

REVUE

Guatemala's English-language Magazine

NOVEMBER 2022 revuemag.com Year 31 No. 9

FOOD IN GUATEMALA



THIS MONTH IN REVUE

On the Cover
"Roasted Chilies"
courtesy of
Amalia Moreno-
Damgaard



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by Louise Wischild

The savory tortilla, made from ground maize (corn), is Guatemala's favorite food staple. Maize itself plays an important cultural and spiritual role in Mayan cosmology. In the Maya creation story, people were fashioned from yellow and white maize.

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by Ginger Hooven



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KAQ'IK A GUATEMALAN TRADITION

text and photos by Kerstin Sabene

Kaq'ik, is a savory and spicy red broth made from puréed tomatoes, tomatillos, lots of natural herbs and chilies that are all cooked together and then served with a big juicy turkey leg. Kaq'ik, as I soon came to learn, has a very long history and was eventually declared a Cultural Heritage in 2007. ...page 34



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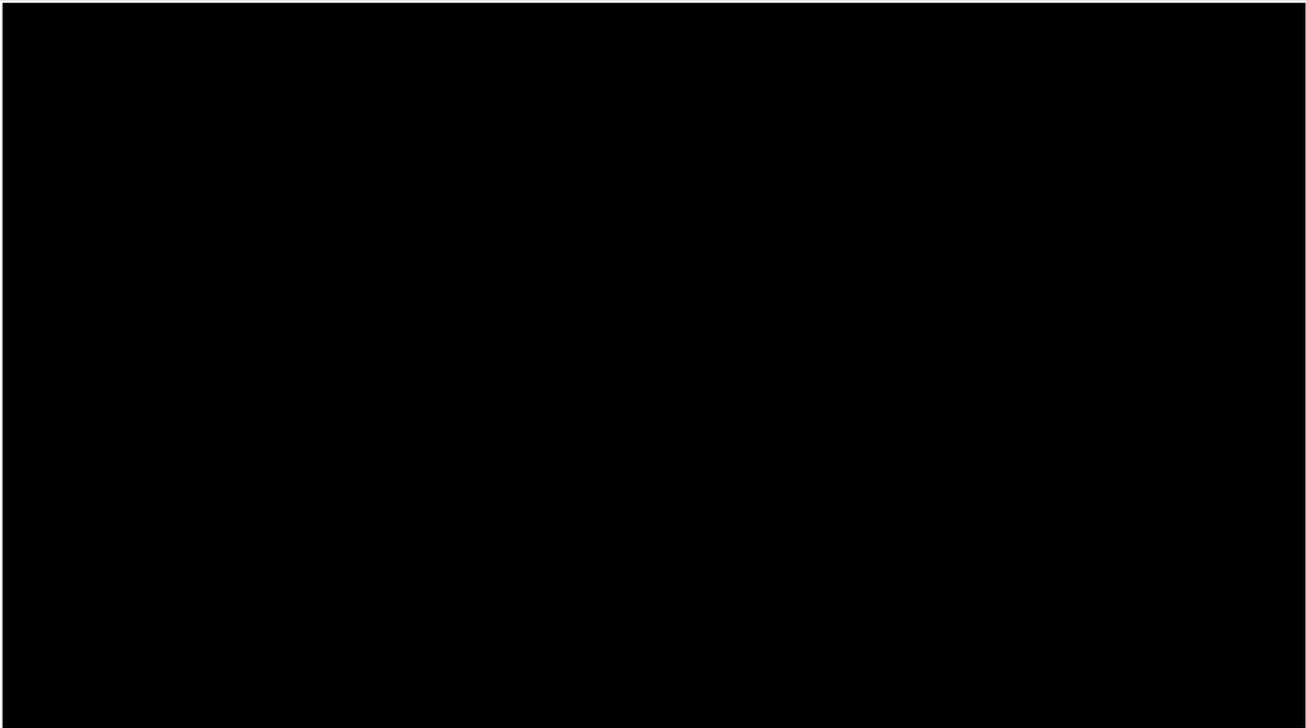
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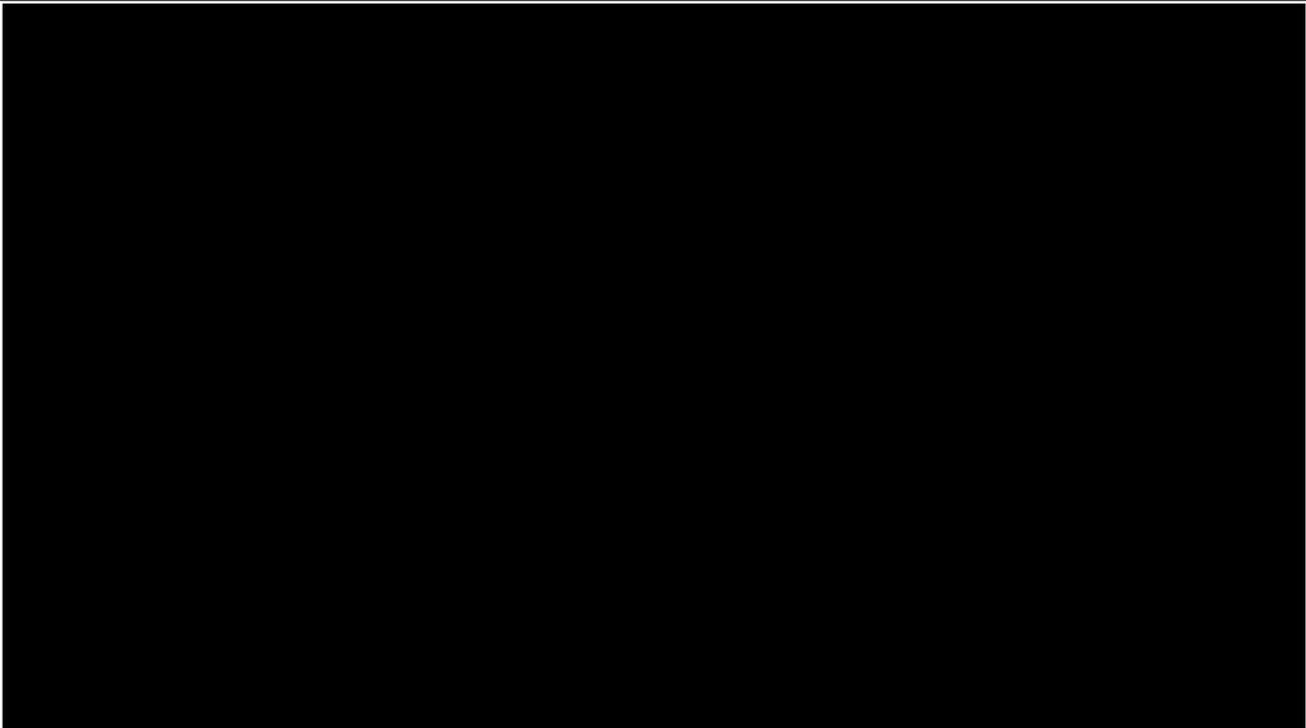


