

# Peru's revolution in



# in tastes



## Innovative chefs in Lima are dishing up a fusion of Andean and European cuisines with seasoning from around the world

**G**astón Acurio was a young man when he left his native Peru to study law in Europe. But when he returned home it was with a diploma from Paris's Le Cordon Bleu. In a "rare and fleeting burst of courage," he says, he decided to change his life and follow the path of his true passion, cooking. Named for his father, a respected politician who was a senator and a cabinet minister during the presidency of Fernando Belaúnde Terry, Acurio was expected to follow in the elder man's footsteps. In the end, his father had no alternative but to support his son, who traded in a future of courts and lawsuits for a life of ladles and cook stoves.

Today Acurio may be one of his country's best known chefs, but he prefers to be called simply a cook. He and his German wife, Astrid Gutsche, whom he met at cooking school, are celebrities in and outside of Peru. Their restaurant, Astrid y Gastón, opened its doors in 1994 and within a short time became one of the best restaurants in Lima. Today it has branches in Santiago, Bogotá, and Quito. In January 2003, Acurio opened a delicatessen, T'anta,

meaning "bread" in Quechua, in Lima's Surco neighborhood and in May 2005 inaugurated La Mar in the tourist haven of Miraflores. La Mar is a restaurant where ceviche—the dish that seven out of ten Peruvians believe best represents Peru—heads a mouth-watering list of some fifty seafood delicacies.

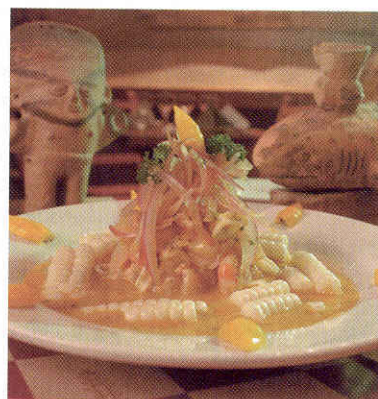
Acurio is probably the most successful proponent of *novoandina*, the name given to a new Peruvian cuisine. This is an arbitrary name—and some might object—for a culinary phenomenon that is generating great expectations. It's a revolution begun by a generation of cooks trained in prestigious European schools who today are using their techniques to reevaluate the ages-old wealth of their home cuisine.

"It's true that we've gone from rustic and modest dishes to more contemporary offerings at the vanguard, but these are,

in essence, just as Peruvian," says Acurio.

Today's *novoandina* cuisine has brought such humble Andean food crops as quinoa, *kiwicha tarwi*, and *arracacha* to the fore in the most sophisticated culinary endeavors.

Because of the exquisite result of the syncretism of flavors from all over the globe,



*Perhaps Lima's most successful chef, Gastón Acurio, top, at work in his Barranco studio kitchen; traditional ceviche uses the freshest seafood and fish, left, but this novoandina version adds the zing of passionfruit juice, above*

**by Jorge Riveros Cayo**  
**Photographs by Yayo López**  
**Translated by Kathy A. Ogle**



Highland fare has traditionally relied on Peru's wide array of native vegetables and tubers (cau cau criollo, above, is tripe and vegetable stew) enhanced by age-old techniques, such as stone-ground chile, right; in the Andean capital of Cuzco, center, the trendy cuisine at La Retama restaurant is enhanced by cathedral views



Peruvian cuisine is currently considered one of the world's best. The key to this fusion of flavors is the meeting of the Andean and European worlds, something that happened with absolute ease and no hard feelings.

"It was on the gastronomic plane that the natives and the invaders understood each other best," says Rodolfo Hinostroza, poet and culinary expert, "probably because the most permeable part of any culture is that which is closest to pleasure, need, and hunger."

Modern-day visitors to Peru may find it easy to succumb to the cuisine's traditional aromas, tastes, and colors: ceviche served with onion julienne, tender *choclo* (corn on the cob), and sweet potato; *lomo saltado* (sautéed shoulder cuts of beef) with tomatoes or onions julienne and fried potatoes; or a *chupe de camarones* (a robust soup with vegetables, milk, and plenty of shrimp).

