

snapshot

CHEF SAUL MONTIEL *Cantina Rooftop Restaurant & Lounge*



AS A CHILD GROWING UP IN THE SMALL TOWN OF ATOTONILCO

EL GRANDE in central Mexico, Saul Montiel's biggest influence was his mother, Margarita Montiel Perez. She was left to raise him and his three siblings alone when his father died suddenly—and that instilled in Montiel a sense of responsibility to care for his mother and provide for his family in his father's absence.

That sense of responsibility, combined with a love of the foods of his homeland, led Montiel on a culinary journey from Mexico to New

York City, where he met Chef Jodi Williams (now a Food Network chef), who helped Montiel hone his culinary skills. With his passion for food reaffirmed, Montiel went on to work with top chefs such as Chef Josh Capon and Aarón Sanchez before landing in 2018 as the executive chef at New York City's **Cantina Rooftop** Restaurant & Lounge—an establishment by nightlife industry veteran Pedro Zamora that's been described as “new modern Mexican dining experience in the sky.”

Here, he has created a contemporary Mexican menu inspired by his grandmother and mother from traditional “fonda” recipes from Hidalgo and traditional Mexican street food recipes from Mexico City.

“I have modified the menu to focus more on authentic Mexican street food, which I am so crazy about—for example gorditas, aguachiles, seafood tostadas, tacos and quesadillas,” Montiel says. “Additionally, I took some of the existing dishes and added ingredients such as burrata cheese and heirloom tomatoes to make them more interesting.”

And this innovative, ambitious chef isn't stopping there.

“In the new year, I intend to introduce real Mexican sopes, gorditas and tlacoyos,” he says. “I am also augmenting our taco menu with Tacos de Cabeza (cows head tacos), Tacos de Barba-coa (lamb tacos), and Tacos Placeros (market tacos).”

Among the most popular offerings: the restaurant's guacamoles (“My personal favorite guacamole is the one with grilled corn, chipotle

and queso,” he says), along with the Tacos Campechanos, and the “veggie gringa open face quesadilla with homemade corn tortillas, queso Oaxaca and squash.” And he offers his recipe for Jicama, Mango & Shrimp Aguachile when asked to share one of his all-time favorites.

Here he shares the recipe with *el Restaurante* readers.

Jicama, Mango & Shrimp Aguachile

Makes 4 servings

- 2 dozen raw medium shrimp
- 1 c. freshly squeezed lime juice
- ½ bunch of cilantro
- ½ red onion, sliced
- 1 small piece of serrano pepper
- 2 cloves of garlic
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- ¼ c. diced jicama
- ¼ c. diced mango

1 cucumber, peeled and diced
Corn tostadas or your favorite tortilla chips

Butterfly the shrimp and remove the vein with the tip of your knife. Place the butterflied shrimp in a large nonmetallic bowl, toss with the salt, add 6 spoons of lime juice and refrigerate while you make the sauce.

In a blender, combine the remaining juice, garlic, cilantro, salt, whole serrano and pepper and blend until they are completely smooth. This will be your aguachile.

In a bowl mix all shrimp with the aguachile mix and the diced mango, cucumber and jicama.

Garnish with cilantro leaves and julienned radishes. Serve with corn tostadas or tortilla chips.