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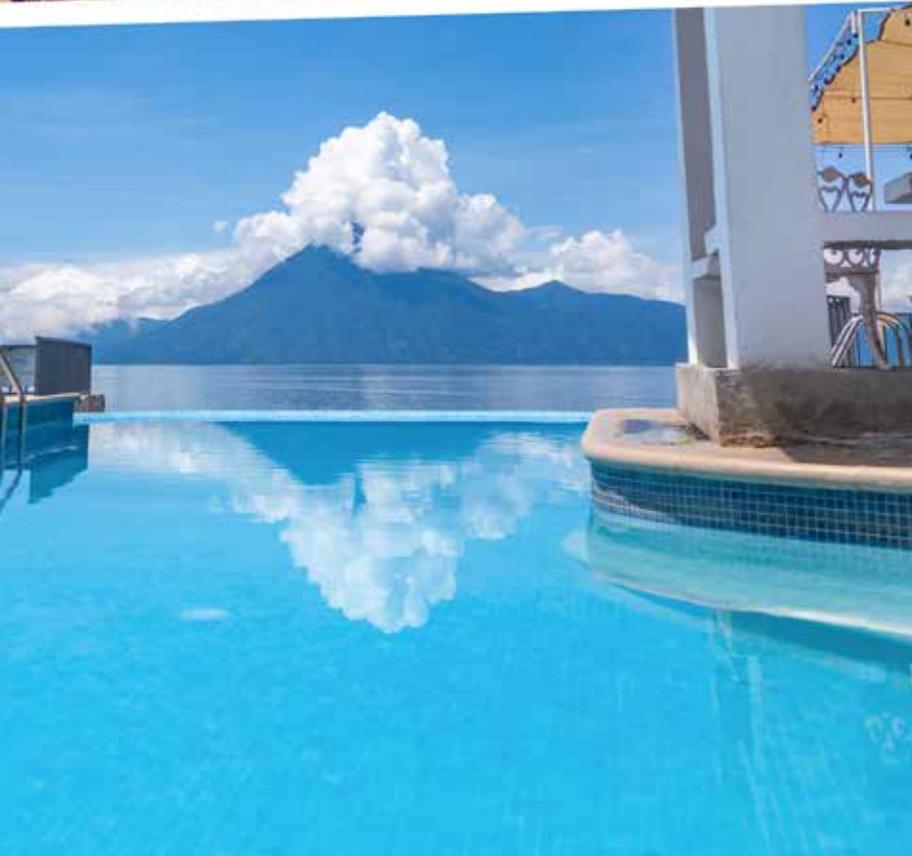
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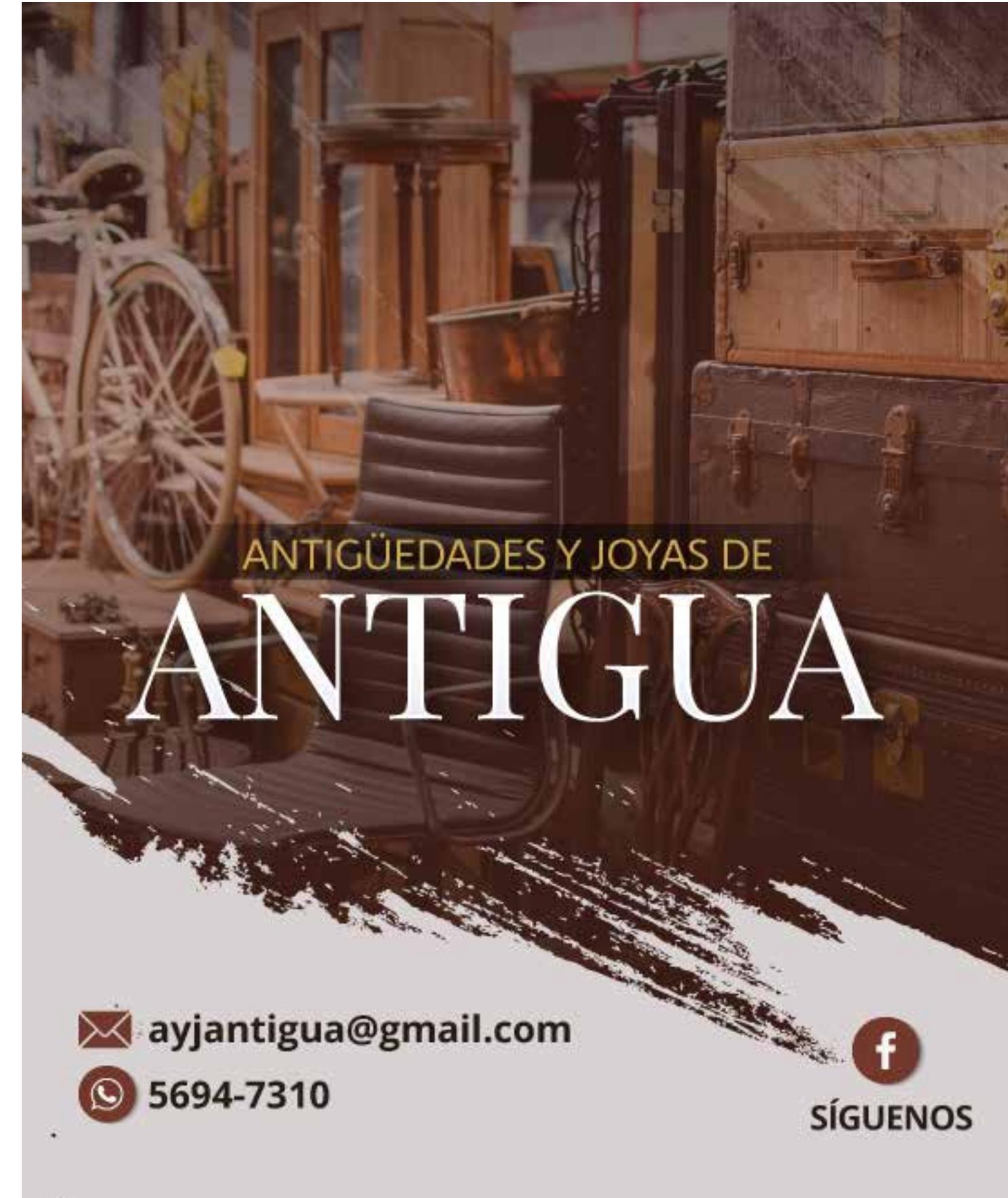
