

COMMENTARY

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DINNER WITH SIMON

A brunch staple now a dinner destination

Guajiros only gets better as it grows

Long known for breakfast and lunch, Guajiros Miami Eatery now serves dinner, and the experience has just the same effect: joy. Bright colors, pulsing music, vivid food and eager hospitality produce an energy that feels impossible to resist.

Behind that energy, says my latest dinner guest Chris Martin of Florosa bakery, is the Mayorga family – and the work they put in. She should know. Martin’s



SIMON DAVIDSON

cousins Harvey, Nilo and Sebas Mayorga run Guajiros with help from their parents, Harvey Sr. and Jacqueline. Take the food, which Sebas oversees. Before Guajiros, Sebas had no formal cooking experience, which might deter some from a head chef role. But with his mother’s guidance and a love of food, Sebas immersed himself in the work of learning and improving.

Sebas’ dinner menu is the culmination of that work. The Nicaraguan-born family’s vision for their restaurant stems from their first American home: Miami, where the variety of Latino heritages forges an experience all its own. Sebas’ food does the same.

We began in Colombia for arepas – thick corn cakes made from precooked and dehydrated corn flour called masarepa. Unlike the Venezuelan stuffed arepas elsewhere in Charlottesville, Guajiros’ Colombian versions are cut into triangles and served with a platter of accompaniments for customized bites: chimichurri, queso frito, romesco, pickled onions and a dip of whipped goat cheese spread, parsley, anchovies and shallot rings. “A great start to a meal,” said Martin, a culinary school grad herself.

Spanish buñuelos de bacalao – cod fritters – are a tribute to Sebas’ mother, who loves seafood and attended school in Spain. After Sebas was born, she became allergic to shellfish, and he makes the fritters so she can still eat something from the sea that reminds her of Spain. Sebas salts and dries cod himself, which he then rehydrates and combines with potato and shapes into balls. Deft frying ensures a crisp exterior and creamy interior. On the side, Peru made a delicious appearance in aioli spiked with ají charapita, an Amazonian pepper, while lime wedges, Martin said, brought “crucial” acid to round things out.

Next came Martin’s favorite entrée on the menu: salmon with leche de coconut. A creation of sous chef Eugene Byers, it’s inspired by rondón, a popular dish in Bluefields, Nicaragua, the Caribbean coastal city where he was born. While the coconut sauce is traditionally served with shrimp, lobster and crab, Guajiros uses salmon, which works well as it flakes into the creamy sauce, enhancing its richness. The generous portion of two

Table setting

Guajiros Miami Eatery

Latin American cuisine

114 10th St. NW

(434) 465-2108

8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday through Tuesday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday

fillets is ideal for sharing, which we did. What makes it a stand-out, Martin said, is the salmon’s careful seasoning and the coconut’s natural sweetness.

The influence of Sebas’ mother extends beyond the cod fritters throughout the menu. Sebas’ favorite dish, in fact, is his mother’s: gallo pinto. Literally “spotted rooster,” the red beans and rice dish is said to have gotten its name from its colorful appearance. “It is the backbone of Nicaraguan cuisine and a direct connection to my upbringing and roots,” said Sebas. As his mother taught him, Sebas cleans red silk beans and boils them with garlic, onions and spices. For enhanced flavor, he then cooks rice in the residual water from the beans and mixes it all together. Available by itself, the gallo pinto also appears throughout the menu: meat platters, breakfast bowls and, Martin’s favorite way to enjoy it, “Hands on Breakfast” – a large flour tortilla stuffed with scrambled eggs, sweet plantains, pico, cilantro mayo and, of course, gallo pinto.

While Sebas was new to cooking before Guajiros, the Mayorga family has decades of experience in service, and it shows. Nilo manages a front-of-house team that seems as though they’ve been hoping you would arrive. And, Harvey, with a background in spirits, runs the bar, whose expertise makes a dealer’s choice a good call – whether a riff on a mojito, daiquiri, Negroni or Oaxacan Dead, blending mezcal, lemon, orange liqueur, sweet vermouth and Fernet-Branca.

Offered Wednesday through Saturday, Guajiros’ dinner feels like an extension of the breakfast and lunch they serve daily. It’s the same family, the same work and the same hospitality that has made the restaurant a fixture of Charlottesville mornings and afternoons. From Nicaragua to Miami and beyond, Sebas’ food remains grounded in the Mayorga family’s experience and determination. Sebas, who came to cooking without formal training and made himself a chef, puts it best: “Joy is a byproduct that our families and customers experience as a result of what we’ve created.”

Simon Davidson is a restaurant critic for The Daily Progress. He also is founder of the Charlottesville 29 food website. He has written about Charlottesville food for more than a decade. He lives in Keswick with his wife and two children.



GUAJIROS MIAMI EATERY

Guajiros Miami Eatery, while best known for its breakfast and lunch, now also serves a dinner to match in quality.

DOLLARS & SENSE



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Many people keep an eye on their portfolio and, as it grows, develop a sense that “It’s good that I have this much. That’s the reason I need not worry about finances.”

Did your investment pay off?

It’s OK to splurge

If your investment portfolio grew by \$250,000, would you give some of it away or spend it on something or someone else?



JORGEN VIK

Depending on the size of your portfolio, there’s a fair chance it has grown by this amount or more over the last 12 months.

Then, the follow-up question in my setup: Did you have enough to fund your goals 12 months ago?

