

Featured Chef: Silvana Salcido Esparza

Written by By Debby Wolvos

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Featured Chef Silvana Salcido Esparza- Chef-Owner, Barrio Cafe and Barrio Queen



AFM: Who taught you to cook?

SSE: My mother, my maternal grandmother, and my father in a house in the middle of the fields of Merced, Calif. My parents also owned and operated the first and only Mexican bakery there.

AFM: What are your favorite childhood food smells and sounds?

SSE: My favorite smell is chorizo. My favorite sound is the clatter of silverware and dishes in the background, and the murmur and laughter of my mother and grandmother in the kitchen.

AFM: What is your favorite ingredient?

SSE: Love. That's the secret. My mother told me that. She died of cancer. The last year of her life was spent in her home. I cooked for her and cared for her. Her recipes are engraved in my heart.

AFM: You are a James Beard twice-nominated chef with highly successful restaurants. Yet you have experienced your share of difficulty in life.

SSE: Growing up I stood out. I was the only Mexican and Jehovah's Witness in the entire all-white school in California. Born in the United States. Happiest in Mexico. A Mexican lesbian. Plus, I look Black. Whew. I could write a book.

AFM: Tell us about your love for vintage cars.



SSE: I remember my father's car. It was a 1950 Chevy. A black car with all the chrome. It was an immigrant's dream car--a working man's car. I loved that car. I always wanted a bomb. So I got a 1950 Chevy Deluxe. It's a tribute to my nephew who was murdered two years ago.

AFM: If the universe granted you an eighth day this week, what would you do?

SSE: To be honest--I already have my eighth day. I am the master of my own little universe. The only thing I have to do is pay taxes and obey the law. I live in bliss knowing that nobody is going to tell me if I have to go to work today.

AFM: What's in your fridge at home?

SSE: It's full of condiments... too many condiments in there!

AFM: Name a few of your favorite local chefs.

SSE: I love the food but I'm not crazy about the industry. I'm a bit of a rebel that way. I like the chefs who are authentic. Beau (MacMillan)...he's a big bubba. Before he was "famous Beau," he was Beau. He still is. I love Chef Lee Hillson too. And Chef Chris Bianco.



AFM: We understand that the November issue of Esquire magazine is naming Barrio Queen as one of the "Best New Restaurants in America".

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Congrats.

SSE: Thank you. I'm writing a breakfast menu for Barrio Queen right now.

<http://www.barriocafe.com/>

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