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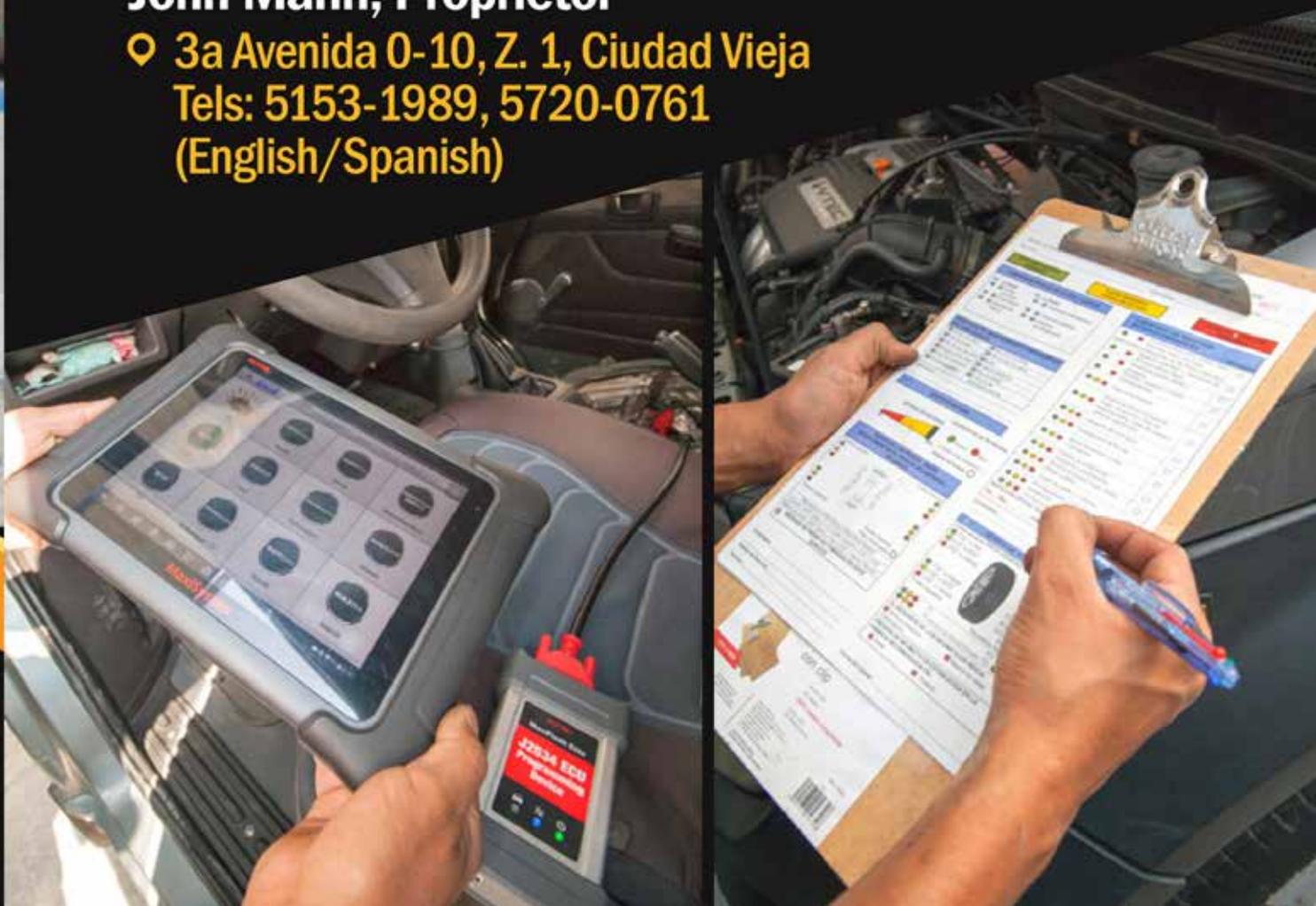
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FROM THE PUBLISHERS