If the answer to the second question is yes, I encourage you

to give a little more, help a little more, maybe even splurge a little if that suits you.

I find many people keep an eye on the size of their investment portfolio and, as it grows, sometimes substantially, somehow develop a sense that “It’s good that I have this much. That’s the reason I need not worry about finances.”

There’s a disconnect here as if we don’t quite appreciate the value of that number.

Another problem with this disconnect is that it makes the investor needlessly anxious when the number goes down, sometimes by a lot.

If the investor described above sees his portfolio drop by \$250,000, he shouldn’t worry

about having enough.

Yet, emotions take over and we mourn the higher figure that was.

If so, step back to gain perspective. Even with such a drop, could it be that you have more than enough?

I hope this describes your situation. Nothing to see here, moving on.

Good luck.

Jorgen Vik is a financial advice columnist for The Daily Progress. He is a certified financial planner and partner with SKV Group LLC. Investment products and services are offered through Wells Fargo Advisors Financial Network. SKV Group is a separate entity from WFAFN.

BOTANICAL BRIEF

It’s more than just the monarch

Virginia’s native butterflies need your assistance too

Did you know that every year monarch butterflies migrate from as far as Northern Canada up to 3,000 miles down to the mountains of Mexico, visiting the exact same trees as their ancestors? Each individual monarch only lives long enough to make part of the trip, and it’s unknown how the descendants



WHITNEY ZHANG

follow the exact same paths and find the exact same trees four generations later. The mystery of migration of these beautiful orange monarchs is just one question that fascinates the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont’s lead butterfly expert, Nancy Weiss.

Every summer, Nancy leads butterfly walks in the garden to share her knowledge of these wonderful insects and how we can support them. A lifelong naturalist, Nancy has been involved with the Massachusetts Audubon Society, the Smithsonian, Nature Serve and the Master Naturalists before coming to the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont.

Just like monarchs, Virginia’s other native butterflies are in need of help. To thrive, every type of butterfly needs two kinds of plants.

“They need what people normally think of, the nectar plants, for the adult to get nectar sugars for energy to fly around. But for their eggs to attach to and then turn into tiny caterpillars and grow, they need often different plants called host plants,” Nancy says.

For example, Virginia’s state insect, the eastern tiger swallowtail, can be seen swooping around many different plants for nectar from spring to fall. However, their eggs must be laid on tulip trees or magnolia trees, as these are the only plants that support their caterpillars’ growth. It’s

Botanical Brief

This monthly column is brought to Daily Progress readers by the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont. The garden can be found at 950 Melbourne Road in Charlottesville. For more information, visit www.piedmontgarden.org.

hard to picture these butterflies flying overhead, high in the trees because they aren’t often visible there, but these trees are essential for their reproduction. Another example of a butterfly that requires trees is the zebra swallowtail, whose only host plant is the pawpaw tree.

Not all butterflies attach their eggs to a specific leaf or stem. There are butterflies like the great spangled fritter who use the “bomb approach” with eggs. They’ll fly over the field of their required host plant, violets, and drop their eggs one by one all over the field of violets. Once the caterpillars hatch, they will immediately look for a violet to eat. So the approach may be different, but the need is the same: a specific host plant for each butterfly species. The bombing butterflies need a lot more of them. The problem is that many of the native plants needed for both supporting butterfly eggs and providing nectar to the adults are becoming more and more scarce.

The presence of the right host and nectar plants does not guarantee that the butterflies will thrive. Another danger butterflies face is invasive plants. Even when the host plants they need are present, butterflies can confuse a similar-looking invasive plant for a host and place their eggs in a hostile environment by mistake where the caterpillars are unable to live. Butterflies are also threatened by the use of insecticides such as neonicotinoids. “Nearly 100% of field corn and over 60% of soy seeds are treated with these pesticides,” according to the World Wildlife Fund. The chemicals then spread

to every part of the plant, the surrounding soil and the surrounding water. This means that even the surrounding unsprayed wildflowers, including the milkweed necessary for monarchs, can become toxic to pollinators.

Nancy’s advice for those beginning to connect with butterflies is to watch which ones are coming to your own garden or window.

These are the ones with plant support already nearby. You can take a picture and use the free iNaturalist app, at inaturalist.org, to help identify the species. Now, you may wonder if you are seeing a moth, instead of a butterfly. However, butterflies never fly at night, so if you spot a flying “butterfly” after dark, you’ve glimpsed a moth. “Some moths do fly during the day, but you can always tell the difference by their antennae,” according to Nancy. Butterfly antennae always have a small thickening at the end like a knob. Moths’ antennae are either just threads or look “very complicated, like old TV antennas,” she says.

Some ways to start supporting butterflies include providing their native host plants, avoiding neonicotinoids and providing water for butterflies to drink. If you put out a shallow basin with a wide edge, fill it with water and then put in a few rough rocks of different heights, it allows the butterflies to have landing spaces and access water on their journeys. Rocks of different heights will allow them to continue to reach the water as the level lowers. Of course, you can also come to Botanical Garden of the Piedmont events or service days to learn more about stewarding the land to promote native plants and remove invasives. And watch the garden’s calendar for this year’s butterfly walk dates with Nancy.

Whitney Zhang is a nonprofit professional with a passion for nature and wildlife. Before coming to Botanical Garden of the Piedmont she worked as a children’s librarian at the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library and in the Contra Costa County Library system in California.