



CHEF SAUL MONTIEL

Cantina Rooftop

By ALEKSANDAR NIKODIN

As the Executive Chef of Cantina Rooftop, Saul Montiel carries the passion and love for cooking nurtured by his mother and grandmother's guiding hands. Hailing from the humble town of Atotonilco el Grande, just outside Central Mexico, he developed his culinary skills working at his family's two restaurants, where he expanded his expertise to managing larger operations.

The American Dream

Attracted to the freedom and spoils the "American Dream" promises, Montiel journeyed from his small town to New York and quickly went to work, performing

odd jobs to support his family. "I came to America at the age of 16 with \$25 in my pocket and an English vocabulary of 12 words! My biggest obstacles by far were the language barrier, supporting myself, and getting somebody to offer me a job at the age of 16 with no measurable experience," said Montiel. It wasn't long before he broke into the restaurant industry as a dishwasher at Naci Yangin's Italian restaurant, Diva, in SoHo. Although grateful for the opportunity, Montiel found it difficult to survive at minimum wage, even when working 60 hours a week, but he had to persevere as he bought a one-way ticket to America. Arriving early and leaving

late from work was Montiel's mantra, as this opportunity allowed him to observe the cooks and learn to prep in the kitchen. This helped him climb up the ladder; and with a family to support, he flourished in every available position. "The dishwashing ended up launching my career!" laughed Montiel.

My American Mother

Montiel's advancement through the restaurant industry was swift, from I Coppi in the East Village to the Upper East Side's Amaranth, and finally Tappo on the Lower East Side where he met his culinary mentor, Chef Jody Williams. "Jody taught me about purchasing, portioning, prepping, and how to run a team," said Montiel. After leaving Tappo, Williams displayed her faith in the young chef, by bringing him to work alongside her at Giorgione and Gusto. "She was more than a mentor, she was like a mother to me, 'my American mother!'" With Williams at his side, Montiel progressed to Sous chef at Giorgione, and 9 years later, he was appointed his first Executive Chef position at Gusto.

Contemporary Mexican Cuisine

In 2018, Montiel joined the Cantina Rooftop team as the Executive Chef, where he thrived due to his solid foundation of authentic Mexican recipes working in tandem with his adopted Mediterranean techniques. With a confidence molded by experience, he created a fresh contemporary Mexican cuisine, and a menu that rotates every 3 months. "For example, this Spring we will feature squash blossom quesadillas as soon as they are in season," said Montiel.

His Grandparent's Restaurants

Creating a reputation as an innovative chef, Montiel still finds time to reflect on the original events which shaped his cooking style, and future. In a show of appreciation, he reopened one of his grandparent's restaurants La Unica in Hidalgo, which had closed after they passed away. "I knew in my heart that one day I would reopen their restaurants in their honor." Not one to rest on his laurels, Montiel and his boss, Pedro Zamora, plan to open a series of Taquerias and restaurants as partners. Today Montiel and his wife, Eliana, are buying a home in New Jersey to raise their two daughters, Ella and Elena. They have archived The "American Dream". ♦

605 W 48th St.
New York, NY 10036
212.957.1700
cantinarooftop.com
IG @chefmontiel