November is upon us and closing in fast is the holiday season. In this issue of *Revue* we highlight some traditional foods of Guatemala, and not only for special occasions.

We begin with the basics, ***The Evolution of the Tortilla*** by Louise Wischild. For a season she followed a Maya family to learn the life cycle of maize.

We have included a ***Cookbook Alert*** that explains Guatemala-style cuisine for neophytes authored by Carole Wilson.

Ginger Hooven explains the ease of following an Ayurvedic diet in ***Ayurvedically Speaking***.

And, we take a journey with Kerstin Sabene to find a traditional dish of ***Kaq'ik***.

Thanks for reading and we wish you the best of Novembers.

—*Terry & John Kovick Biskovich*



photo courtesy of
Amalia Moreno-Damgaard

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*A Heartfelt Greeting to all of our
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In Guatemala, the pandemic has started to wane, leaving in its wake increased levels of poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Now is your chance to step up and **"Make a Difference"**.

We will again be assembling and distributing Nutritional Christmas Baskets (please see attached photo) which will not only help feed the hungry but will also provide you and Guatemalan families the opportunity to **"Pay it Forward"**. The families working with Open Windows and other selected families will receive two Baskets, one for themselves and a second Basket to give to a family whom they identify as in greater need than themselves. This ability to "empower generosity" within the Open Windows families was well received last season and in many cases, brought tears of joy and gratitude.

Our goal this year is to assemble and distribute 1,500 Christmas Food Bags (last year we received donations for 1,240 Baskets). Please let us know if you are interested in participating and approximately how many baskets you anticipate giving.

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Please forward this to friends and family whom you feel would like to **"Pay it Forward"**
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Thank you, Cynthia and Laisa
(cburski@gmail.com)

3rd Place Popular Vote **"Cocinando con leña"**
San Andrés Xecul by Guido De León







3rd Place Judges Vote "**Manzana de Feria**"
Feria de Jocotenango, Guatemala City by Henry Cukier





2nd Place Judges Vote "**Buñuelos**" Feria de Jocotenengo by Juan José Rodas González



1st Place Popular Vote **“Torrejas en miel”**
Feria de Jocotenango by Andrea Rojas



Las infaltables Tortillas by Javier Alvarez Vassaux

The Evolution of the Tortilla

by Louise Wisechild

The savory tortilla, made from ground maize (corn), is Guatemala's favorite food staple. Maize itself plays an important cultural and spiritual role in Mayan cosmology. In the Maya creation story, people were fashioned from yellow and white maize. Maize is the foundation of

the Mayan diet and culture. Maize is also one of the most important gifts to the world from the Maya.