**B**ut all successes require effort, and the result of such a convincing combination of ingredients began even before Christopher Columbus set foot on a Caribbean shore in 1492. It wasn't until after the Spanish conquistadors had dodged some arrows and experienced hunger that they began to slowly discover and consume the products of the New World. At first it was more out of need than taste. Later, chroniclers like Fray Antonio de la Calancha, an Augustine

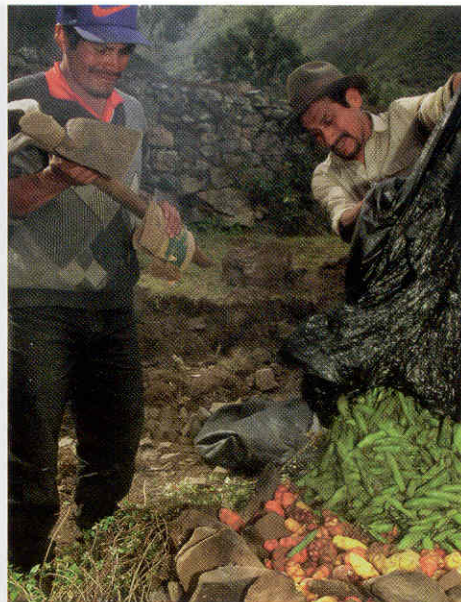
*Jorge Riveros Cayo is a Lima-based journalist and a past contributor to Américas.*

monk and author of *The Chronicle of a Moralist of the Order of Saint Augustine in Peru*, recorded the unexpected abundance of food that surprised the conquistadors: "It is clear that this land is more fertile than that of Spain and Europe because all of the fruits we bring from Europe flourish here, but not so with the plants we take from here to there. Food here is two-thirds cheaper, and this is the place with the most silver in the whole world."

Of course, all the gold and silver found by Francisco Pizarro and company got more attention than the new and marvelous nutritional findings. Only the potato eventually made it back to the Old World. Other Andean tubers like *oca*, *olluco*, and *yacón*; fruits like the *pacay*, *guayaba*, passionfruit, *lúcuma*, cucumber, and *granadilla*; and herbs like *huacatay* and *muña* did not become well known, in spite of their nutritional qualities and pleasing taste.

"The most important thing is that a culinary and gastronomic hybrid was produced in the Andes," explains Peruvian historian Rosario Olivás. "Profound innovations in the use and consumption of Andean products were inspired by the introduction of such things as ovens, mills, sieves, and water and alcohol distillers. Certain culinary techniques were also developed, like pickling, blanching, frying, sautéing, thickening with egg yolks, or coating with flour and butter. Various products made of milk began to be used: cheeses, curds, cream, and butter. Things like lard, olive oil, vinegar, sugar, and sugar cane, wheat bread, wine, and *aguardiente* were also new, in addition to all of the new oriental spices and condiments."





*The tale of two Peruvian traditions, mountain and sea, as told in cuisine: Pachamanca is an Andean banquet of meats, native vegetable, and aromatic herbs cooked slowly in the ground, left, while a fisherman's ceviche feast on the high sea is a meal in minutes, above*

