


***Newcomer Lady Carolina is set to deliver Mr Wilson's spice-laden fare to Melbourne's north. We catch up with the chef to chat about his latest muse.***





Recognised as Australia's foremost authority on Latin American food, chef **Paul Wilson** says his love affair with the cuisine first began during joint family holidays to Spain, where he was introduced to the unique flavours of the Basque region. He later discovered that the Basque cuisine had similar ingredients and textures to those found in Mexico, Cuba and Peru, which inspired Paul's further culinary travels through Latin America.

“Looking back through history you realise that the Spanish were some of the first travellers. As they swept through Latin America they left their mark – taking all the unique ingredients, cooking techniques, religion and culture – leading to this wonderful melting pot of Latin food. Only America has seen the best of it until now, but in Australia we are beginning to realise it's a vibrant food culture,” Paul says.





He believes, “It’s time for Latin American food to have its day in the sun”, and local diners are voting with their feet as Paul opens his third Latin American inspired restaurant in Melbourne, Lady Carolina. Lady Carolina joins Paul’s incredibly successful Mexican incarnations of Acland St Cantina and the Newmarket Hotel, but this time he has decided to keep things fresh and exciting by adding Peruvian and Caribbean dishes to the menu.

“We want you to feel like you’ve stepped out onto the streets of Havana when you come to our restaurant,” Paul says of Lady Carolina. He is referring to Fidel Castro’s state-sanctioned *paladares* of the 1960s: private restaurants that operated out of people’s homes offering a vibrant atmosphere and traditional home-cooking to local customers. It’s a successful formula Paul hopes to replicate, describing the new restaurant as “a Latin American epicentre featuring the food of Mexico, Peru and Cuba” that celebrates food and drinks with equal gusto, “just like the Latin Americans do”.

---

The Lady Carolina menu features five distinct sections and flavour profiles that Paul calls the ‘rockstars’ of Latin American cuisine. These include a cevicheria matched with pisco cocktails, a dedicated vegan and vegetarian section, a luxe street food section serving tacos, alpaca burgers and rum mixers, as well as a guacamole bar riffing on the Mexican staple five ways. Wilson has also purpose-built a *barbacoa* where all the meats are cooked in a traditional

Aztec format with aromatic herbs and spices, including his signature dish *lechon asado*, suckling pig with orange mojo. The barbecued meat is served with fresh salads, tortillas and moles.

“Moles and other essential sauces and condiments on the menu form the building blocks of Latin American food,” Paul says. The recipes for these are also celebrated in Paul’s cookbook, *Cantina*. “If you can master the basics – a great red mole or adobe sauce, or a pomegranate mojo – then you can cook anything, and everything will taste sweet, spicy, sour and aromatic. These key sauces tell you a story about what region they’re from, what they’re best served with and what you can do with them,” he says.

---

With the popularity of Latin American fresh produce growing, Wilson agrees it’s easier than ever to source the more obscure ingredients for these dishes. “There is so much produce that grows in Cuba, Mexico and Peru that also grows in Australia because of our wonderful diverse climate,” Paul says. In fact, he sources much of his produce from local hobby farms including exotic fruits such as achacha (similar to a lychee) and tomatillo, as well as purple corn from Queensland used to produce Lady Carolina’s signature dessert, purple corn pavlova. “Latin American food is definitely here to stay,” Paul says, and we think he might be right.

*Gillian is a freelance food writer based in Melbourne. Her food and travel blog [My Square Frying Pan](#) features rustic style recipes made for sharing, and accounts of her adventures near and far.*

---

## Browse recipes from Paul Wilson’s book, *Cantina*

- See more



Paul Wilson's

**Salted caramel ice cream churros tacos**



Paul Wilson's

**Watermelon margarita**