Though the exact botanical ancestry of maize is still debated, its domestication 10,000 years ago in southern Mexico is regarded as the greatest accomplishment

in agricultural history. Whether maize originated with the tough-shelled seeds from the scrawny teosinte bush or was crossbred with grasses, it was the Maya who planted, tended and selected the best seeds from their harvests for the next year's crop, over thousands of years.

Maize is one of the few plants that does not reseed itself; it requires humans to plant it. Small ears of maize have been found in early Mayan sites, midgets compared to the voluptuous ears grown today. The Maya also understood that maize must be cooked with lime to unlock the plant's nutritional value. Maize is now the third most popular plant in the world and supplies 20 percent of the world's calories.

Today in Guatemala, Maya families continue to tend maize, often on the steep sides of mountains. For a season I



"For a season I followed Chema Gonzalez and his family through the life cycle of maize."

followed Chema Gonzalez and his family through the life cycle of maize. Don Chema's milpa, on the unpopulated side of Volcán San Pedro, is traditionally planted in late February using the seeds he saved from last year's crop.

The land had already been cleared by fire. The vacant earth mimicked Volcán San Pedro in its succession of small pointed mounds, where last year's maize had been planted. Chema knelt and took a handful of dirt to show me that the soil was moist even though it had not rained recently.



As we walked through the field Chema selected tousled ears and handed them to his two eager granddaughters



"Here we plant so that three stalks of maize will grow together and give more stability to the plants and a higher yield."

After making a hole at the top of a mound, he deposited three kernels from the bag he had tied around his waist and then covered them with soil. Squash and beans, which are inter-planted in the lowlands, are not suitable for the mountains, Chema said. "Here we plant so that three stalks of maize will grow together and give more stability to the plants and a higher yield."

By early May the leaves brushed my waist as I walked through the rows of vividly green, healthy plants. Chema's daughter and granddaughter selected leaves from the corn for tamales and gathered edible wild greens that had sprung up between the stalks.

By the end of August, the plants towered high over my head, the thick close stalks like slender trees studded with multiple ears of maize. As we

walked through the field Chema selected tousel ears and handed them to his two eager granddaughters, who cheerfully delivered them to the baskets of their aunts.

At home, the elote will be roasted and slathered with mayonnaise and Parmesan cheese.

The majority of the crop was left to dry on the stalk until January. I stood with the women as towering sacks of just-harvested maize began arriving



The process of degranulation, the bare cobs are used for animal feed and cooking fires.



Benditas tortillas by German Velásquez

on the bent backs of men wearing sombreros. The women smiled at the brimming sacks even though this would require several weeks of intensive labor to process. “Yes, we are very happy today,” they told me, “because there is enough maize for the entire year.”

The women began at once, tearing down the husks and cracking them away from the cob. The well-formed husks were tossed to a pile to wrap chuchitos, while the others would be fed to the horses.

When all the corn had been husked, the process of degranulation, removing each kernel of maize from the cob, began. The women used a simple tool or even a screwdriver to remove each kernel; the bare cobs were tossed into a pile for animal feed and cooking fires.

The kernels were carefully collected—not one was left to be trampled in the dust. Next they were spread

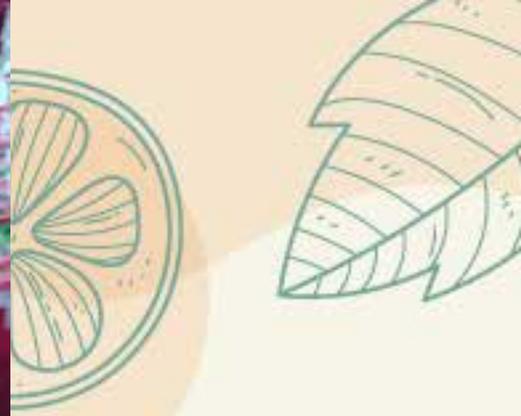
onto plastic tarps where they would be raked until thoroughly dry and ready for storage. The best ears were once again kept aside for next year’s seed, a precious genetic heritage saved to provide food for the future.

The women will soak the dried maize with lime water and then take it to a molindor to be ground, the only machine in the life of the maize. At home they will press the masa (dough) into their palms and clap it softly as it passes between their hands and emerges as a perfectly round tortilla.





2nd Place Popular Vote "**Feria**"
Basílica de Nuestra Señora del
Rosario, Santo Domingo. Ciudad
de Guatemala by Dulce Sarazúa





1st Place Judges Vote **"Torrejas Calientes"** Guatemala City by Francisco Hernández

*"I won't be impressed with technology until
I am able to download snacks from the internet."
—Anonymous*



Kaq'ik is served.

Kaq'ik

Spicy Guatemalan Turkey Soup

text and photos by Kerstin Sabene

In the predominantly Kekchi-speaking Maya municipality of Cobán, Alta Verapaz, I recently had the very good fortune of experiencing some of Guatemala's most ancient and traditional food dishes.