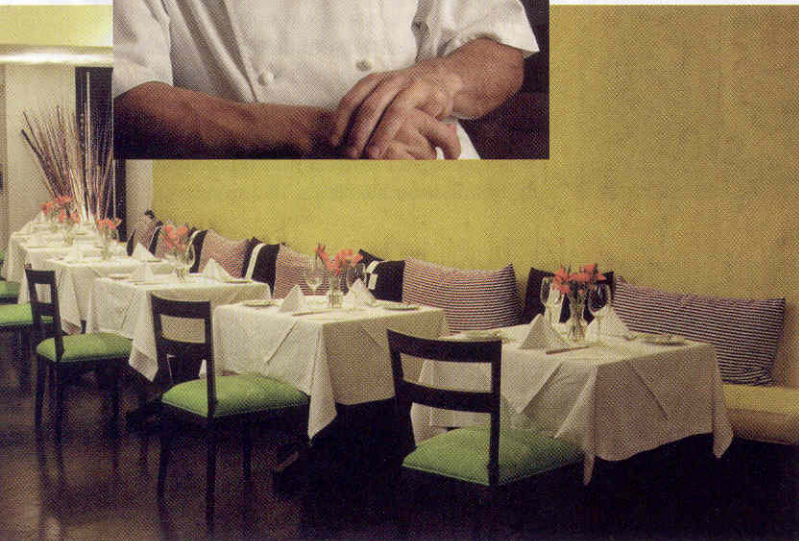
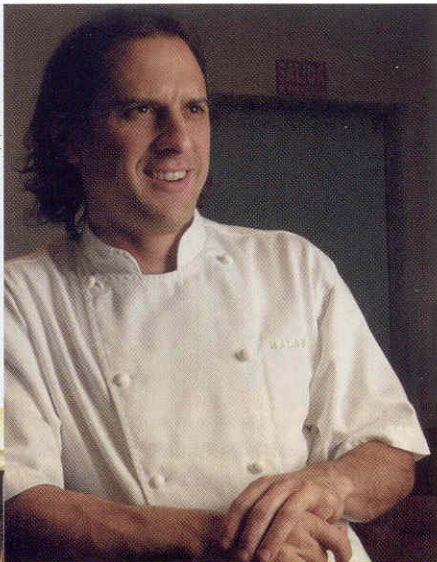
**“Peru is an abundant food market. You can find eighty types of vegetables and sixty kinds of fruit any time of year. The hundreds of micro-climates in the country ensure that no variety will ever be lacking”**

This blending of traditions produced a mouth-watering creation of new foods during the time of the viceroyalty and forged the Peruvian cuisine we know today. But, fortunately, fusion didn't end there. The migration of Africans, Chinese, Arabs, Japanese, and Europeans (especially from southern Spain and the Ligurian coast of Italy) only served to enrich and bring more innovations to the cuisine. It also contributed to the use of new products and ingredients in one of the most biodiverse areas of the planet.

Acurio reinforces this idea: “The great virtue of Peruvian cuisine is that we are a fusion of flavors. We have always welcomed any positive influence, whether it be Chinese, French, Spanish, Italian, or Japanese. But Peru is also an abundant food market. Here you can find eighty types of vegetables and sixty kinds of fruit any time of year. The hundreds of micro-climates in the country ensure that no variety will ever be lacking. In Spain, you can only get asparagus six months of the year, and in Chile you can only get basil for three months. Cooks in Mediterranean climates are obliged to reinvent their restaurant menus every season. Here in Lima, we only do it out of fear of going out of style or being swallowed up in a miniature, unforgiving, connoisseur market.”

In his 1856 book, *Cuzco and Lima*, Sir Clements Markham, English historian, traveler, scientist, and naturalist, described how well one could eat in the mid-nineteenth century in the young republic: “The way of life in these haciendas is very pleasant. The owners and their dependents awake very early and ride their horses into the fields, dedicating themselves to their various tasks until about 10 a.m., when they get together for a breakfast of broth or soup and poached eggs, garnished with fried plantain slices, as well as meat dishes, topping it all off with a cup of frothing hot chocolate and a glass of water. Dinner is at 4 p.m., with the owner at the head of the table. His entire family is there, along with the administrator, the chaplain, the refiner, and other dependents, and any guests who might be in the house. Dinner consists of a *chupe*, the national dish of Peru, made with potatoes, eggs, and chicken. Generally speaking, fresh fish in vinegar and hot pepper or Peruvian pimento is next, and finally the most delicious sweets and compotes, followed by a cleansing glass of water.”

