

2nd generation, 2nd restaurant for Rey Sol owners

By **JIM PRICE**
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Who: Jose Mendieta and Elvira Prado and Citlali Mendieta

What they do: operate Rey Sol and Antigua restaurants

Authentic Mexican cuisine has finally received its long-overdue renown, to the point where chefs have enthusiastically blended it into the great world culinary fusion that mixes French cookery with Japanese, Southwest American with Thai, anything with anything. Chipotle, suddenly, is everywhere.

Jose Mendieta and his wife, Elvira Prado, owners of Rey Sol, 2338 W. Forest Home Ave., began that process half a century ago.

Between them, they have more than 78 years' experience in the restaurant business.

"He opened his first restaurant at the pyramids," says Citlali Mendieta, the couple's daughter, who helps out at Rey Sol and, with her parents' help, has opened her own restaurant, Antigua, at 5823 W. Burnham Ave., West Allis. "He was inspired by the Aztecs."

Gran Teocalli, Jose Mendieta's rediscovery and celebration of ancient Meso-American cuisine in the shadow of the temples of Teotihuacan (he later re-created its grandeur in Tijuana, as well) certainly was inspired. But his training, and Elvira's, was broader than any anthropologically pure divulgence of pre-Columbian dining habits.

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"They both worked with the great Basque chefs who immigrated to Mexico City and opened Costa Vasca and Meson del Cid," Citlali says. "In fact, my father was named a *mesonero mayor*, a master of a very challenging style of Basque cooking. Only an established *mesonero* can name another."

Rey Sol itself is in name a tribute to fusion. It refers to Louis XIV, the Sun King, the French monarch who made his chef among his closest advisors.

Foodie



Photo/[Rick Wood](#)

Citlali Mendieta (right) picked up a taste for restaurants from her mother, Elvira Prado, and father.

With that background, it should be no surprise that you will find deeply authentic Mexican dishes on Rey Sol's menu alongside some decidedly European fare, such as Filete de Pescado en Salsa de Champinones, or fish cooked in a white wine and mushroom sauce.

It is to Milwaukee's delight that Jose and Elvira are so strongly, staunchly, stubbornly traditional about matters of family if not of food.

"My dad was supposed to be retired," says Citlali. "We lived in California, but I was accepted at Marquette. Naturally, they had to come along, because you don't just send a young, unmarried woman off by herself.

"It is the way old-fashioned families do it. My curfew when I was 21 was still 10 p.m."

Citlali transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and got a degree in information resources, hoping to distance herself from the restaurant life before it entered her bloodstream as it had her mother's.

"It's very jealous," she says of the business. "It's like a wife or a husband. If she's somewhere else, she wishes she were here."

Alas, Citlali didn't know that garlic, herbs and chiles were already part and parcel of her makeup.

"I've been brainwashed," she says. "I used to swear that I would never have my own place, and now look. Never say never."

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