One of these dishes, **Kaq'ik**, is a savory and spicy red broth made from

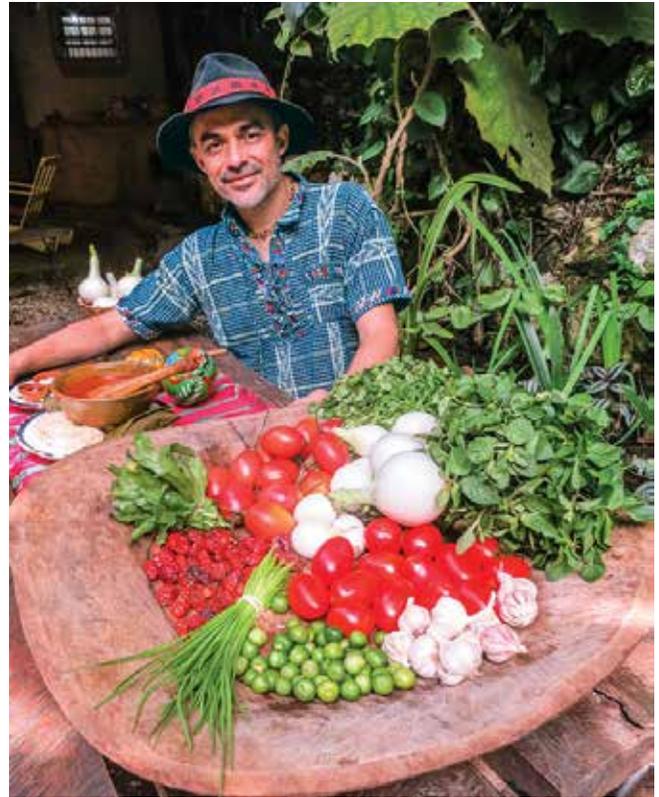
puréed tomatoes, tomatillos, lots of natural herbs and chilies that are all cooked together and then served with a big juicy turkey leg. Kaq'ik, as I soon came to learn, has a very long history and was eventually declared a Cultural Heritage in 2007 by Guatemala's Ministry of Culture and

Sports. And as with most ancient and cultural heritage dishes, there exist a variety of versions that have all been tweaked over the centuries by someone's abuela (grandmother).

“**Xkape Ko’ban** pays homage to all abuelas,” said Byron Cordova, an owner and a chef at this enchanting café and restaurant located in the heart of central Cobán. “I wanted it to smell just like my grandmother’s house, which is Tucked away off the beaten path, Xkape Ko’ban is a unique respite from the daily hustle and bustle of Cobanero life. I find myself completely entranced each time I enter its magical gardens and aviary. And a visit to Xkape is as much an educational experience in Maya culture as it is in the culinary arts.

Here you can browse an eclectic gift shop filled with locally produced natural products, discover the most delicious handmade tamarind candies and learn about Maya medicinal plants.

Cordova, whose grandmother from his father’s side is Kekchi, founded Xkape with his partners 13 years ago in February. “This is a sig-



Byron Cordova at Xkape Ko’ban

nificant milestone,” he explained, “because it corresponds with Maya cosmovision and its cyclical calendar of 13 years.”

Cordova studied agro ecology and founded Xkape on the agro ecological and permaculture systems of the indigenous. “My objective,” he stated, “was to showcase the cultural heritage and traditions of the Verapaz region with a heavy emphasis on Kekchi culture and cuisine.”

“**Ik**” means spicy in Kekchi, which is why one of Kaq’ik’s main ingredients is a hot, dry

Cobanero chili. “It’s what gives this soup its special character,” said Cordova. “**Kaq**” means red, but its color also denotes an ancestral and ceremonial aspect to the dish, he explained.

Traditionally, Kaq’ik is served at celebratory events such as weddings, birthdays and house christenings. And because ritual is such an important part of Maya culture, fresh turkey blood has been known to make its way into the ground and spread around important points of a new house construction.

Even today in many areas of Alta Verapaz, Kekchi women keep the tradition alive by killing, cleaning and preparing the turkey just as it has been done for centuries.

Making the broth for Kaq’ik is easy and essentially requires simmering the onion and garlic first followed by the tomatoes and tomatillos in a large pot and adding some water. In Alta Verapaz, there is an abundance of tree tomatoes or tomate de árbol, which are also added to the mixture.

Entrance to Xkape Ko’ban





Fresh ingredients for preparing Kaq'ik

If you enjoy a charred flavor, Cordova says it's best to first grill the vegetables a la plancha, allowing them to soften before adding to the stew with some achiote (annatto seed) for color and the Cobanero chilies al gusto.

After simmering over low heat for an hour or two, add some fresh cebolline (chive), hierbabuena (mint) and samat (wild cilantro) and finally season to taste with salt.

Depending on whose recipe is used, the turkey or chunto is cooked separately in water or chicken broth with a

good handful of the fresh herbs thrown into the pot. Just before serving, the Kaq'ik gets assembled with the turkey leg dipped into the broth and garnished with some of the fresh samat and mint.