To eat like that now might seem Pantagruelian, and there would be the additional, inevitable risk of falling into the custom of the daily siesta. Nevertheless, Peruvian food has always been characterized by this kind of abundance in proportion and richness in flavor.



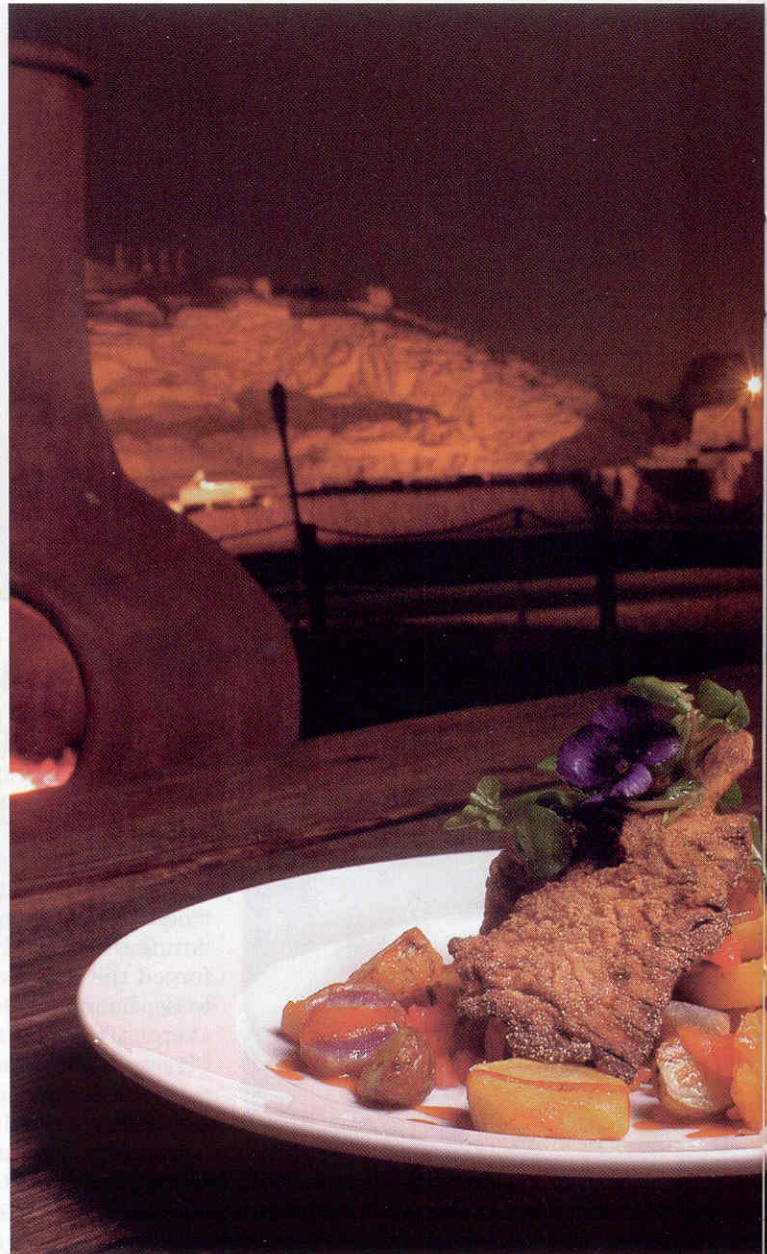
Currently, Peruvian cuisine is generating an unprecedented interest all over the world. It's easier to find Peruvian restaurants now whether you're in New York, Madrid, Paris, São Paulo, Montreal, or Seattle (see "Peruvian Delights in the U.S. Northwest," p. 50). At the same time, Lima is an active and boisterous place where fourteen cooking schools have opened in the last few years, including one joint venture with Le Cordon Blue. In spite of concerns that there may be too few customers and an oversupply of restaurants, new restaurants keep opening in Lima and other cities, and that seems to be a sign that everything is going quite well.

