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FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO *read*, LOVE TO *eat*, AND LOVE TO *travel*



San Antonio

WHERE ON EARTH

San Antonio Culinaria Festival

by LAURA SUTHERLAND

THE LINE-UP OF HOT SAUCES demanded closer inspection. There were seven spicy bottled possibilities, plus Sriracha... and I knew the duck taco in my hand

was loaded with sliced jalapeños. Did I really need more heat? I tried a bite of the taco, stuffed with duck confit, bacon, pineapple, cilantro, lime crema and the jalapeños. A little heat lingered on my palate but it didn't take away from the unusual and seriously delicious blend of ingredients assembled by Chef Jason Dady at his popular DUK food truck. I decided to eat it au naturel, as the chef may have intended. I could always try another later with some real firepower on it.

Dady's was one of 15 food trucks that were parked in a big circle, like a ring of Conestoga wagons settling in for the night. In the middle were tables and chairs, a big beer and wine tent, and hundreds of people sampling the goods.

San Antonio's premiere food festival, Culinaria, had started a few days earlier with special dinners and wine tastings at restaurants around town. But the Food Truck evening was the first large crowd event, where people could get in for \$10-\$20, drink free wine and beer and pay another few dollars to sample all kinds of food truck favourites.

The variety of dishes ranged from Pakistani street food to pulled pork BBQ, but hot and spicy seemed to be a prevailing theme. I guess that was fitting since this was the American Southwest after all, where chiles of all varieties flavour the food and people's seasoned palates appreciate the heat.

Sriracha, the trendy Thai/Vietnamese hot sauce, was everywhere. At Cheesy Jane's Truck, even the whoopee pie was dotted with little red flecks of it, giving the retro dessert a pleasant afterburn. Sriracha ketchup was featured generously on the Slider Provider truck's 'Chuck Norris' slider too, which dripped the spicy condiment in a most satisfyingly messy way.

During the day we took advantage of the perfect May weather and explored the city. San Antonio's spectacular River Walk, a green and »



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THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Silvia Alcaraz of Cocina Heritage offers Mayan-influenced dishes at Culinaría's The Best of Mexico event; Spicy duck tacos from the Duk Truck; Casa Hernán; El Machito dishes up; Mission Concepcion; Chefs from the St Anthony hotel; Mexican cookies and conchas from Lux Bakery.

Cook



SERVES 10

FIDEO SECO EN PASILLA ADOBO

Vermicelli with Pasilla Chile Sauce

CHEF JOHNNY HERNANDEZ reinterprets classic Mexican dishes at his two San Antonio restaurants.

Vermicelli¹ 1 lb

Vegetable Oil ½ cup

Pasilla Chiles 8, seeds and stem removed

Brown Sugar ½ cup

Onion ½

Garlic 3 cloves

Ground Cloves a pinch

Cinnamon a pinch

Chicken Stock 7 cups

Salt and Pepper to taste

FOR GARNISH

Avocado 1, sliced

Red Onion ½, julienned

Sour Cream ½ cup

Queso Fresco grated, ½ cup

1 IN a saucepan bring to a boil the chicken stock, chiles, onion, garlic, brown sugar, cloves, cinnamon, salt and pepper. Reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes.

2 REMOVE from the pan and blend till smooth, strain the sauce and set aside.

3 IN a frying pan heat the vegetable oil and fry the vermicelli in small batches until golden brown. Remove from the oil.

4 IN a covered saucepan simmer the fried vermicelli in the pasilla adobo sauce until the vermicelli is al dente, and completely dry; check seasoning.

5 SERVE and garnish with sour cream, queso fresco, red onion and sliced avocado.

¹ Or spaghetti broken into one-inch pieces.

«leafy linear park, runs through the heart of downtown and to the north and south of town for a total of 15 miles. Its shady riverside pedestrian trails are accessible to strollers and wheelchairs and it's an inspiring place to stroll or bicycle or explore by river boat or kayak.

You can also rent bikes to cruise along the city's Mission Trail. Most people are familiar with Mission San Antonio, better known as the Alamo, where a small band of Americans attempted (unsuccessfully) to fight off the Mexican army. But other Spanish missions are nearby and are connected by bike and walking paths; Mission San José is particularly beautiful and features a popular mariachi mass on Sundays.

San Antonio's rich culture — Spanish, Native American, Mexican, and German — comes alive through its food, of course, as well as its architecture, music, outdoor spaces and art. The Briscoe Western Art Museum houses a fascinating and eclectic collection focused on the broader definition of Western art — Hispanic American, Indian, classic cowboy, folk art and photography. Don't miss the inventive display of spurs from the last few hundred years and ornate leather and silver saddles, including one belonging to the famous Mexican Revolutionary leader Pancho Villa.

Culinaria's Friday night event, *The Best of Mexico*, highlighted one of San Antonio's specialties — cuisine from all regions of Mexico, often with a Texas twist, as well as a reinvention of Latin classics from Central and South America. Colourful booths in blazing fiesta hues transformed an outdoor pedestrian mall into an eating and drinking extravaganza, and a hot salsa band sizzled while we wandered.