Kaq'ik is usually accompanied by small portions of rice and tamalitos, or pochitos as they are known in Verapaz, filled with masa (corn flour) that have been steamed in banana leaves. Kaq'ik is usually accompanied by small portions of rice and tamalitos, or pochitos as they are known in Verapaz, filled with masa (corn flour) that have been steamed in banana leaves.



"Fiambre Antigüeno" by Karla Coxaj





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Ayurvedically Speaking, you are what you digest



Fresh organic vegetables.

by Ginger Hooven

Following an Ayurvedic diet in Guatemala is so easy! The markets are brimming with beautiful produce, farm-fresh milk and butter are still available, and for locals, lunch is the biggest meal of the day.

Though Ayurveda, the 5,000+-year-old traditional approach to health and wellness was established in India, this does not mean eating

only Indian food. Ayurvedic cooking starts with creating a well-balanced meal that provides sufficient nourishment for the whole human: mind, body, senses and soul.

The meal begins with the senses. The aromas that drift toward us; the color, texture and variety; the first bite awakens both touch and

Timing is everything. “You are what you eat,” but in Ayurveda, “You are what you digest.” Certain rules assure digestion can be at its maximum. For example, chewing well, not drinking much

liquid (and never cold liquids) to keep the digestive fire ignited, allowing adequate time between meals to complete the proper stage of the digestive process, and not going to sleep with a full tummy (which also causes a whole array of gastric problems).

Food is used as medicine in Ayurveda. Based on the five elements (ether, air, fire, water and earth), Ayurveda uses two overarching principles: “like increases like” and “opposites decrease.” If one is feeling anxious, worried, nervous (ether and air qualities), foods that ground, stabilize, calm (water and earth qualities)



In Aryurveda, one should take time to appreciate the food.



Carrots cooking

are needed. So instead of a light, airy salad for lunch, I might choose a thick stew or soup. Instead of popcorn for a snack, I might have a cup of hot, spiced milk and a sweet. If one is feeling hot and angry (fire qualities), a good mid-morning drink might be aloe vera water or coconut water instead of a cup of hot coffee or black tea.

A common error that comes up when speaking of Ayurvedic cooking is that it

is vegetarian. While yoga, the sister science of Ayurveda, promotes a vegetarian diet, Ayurvedic does not. The properties of the animal are taken into consideration and the same principles are applied; when necessary, animal products are used for healing. When not, a simpler, plant-based diet is encouraged.

Eating is a ritual in Ayurveda. One should take the time to appreciate the food, taste it, feel its nourishing qualities

entering the body. Taking time to be grateful for the meal is an important factor in providing sustenance for the soul. In Ayurveda, leftovers are not encouraged. Fresh food has prana – life force energy – which is depleted as food is refrigerated and reheated. Twenty-four hours max is a good rule of thumb.

How to create a Guatemalan meal through an Ayurvedic lens? A lovely rice pilaf (sopa de arroz), creamy black beans (frijoles parados) and over half a plate of fresh seasonal vegetables, sautéed and braised (lid on) in their own juice. Start with some red onion, a touch of garlic, thinly sliced carrots ... after the carrots start to soften, add chunks of zucchini or guicoyitos ... and finish up with handfuls of fresh greens and a squash blossom or two. On the side you can serve a mild pico de gallo and freshly chopped cilantro ... and you're good to go!



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"Atol de elote en el parque" Parque central de Quetzaltenango, by Luis Soto



"Joyous food in the Mercado"
Antigua by David Dean

***"Eating is not merely a material pleasure.
Eating well gives a spectacular joy to life and contributes
immensely to goodwill and happy companionship.
It is of great importance to the morale."***

—Elsa Schiaparelli



**"Tortillas de harina" Puerto Barrios, Izabal
by Daniel Iguardia**





COOKBOOK ALERT

“El Poyo, la Piedra y el Nixtamal: Cocina al estilo de Guatemala para neófitos.”

*A cookbook that explains
Guatemala-style cuisine for neophytes*

by Keri Peyton

When author Carole Wilson was a child, she spent hours in her grandmother’s kitchen. While the house was ultramodern for the time, her grandmother insisted on having a poyo, an old-fashioned, masonry, wood and charcoal burning stove.



At that stove, Carole spent hours as a child surrounded by the aroma of charred chilies, culantro (the Guatemalan spelling of cilantro) and day-old tortillas, helping Chabela, her grandmother's cook, make countless meals for the family.

Many years passed, but Carole never forgot the memories of that world when people would bring baskets of fresh fruit and vegetables home from the market in horse-drawn carriages. In *El poyo, la piedra y el nixtamal* Carole has not only recorded the essence of her grandmother's kitchen and Guatemala's culinary traditions, she has presented them in a clear and easy-to-follow format, removing the mystery for the modern kitchen.

El poyo, la piedra y el nixtamal includes 280 recipes, meticulously researched, collected and tested over a 20-year period, and presented in a beautifully designed book. In addition to these accessible recipes, Carole has carefully described all of the techniques someone new to the Guatemalan kitchen would need to use in order to achieve the special and unique flavors of Guatemala.