Pedro Miguel Schiaffino, a twenty-eight-year-old chef and graduate of the Italian Culinary Institute for Foreigners (ICIF), opened Malabar just two years ago in the San Isidro neighborhood. He has surprised more than one customer with his bold idea of putting exotic products from the Amazon rain forest like *chonta* (palm hearts cut into thin strips) and *paiche* (river fish) on the menu. Schiaffino and many other Lima chefs agree that "the residents of the capital city can be very picky and demanding customers," which means they are resistant to trying new things.

Another ICIF chef, Rafael Piqueras, has a great deal of experience in both Spanish and Italian restaurants and is about to open his own restaurant in Lima. "Our cuisine requires a modern presentation," he says. "Not only do our dishes have to taste good and offer innovative, new options, but we also have to make aesthetics, texture, and balance a priority."

Along the same lines, celebrated *novoandina* chef Cucho La Rosa says: "Standardization does not mean you can't be creative. On the contrary, it is just looking for a point of reference."

Acurio seems to have taken this premise literally as he seeks to make La Mar a model that is exportable to other countries. He is simplifying the ways of cooking the most celebrated Peruvian dishes in order to internationalize them, much like sushi, pizza, paella, or pad thai have been internationalized. "That's the only way a Finn is going to be able to open a Peruvian restaurant in Helsinki," says Acurio.

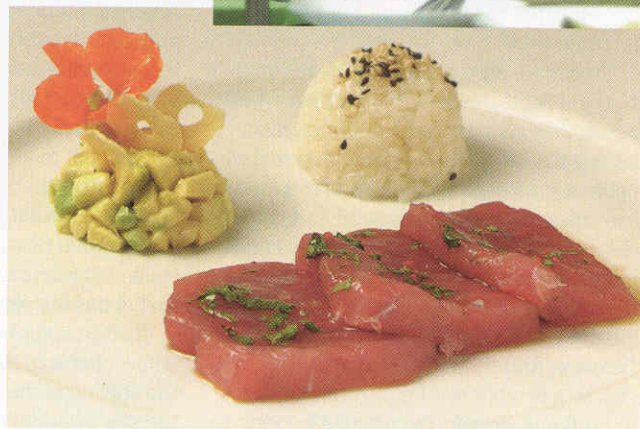
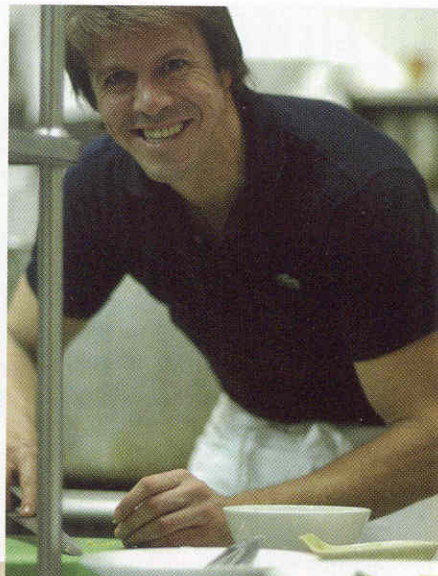


In addition to this "revolution," Peruvian food is constantly going through significant "evolution" without losing its essence. Ceviche is a case in point. Different versions of ceviche are being consumed from Peru to Mexico. This simple and exquisite dish may have originated on the sunny coasts of Peru, but like power and influence, recipes also spread from Peru to the rest of South America during the more than four centuries of the viceroyalty. Ceviche took on body and flavor according to the region that embraced it, and many new varieties were born.