Some seasoned visitors went right to tables featuring dishes from the most popular restaurants in town, like celebrity chef Johnny Hernandez's La Gloria or El Machito. But I tried every booth, marvelling at the men in suits and women in silk dresses and high heels who navigated Columbian *arepas*, spicy tortilla soup, *chiles en nogada* and exotic tacos dripping with guacamole and salsa without spilling a drop.

When I tasted the extraordinary *fideo seco con chile pasilla* — vermicelli with a light, dry, pasillo chile sauce topped with crema and avocado — I looked up and saw it was from El Machito and I began to understand the buzz. Johnny Hernandez's reinvention of Mexican classics has made him one of the most respected chefs around. Luckily we'd made a reservation for brunch at his hacienda-style Casa Hernán a few days later.

On another day we visited the trendy Pearl area, a 20-acre former 19th-century brewery turned into a gastronomic hotspot where the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) has established its third cooking school, with an emphasis on Latin cuisine. The Pearl's Saturday Farmer's Market and restaurants like Cured and La Gloria pull people in from all over the city, but we were there to take a Latin Boot Camp cooking class at CIA.

Donning our toques, we sliced and diced, squeezed and steamed, measured and marinated until our team finished a Peruvian ceviche dish with a killer lime marinade called *leche de tigre* and a lime-infused salad with fava beans and Peruvian corn.

The cooking was fun, but the best part was eating the line-up of Latin dishes prepared by the class.

Later that evening we sipped Napa Valley and French sparklers in the Bubble Lounge at Culinaria's fanciest event, The Grand Tasting, but I was actually hungry so I stepped outside. The first dish I tried, a plantain and yucca mofongo, was so good that I sneaked back in line for a second taste... and then a third — the heck with saving my palate for more selections. It was from NAO — CIA's signature restaurant specializing in Latin cuisine — and it reminded me that even if you miss Culinaria, you can still eat at some of the legendary establishments represented at the food events.

I ended up sampling far more dishes than I should have at the Grand Tasting, not to mention eight (or was it ten?) tastes of different artisanal tequilas and mescals. So I was relieved that brunch at Johnny Hernandez's Casa Hernán the next morning was on the later side. I knew he'd be serving something barbacoa style and he had been smoking a cow's head all night long. He highlights food from a different part of the country at his popular once-a-month Sunday brunches, and was featuring Norteño food from Mexico's interior at this particular meal.

Later that day at the final event of Culinaria, Barbecue, Burgers & Beer, I confess I was feeling a little... *done*. But when a server at Q Restaurant's booth thrust a bite-size brisket burger piled high with toppings into my hands, I took a bite just to be polite. It was so delicious that it inspired me to soldier on, so I wandered around sampling more until Ostra's slider topped with foie gras butter, pimento cheese, bourbon bacon and garlic aioli put me over the edge and I honestly couldn't eat another thing. Well, except for a couple of spoonfuls of boozy homemade mint julep ice cream. I honestly needed something sweet to top it all off. **T&T**

Culinaria
www.culinariasanantonio.org

Culinary Academy of America San Antonio
www.ciachef.edu/texas

NAO
www.naorestaurant.com

El Machito/ La Gloria
www.chefjohnnyhernandez.com

Cured
www.curedatpearl.com

The Pearl
www.atpearl.com

Casa Hernán
www.trueflavors.com/casa-hernan

LAURA SUTHERLAND is a travel writer based in Northern California. **T&T**

Cook &

USA



SERVES 10

SOLTERITO

Peruvian Fava Bean Salad

THIS LIVELY BEAN salad recipe is from the Culinary Academy of America's *Latin Boot Camp* course.

Queso Fresco $\frac{1}{2}$ lb, small dice

Fava Beans¹ in the pod, 3 lbs

Tomatoes 1 lb, seeds removed, small dice

Red Onion $\frac{1}{2}$ lb, finely diced, rinsed in cold water

Choclo (Peruvian Corn Kernels)² $\frac{1}{2}$ lb, blanched in boiling water

Extra Virgin Olive Oil $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

Mexican Limes³ 3, juiced

White Vinegar $\frac{1}{4}$ cup

Huacatay or **Cilantro** finely chopped, to taste

Salt and **Pepper** to taste

1 SHELL the fava beans and blanch in boiling water (seasoned with salt). Immerse in an ice bath and remove the outer skin from the blanched beans. Reserve.

2 TRANSFER the chopped ingredients to a bowl with the cooked fava beans and corn. Mix all the ingredients with the lime juice, vinegar and olive oil. Season to taste with salt and pepper and huacatay or cilantro.

3 SERVE chilled.

¹ If fresh fava beans are not available, use frozen edamame beans instead.

² If you can't find choclo, use regular corn.

³ Or substitute one regular lime.