You'll learn how to perfectly roast and peel chilies, thicken a sauce with toasted platano peels or day-old tortillas, and



cook meats and vegetables so they perfectly pair with the recado (sauce) you're craving. The book also includes a description of the common ingredients found in the Guatemalan pantry, giving readers knowledge of the building blocks of these delicious dishes.

Currently published in simple Spanish, **El Poyo, la Piedra y el Nixtamal** is available in Guatemala City at: Corinne (Blvd. Los Proceres & Condado Concepción), Geminis (13 av. 13-05, z. 14), and Sophos (Plaza Fontabella) and in La Antigua at Colibrí (4a calle oriente #3-B).

REVUE PHOTO CONTEST

DECEMBER
2022

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MONTHLY PHOTO CONTEST for December
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photo with caption/location and
your name & website for the credit line
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More information at: **revuemag.com**
Submissions entered by the 15th of
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¡Prizes are Back on both categories!

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Photos in this ad are from previous contests by: Mima Ortiz, Aarón García Barrios, Eduardo Andrino, Edy Armando Morales, Joan Manuel Rodríguez, Josué Morales and Jaime Pérez.

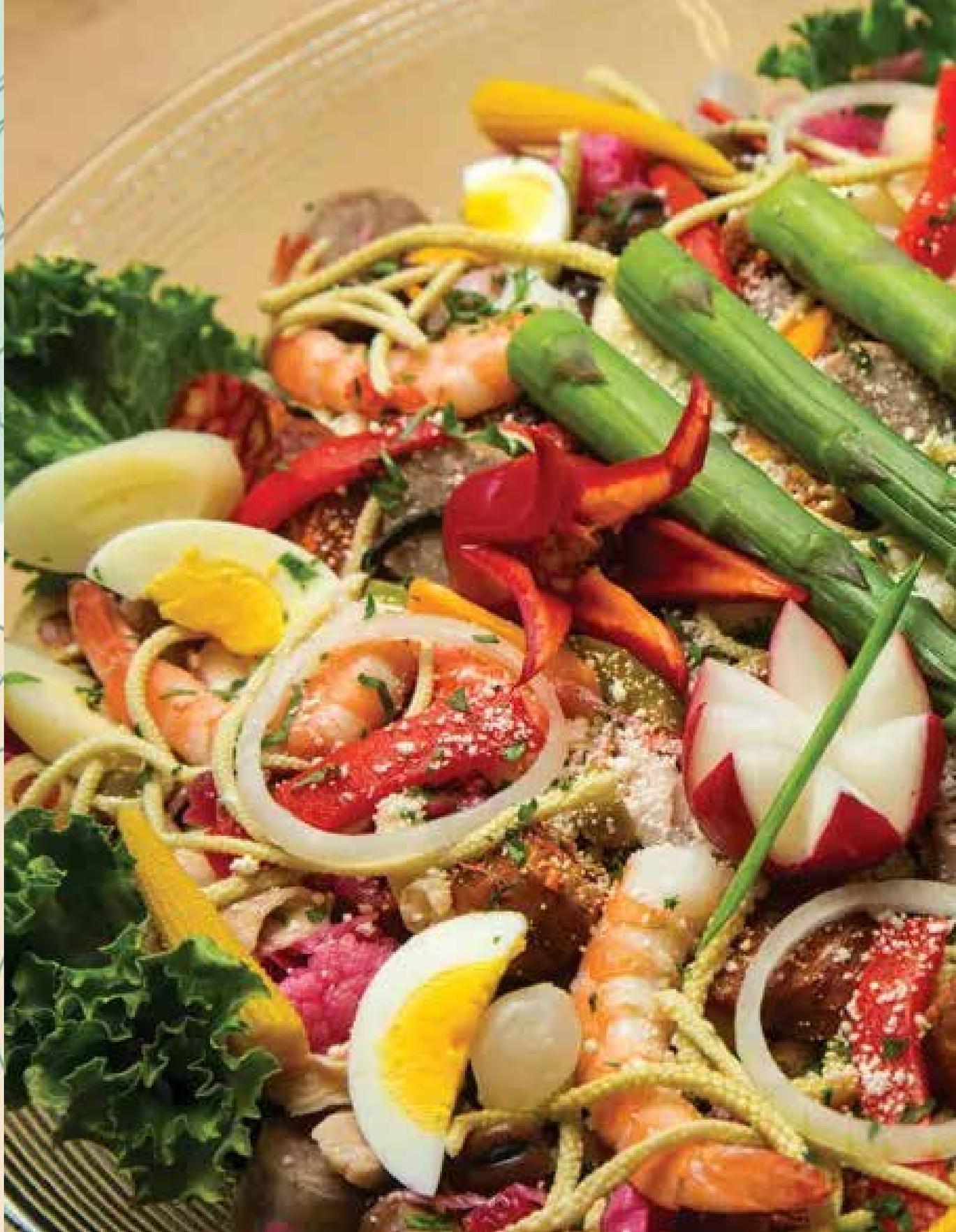
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