"Thirty years ago you would squeeze lemon over pieces of fish and then wait an hour to eat it. That was ceviche. Today, it wouldn't occur to anyone to make ceviche that way. It would be a crime," says Arturo



*Chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino's Malabar, opposite, is a sun-toned dining room in San Isidro; Huaca Pucllana, center, is uniquely located on the grounds of an archaeological site in nearby Miraflores; and Rafael Osterling's self-titled restaurant features nikkei influences and mango confections, right and above*



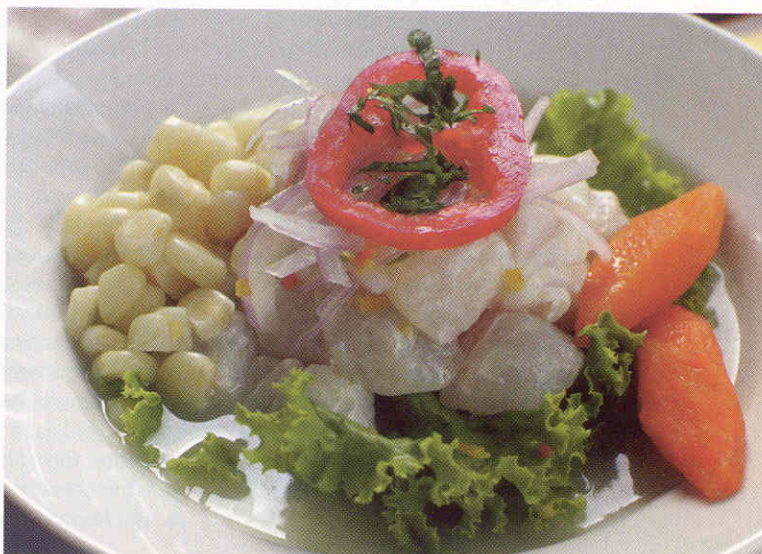
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Rubio, owner of the Miraflores restaurant Huaca Pucllana, named for the archaeological site next door. (Diners are treated to stunning views of its pre-Hispanic pyramid, which is illuminated nightly.)

*Nikkei* cooks (Japanese descendants born in Peru) have influenced the making of ceviche with their own sashimi technique. "You just need to have the freshest fish, squeeze on a little fresh lemon juice, ten minutes, and you're done. That's how ceviche is prepared today. Practically raw, but fresh, very fresh," pronounces Humberto Sato, chef and owner of Costanera 700, a taste emporium where fabulous fish and shellfish dishes are prepared oriental style.

But then, when it comes to ceviche, the debate can be as spicy as the hottest chile. ■

*It may have culinary rivals, but the classic ceviche, right, will never be supplanted*



# PERUVIAN DELIGHTS IN THE U.S. NORTHWEST

by Jack Robertiello

Once you've spoken with her, it's hard to imagine Doris Platt Rodríguez as anything other than a passionate ambassador on behalf of the pleasures of Peruvian cuisine. But opening Andina, the best-known Andean restaurant in the Pacific Northwest, wasn't the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, or even some short-term daydreams; the inspiration for the celebrated restaurant came from a maternal desire to convince one of her sons that the restaurant business was no place to be.

True, opening a restaurant means long working hours, endless competition, myriad issues with suppliers and creditors, maintaining a good staff, not to mention what it takes to craft recipes and create menus that can win a place in the public's heart. But it's also traditionally provided a way for immigrants or their children to merge a taste of their past with the present world they inhabit. Platt, a native of Cajamarca in the Peruvian Andes, was trained as a pharmacist, so when her son Peter returned home to Portland, Oregon, from a long solo trip to Peru with the idea that the best way to create a better understanding of their culture in the U.S. was through food, it unnerved her and her husband.

"He told me after his trip, 'Mom, the food from there is so wonderful; why don't you bring it to this part of the country?' I said to him, 'This is a crazy idea—we can't cook for so many people, and what do we know about running a restaurant?'" says Platt. But their reluctance gradually evolved into infectious enthusiasm, though the route has been rough and, like at many celebrated restaurants, actually profiting from their labors has been a challenge.

Solving the chef problem was just one of the challenges, but Peter found a mentor who guided the family through the financial ways of the restaurant world. The Platt Rodríguez family—there are two other sons—decided they must recruit a chef from Peru (much of the staff is also Peruvian), and when that chef moved on

soon after the 2003 opening, they then started looking for the "ideal candidate" to evolve their image of true Peruvian cuisine, classic and contemporary, combining ingredients and dishes from the Incas, Spanish, Africans, and other cultures.

