

FOODSERVICE EAST PRESENTS

# SECRETS OF **SUCCESS**

March 2012

An ongoing series of interviews with chefs, restaurateurs and foodservice operators, Secrets of Success looks at the paths taken to professional recognition and acclaim.



## **Chef Victoriano Lopez** Executive Chef, La Mar, New York, NY By Foodservice East

Victoriano López, Gastón's most trusted partner in the kitchen who has worked at his side for 17 years, serves as Executive Chef at La Mar NYC.

Chef Victoriano was born into a humble family in the Andes, and at age 18 he went to Lima to work for an uncle as a street vendor. Victoriano landed a job at Astrid&Gastón, where Gastón discovered and developed Victoriano's talents in the kitchen, consequently he swiftly moved through the culinary ranks. Victoriano has held many positions in Gastón's various restaurant kitchens, and has become his most trusted partner, overseeing the openings of new restaurants around the world. In addition to Gastón's restaurants, Victoriano has trained in the kitchens of top restaurants around the world, including Cellar de Can Roca, Mugaritz, and Arzak, and his next project is to serve as the representative of Peruvian cuisine and culture at La Mar in New York.

# FOODSERVICE EAST SECRETS OF SUCCESS

**FSE: You've been overseeing the cuisine of a large group of restaurants prior to coming to New York to open La Mar Cebicheria Peruana. What is it like to return to the kitchen?**

CHEF VICTORIANO: I have never left the kitchen! While we have opened other restaurants, there is no place I would rather be. It's incredibly excited to be here in NYC. While I haven't been outside our kitchen doors much, I can always feel the amazing energy of this city.

**FSE: What are the major characteristics of Peruvian cuisine?**

CHEF VICTORIANO: Very fresh ingredients. Most ingredients in Peru are grown year-round. The main ingredient in Peruvian cuisine would be the peppers. We have such a variety and almost every dish uses them. Other things like corn, potatoes and beans also round out our cuisine. Other characteristics include the fusion of several cultures with Peruvian cuisine. For example, Afro-Peruvian, Chinese-Peruvian, or Japanese-Peruvian.

**FSE: How are New Yorkers responding to your food?**

CHEF VICTORIANO: Very well! New Yorkers are incredibly open and love to try something new because the city is home to so many cultures and cuisines – that also means that they have very high standards and we love that. It has been very exciting and humbling to see how people have opened their hearts and palates to Peruvian cuisine.

**FSE: Please tell me about Pisco and the types of cocktails being made with it.**

CHEF VICTORIANO: Pisco is one of the oldest spirits in the world and it is what everyone drinks in Peru. It's distilled from grapes in Ica, Peru, located in the Pisco. We are very excited about our cocktail menu – which is focused on Pisco of course! When you come to La Mar, a visit would not be complete without a Pisco Sour. Also, don't miss the Acholado and Pisco Punch. Our cocktail director Saul Ranella probably knows more about Pisco and Peruvian cocktails than anyone. He changes the cocktail menu frequently so definitely say hello to Saul and ask him for his picks!

**FSE: Are you able to easily obtain all the ingredients needed to create Peruvian cuisine in New York?**

CHEF VICTORIANO: Yes! We source most of our ingredients locally, from the Greenmarket and other nearby farms, with the exception of some of the principal products that we need in Peruvian cuisine

like peppers and Peruvian corn.

**FSE: What can you tell me about the role of different peppers in Peruvian cuisine? Are they all available here?**

CHEF VICTORIANO: There is no Peruvian cuisine without peppers! We use them in every dish, for flavor and heat, color and texture.

**FSE: What types of food do you like to eat when you're not cooking at the restaurant?**

CHEF VICTORIANO: I love eating all kinds of food, from Korean to Italian, Mexican to Indian. I believe to be a good chef one must have a palate for every kind of food, or at least respect it.

**FSE: Was it difficult finding labor in New York? Were any of the people you hired familiar with Peruvian cuisine?**

CHEF VICTORIANO: Putting together a good team is the most important thing we can do. As we are bringing a new type of cuisine to NYC, it's critical that we have people who are excited, passionate and knowledgeable about what we are doing. I'm so proud to say that we have put together an amazing team of cooks – many are Peruvian or South American, who have had experience cooking Peruvian food. We are a family in the kitchen!

**FSE: There is a potato dish on your menu that is a family recipe of yours – what is it and how is it prepared?**

CHEF VICTORIANO: Papas a la Victoriano, or Potatoes Victoriano Style, is a dish I created with the influence of my parents. In Peru, potatoes and beans are available year round, so as a child eating dinner with my family at home, we would have some type of dish like Papas a la Victoriano. My dad made it, my mom made it, and my wife made it. They inspired me to make it, too. We use a variety of different colored peanut potatoes and cook them with favas, huacatay (a Peruvian herb which resembles mint), fresh cheese, aji amarillo sauce, and cream. It is served as a side with our lobster dish.

**FSE: What do you enjoy most about your job?**

CHEF VICTORIANO: I love the people I work with, I love cooking, I love creating new dishes, and most of all, I love to make people happy with the food I make.