ForeWord Reviews

COOKING

The New Southern-Latino Table: Recipes that Bring Together the Bold and Beloved Flavors of Latin-America & the American South

Sandra A. Gutierrez
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The New Southern-Latino Table, by cooking instructor and food writer Sandra A. Gutierrez, is both a wonderful cookbook and a fact-filled guide to the fusion of Southern and Latino cooking. Gutierrez grew up in the southern US and in Guatemala, the country of her parents, where her aunt is a leading caterer. Her diverse background and heritage enable the author to lead this skillful foray into the cuisine of the Americas, including concise accounts of culinary history and cultural background.

Gutierrez offers recipes blending the kitchen customs of our own southern region with those of countries in South and Central America, the Carribean, and Mexico. Her recipes are easy to follow and deliver elegant, complex flavors plus notes on the origins of the dish. In her piquant recipe for barbacao de carne with vidalia onion and herb salsa, she explains: “The word “barbecue” is derived from the term *barbacao*, a cooking technique originating with the Taino people of the Carribean in which meats are roasted on an open fire.” In another recipe for bacon, vidalia, and chayote pie, Gutierrez presents a bold blending of savory and sweet, featuring a member of the squash family which Latinos call “chayote” and New Orleanians know as “mirliton.”

In the Introduction, Gutierrez states: “Food tells the story of faraway places and of people long gone.” Thus, each chapter begins with a short essay in which she lays the groundwork for the recipes that follow. Interspersed throughout are notes of one or two lines giving helpful hints on handling specific ingredients. For instance: “Since Mexican cinnamon is sold only in stick form, you’ll need to grind it yourself. Break the stick into pieces and grind in a spice or coffee grinder or a mortar and pestle until smooth.” Gutierrez also includes several extraordinary one-page instructions and background pieces on food preparation or history. Her essays on chiles and “the African diaspora and food” are particularly fascinating.

Mindful that not all readers are familiar with the ingredients called for in Southern-Latino cooking, Gutierrez’ first chapter specifies a large assortment of spices, herbs, and flours

needed to prepare the dishes she presents. As further assistance, she provides a guide to a "tienda" (a Latino grocery store) and a glossary of terms used throughout the book. Finally, there is a useful list of sources and suggested reading for those wishing to delve deeper.

The New Southern-Latino Table is a tremendously valuable addition to the bookshelves of both serious and casual cooks.

John Michael Senger