They found him in well-established Lima-based chef Jorge Luis Ossio Guiulfo. Ossio, who comes from a family of culinarians, was educated at the Culinary Institute of America, trained in Paris and Florence, and already was executive chef and owner of three restaurants in Lima. He appeared to have had enough work on his hands, but he came to Andina for a few months as consulting chef to create new dishes, expand the menu, train the staff, and renew the concept. He's left behind Peruvian protégé José Luis de Cossio de La Puente as chef de cuisine to run things, but Platt says Andina isn't about the American chef system.

"The concept here isn't specifically about which chef is in the kitchen. For us and all the chefs and the managers and everyone, the star of Andina is Peruvian food and culture," she says.

Specifically, that means offering dishes in two styles; traditional *criollo* from colonial-era Peru, and what the folks at Andina call *novoandina* or *novo* Peruvian, innovative cooking using indigenous ingredients prepared with modern techniques, and authentic flavor and sensibility.

The result is inventive dishes like *causitas marinadas* (octopus, crab, and lobster layered with key lime potato puree), *quinoto de hongos de la montaña* (artichokes, asparagus, wild mushrooms, and creamy vegetarian quinoa), and *chupe de camarones* fusion (a traditional Peruvian soup infused with lemongrass, coconut, and *ají panca*, a dark and moderately hot Peruvian chile with a fruity flavor). These share menu space with the more traditional Peruvian entrees like *loco serrano con granos andinos* (a stew of squash and grains with cheese and quail eggs) and *seco a la norteña* (a family recipe of lamb shanks braised in black beer, cilantro, chile, onions, and garlic). Of course, there are ceviches, the traditional potato-cake *causa*, and many seafood options as well, befitting a true Peruvian menu.

So far, the Pacific Northwest has welcomed Andina's way with open arms; Oregon's largest newspaper, the *Oregonian*, named it the restaurant of the year in 2005 and *Gourmet* magazine has called it "a rare Peruvian gem filled with folk art and weavings . . . unique on the West Coast."

So today, what seemed to start as a young man's whimsy has turned into a journey to bring Peru's culture, traditions, and history to a part of the world where the various cross-currents of South America might otherwise seem obscure. One conversation with Platt would clear up some of that obscurity, as she might explain how her hometown was the site of the capture by the Spanish of the last Inca emperor, Atahualpa, or how its milk and cheese are considered among the best in the region. Platt, who met her American husband when he worked in the Peace Corps and reconnected with him years later when they taught science in the same Lima high school, infuses Andina with a passion that is all enveloping, in a unique confluence of circumstances that prove to her that, despite her family's original reservations, Andina was simply meant to be.

Andina's chefs remind us that classic ceviche (or cebiche) depends on freshness and the quality of ingredients, as well as speed, to avoid loss of freshness or flavor. "The modern 'a la minute' style recommends that the seafood marinate for no longer than a few minutes, preferably with ice cubes added to the mix to keep everything chilled. The taste should be right out of the ocean. Indeed, the first Spanish-style cebiches were prepared by Peruvian fishermen on their skiffs, using fresh catch and the limes they sucked to ward off seasickness. Even before then, the pre-Hispanic coastal people of Peru used the acid juice of *tumbo* [a form of passionfruit] to 'cure' raw seafood."

