came to the realization that what I loved most about Mexico, I could share through food stories. I could make history come alive!" Even though she had never spoken in public or used a microphone, Pati was a dynamic teacher. "I loved the hunger of Americans who wanted to know more. I loved that interaction." The classes feature a live cooking demonstration, followed by a tasting dinner, and they have become so popular that there is a waiting list for tickets a full year in advance!

Going to the next level

The success of her lecture series at the Mexican Institute led Pati to meet producers from the local PBS



Clay Williams

On Cinco de Mayo, Pati Jinich made scallop aguachile at the James Beard House

station, WETA, who attended one of her classes. They talked together about a kitchen show that would be recorded in her home and feature the foods, traditions, and recipes of Mexico.

A lot of hard work and a year and a half later, *Pati's Mexican Table* had a pilot and, not long after, it debuted nationally on the public television network. "We tape it in my home kitchen," she explains, "with no script, completely on the fly, so it feels very real." Regular viewers, now numbering over 31 million, have seen the program's growth and have met Pati's family, including her three boys, as they have grown up on camera.

The best part — building bridges through food

In addition to the live lectures and her PBS television series, Pati makes guest appearances on a variety of cooking shows, has a food blog, and has written two cookbooks. *Pati's Mexican Table: The Secrets of Real Mexican Home Cooking* was published in 2013. *Mexican Today: New and Rediscovered Recipes for Contemporary Kitchens* came out in 2016. Is a third book in the works?

Pati chuckles and says somewhat mysteriously, "I don't want to jinx it!" We can only guess that a next cookbook just might be on the horizon.

All Pati Jinich's efforts have made Mexican food more accessible to everyone — from food aficionados to parents wanting a quick and tasty dinner for their kids. And, looking back, she says it has played an even bigger role, too. "I can show what immigrants bring to the table and how they enrich the international culinary field," she says, "Food connects cultures and countries. One recipe at a time. One story at a time. One image at a time. I am helping people so much more by trying to invite everyone to the table." Building bridges through food... a great — and award-winning — combination!

In addition to the 2018 James Beard Award for Outstanding Personality/TV Host, **PATI'S MEXICAN TABLE** received the Best National Informational Program Award from the Imagen Awards in 2016. The series can be seen throughout the U.S., Canada, Japan, Southeast Asia, and India/South Asia. It airs locally on Saturdays at 11:30 a.m. on WETA TV 26.