



The Food Issue

BY CYNTHIA BAUGHMAN

From the moment we first heard about the exhibition that we call in-house “the chocolate show,” we’ve been excited about it—so excited that we decided to build an entire issue around it. *New World Cuisine: The Histories of Chocolate, Mate y Más* at the Museum of International Folk Art gives us occasion to look at chocolate three ways: Patricia Crown tells us about her important research into the early history of chocolate in Mesoamerica and the Southwest, particularly at Chaco Canyon. Cordelia Thomas Snow examines Spanish Colonial records to uncover the history of luxury foods traveling up El Camino Real, not only chocolate but also some surprising delicacies such as saffron. And Frances Levine examines the role of chocolate in the Inquisition trial of Doña Teresa Aguilera y Roche. These articles have kept us nibbling chocolate for months, and Santa Fe chocolate historian Mark Sciscenti’s tastings of historical chocolate drinks have made us swoon. (You will be able to try these divine concoctions at the December 9 exhibition opening and at Sciscenti’s February 10 lecture and tasting.)

New World Cuisine is about more than chocolate and other New World foods, it is also about a two-way exchange between the Old and New Worlds. Gary Paul Nabhan argues that recent genetic studies reveal that plant introductions from the Old World to the New were more complicated than we might have thought. It’s a fascinating story that will make you regard the vines and trees around you with new eyes.

Several writers fill in later parts of the New Mexico food story. Lois Rudnick examines Fabiola Cabeza de Baca’s important contributions to recording and teaching traditional New Mexican cooking. An excerpt from Margaret Wood’s new memoir tells us how Georgia O’Keeffe cherished her garden and used its produce. Painter and author Margarete Bagshaw

remembers how her grandmother Pablita Velarde celebrated Christmas and shares one of Velarde’s recipes. Eric Renner and Nancy Spencer focus on how pinhole photography can employ food not only as its subject but also as the camera itself. In an interview by Shelley Thompson, Nicolasa Chávez recounts the family history and years of travel and research that led to her curating *New World Cuisine*. And Santa Fe poet Anne Valley-Fox lyrically sketches a New Mexico Sunday that culminates in a very New Mexican “Sunday Brunch.”

While we celebrate the complex history of our New Mexico cuisine, there is also hunger, and one piece acknowledges that. I met Brenda Mantz at the Taos Summer Writers’ Conference. Mantz lives in the mid-Atlantic region but returns to Taos each year because she finds inspiration at the conference and because her time at a commune in Embudo is the subject of a memoir-in-progress. With New Mexico food history on my mind, I asked her what she ate at the commune, imagining fresh-baked bread and vegetarian casseroles crafted with produce from a communal garden. I was surprised when she replied, “Whatever I could get with food stamps at the Dixon General Store.” Her essay “Canned Corn and River Water” augments the history of the counter-culture in New Mexico and is a vivid account of living hungry. The piece harks back but also forward: Mantz’s pitiful commune diet included New World corn and Old World apples foraged from abandoned Embudo orchards. But the back-to-the-land movement that she was part of did contribute, in a line as winding as a river, to the locavore food culture that thrives in New Mexico today. Our dazzling farmers’ markets bring us Old and New World foods coaxed from the earth by a diverse group of skilled farmers and other agricultural adventurers, drawing from the multitude of traditions that we examine here. ¡Buen provecho! ■

EL PALACIO IS PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO FOUNDATION

EL PALACIO, ESTABLISHED IN 1913, IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY FOR THE NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS BY THE CENTER FOR MUSEUM RESOURCES, 725 CAMINO LEJO, SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87505 ■ MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO BOARD OF REGENTS: JO BOUNDS; MARY ANN CORTESE; THELMA DOMENICI; KAREN DURKOVICH; GEORGE GOLDSTEIN; KENT F. JACOBS, MD; BRUCE LARSEN; BEV TAYLOR; J. PAUL TAYLOR ■ REPRODUCTION OF ANY PORTION OF THE CONTENTS HEREIN PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION ■ WE ASSUME NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNSOLICITED MATERIALS
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