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*A food and travel writer based in Brooklyn, New York, Jack Robertiello is a regular contributor to Américas.*

**CEBICHE DE MANGO VERDE  
(GREEN MANGO CEBICHE)**  
(ADAPTED FROM ANDINA RESTAURANT)

Serves 4

- 12 ounces raw shrimp
- 1 cup sliced green mango
- 1 cup fresh key lime juice
- 3/4 cup sliced red onion
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped cilantro
- 1 habañero chili
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/4 cup passionfruit juice (or puree)
- 4 leaves butterleaf lettuce
- 3/4 cup corn kernels, boiled and chilled
- 4 slices sweet potato, boiled and chilled
- 4 wedges white yuca, boiled and warm
- Kosher or sea salt to taste

Rinse the sliced green mango and onion in cold water and reserve separately in iced water. Slice the habañero chili into small thin strips. Reserve. Peel, devein, and blanch the shrimp in boiling salted water. Drain and shock in iced water. Drain, slice each in two, and reserve. In a stainless steel or nonreactive ceramic bowl, combine the mango, shrimp, and onions. Season with salt. Add the habañero strips, chopped cilantro, passionfruit juice diluted with a half-cup water, and lime juice. Mix well. Divide among four chilled plates and serve with corn kernels, a sweet potato slice, and yuca wedge on lettuce leaf garnish.

**CAUSA MORADA DE TRUCHA  
(PURPLE POTATO CAUSA WITH  
SMOKED WILD TROUT)**

Serves 6

- 3 cups mashed purple potatoes
- 1/4 cup key lime juice
- 1/4 cup *ají amarillo* puree (see Note)
- 1/2 cup canola oil
- 12 ounces fillet of smoked wild trout, or  
1 1/2 cups chopped smoked wild trout
- 3/4 cup mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup finely chopped celery
- 1/2 cup finely chopped red onion
- 1 1/2 semi-ripe avocado
- Daikon sprouts, for garnish
- Salt and pepper to taste

Coarsely chop the smoked trout and place in a large bowl. Using a large spoon, mix the mayonnaise, celery, red onion, and salt and pepper to taste. Set aside to chill. Place the mashed potatoes in another large bowl, and add the *ají amarillo* puree, key lime juice, and salt and pepper to taste. Add the canola oil and mix the ingredients by hand. For the base layer of the causa, fill a stainless-steel ring mold (3 1/2 inches in diameter, 1 3/4 inches high) to one-quarter its height with the potato mixture, patting down evenly and firmly. For the middle layer, fill the ring mold to three-quarter height with the trout mixture, again patting down evenly. For the final layer, repeat with the potato mixture, and again compress gently but firmly. Carefully remove the ring, and garnish with slices of one-quarter avocado. Finish with daikon sprouts. Repeat for remaining portions.

**Note:** To make the chile puree, remove the seeds from eight to ten peppers and boil the chilies for five minutes. Liquefy the peppers in a blender, adding enough water to achieve the consistency of a thick puree. Press through a fine colander or sieve and set aside.



©BASIL CHILDRS (2)



Doris Platt Rodríguez, left, and her widely acclaimed Portland, Oregon, restaurant, Andina, above

**Note from Andina:** *Ají amarillo* (also known as *ají escabeche* or *ají verde*) is the most commonly used pepper in Peruvian cuisine. A puree of yellow bell pepper with a touch of jalapeño pepper can be substituted; the combination of the yellow bell pepper's mild and fruity flavor with the heat of the jalapeño approximates the flavor of the *ají amarillo*.

**PASSIONFRUIT MOUSSE**

Serves 4

- 16 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 3 cups sugar
- 2 2/3 cups passionfruit puree (available in  
grocer's freezer)
- 4 cups heavy whipping cream
- 1 cup cooked quinoa

In a standing mixer, whisk the cream cheese on medium speed with half the sugar until very smooth (about three minutes), scraping down the bowl frequently. Add the remaining sugar and scrape down the bowl again. Mix until there are no lumps. Reduce speed to low and add the passionfruit in three stages, scraping frequently. Transfer the mixture to a clean bowl and put the heavy cream in a mixing bowl. Whip until stiff peaks form. Add the passionfruit mixture to the whipped cream and whip until thick and smooth, about twenty seconds. Fold in the cooked quinoa. This recipe is delicious served in a bowl on its own, or it can be piped into canoli shells for an elegant presentation. ■