

Pedro's Casa ES SU CASA

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edge
FASHION, FOOD & MORE



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By SCOTT KEARNAN



HOUSE SPECIAL:
Pedro Alarcon, top, recently opened La Casa de Pedro in the Seaport District. His lobster ceviche, left.

Pedro Alarcon built a dream with \$34. That's how much Alarcon had left in his bank account when he purchased a Watertown bakery in 1996 with the goal of opening his own restaurant. The deal closed on a Friday, and Alarcon recruited family to help clean, paint and prepare the small six-seat eatery for a Monday debut. When doors opened at La Casa de Pedro, named as an extension of Alarcon's personal home, which was known as a warm gathering place for his Venezuelan immigrant community, its owner ran the show nearly solo: taking orders, bussing tables and cooking up the spot's soon-to-be-signature Latin cuisine. At first, Alarcon lived off tips. But soon his business grew, and so did those dreams. Now, shortly after celebrating

his original restaurant's two-decade anniversary, Alarcon has opened a sprawling, 300-seat second location in Boston's Seaport, a rapidly developing neighborhood that represents to Alarcon the boundless opportunity that is the best of America.

"You can be whatever you want to be in this country," Alarcon said. To other burgeoning restaurateurs, especially fellow immigrants, his advice is simple: "Never give up, and believe in what you're doing."

Self-belief has fueled Alarcon's fire since he arrived in Watertown from Caracas, Venezuela, in 1984. At the time he "couldn't even boil water," but he landed a job as a french fry cook at Boston University, eventually working his way up to helm the school's largest dining facility. Feeding others, he found, nourished his own soul — so he worked his way through culinary school and took additional part-time gigs in hotels like the Colonnade and

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Alarcon serves warmth, Latin cuisine in Seaport

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Boston Park Plaza. Launching La Casa de Pedro was a leap of faith, but it paid off. In 2006, the original six-table restaurant was relocated to a different Watertown address and expanded to 169 seats.

To drop anchor in the Seaport, though, was a special goal for Alarcon. About seven years ago, he said, he saved a newspaper article touting the area's burgeoning reputation as a hot spot for development. He had plenty of fits and starts in moving to such an expensive, competitive neighborhood, but he re-

bounded from every knock backwards — "like a boxer," said Alarcon, and kept his eye on the prize.

"I hung up that article and looked at it every day of my life," Alarcon said. "Every time, I'd say, 'See you soon.'"

In the meantime, the Seaport's face changed radically. With its November opening, the start of a 25-year lease, La Casa de Pedro debuted a splashy modern style: The hacienda-style space boasts colorful imported tiles, tropics-evoking palm trees, a massive ceviche bar by its open kitchen and even a real Jeep Willy in its front lounge.

But despite his restaurant's big-budget design, Alarcon is still the little local guy in a neighborhood increasingly dominated by national chains, from high-end steakhouses such as Ocean Prime and Del Frisco's to the margarita-shaking brand Rosa Mexicano.

Alarcon isn't intimidated. "I chose to be here because I love swimming with the sharks," he said with a sly smile. "And then I show the sharks who is the boss."

His competitive streak comes in handy, but it's homey hospitality that sets La Casa de Pedro apart. The Seaport restaurant's walls are filled



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DREAM COME TRUE: Pedro Alarcon, who first opened La Casa de Pedro in 1996, recently added a brightly decorated location in the Seaport District.

with family photos, and one room-length banquette is engraved with names of parents, siblings and other loved

ones. Alarcon's nephew, Luis Maggioli, is the spot's director of operations. Decor elements nod to nostalgia, like a pair of leather barber chairs at the bar that pay tribute to Alarcon's childhood memories of father-son bonding at a hometown barbershop.

The chef-owner even named one of his dishes after his closest crew of life-long friends: The Parrillada de Los Amigos Luis, Carlos y Rafael is a board of spit-roasted pork shoulder, skirt steak, morcilla (Spanish blood sausage), chorizo, chimichurri and yuca cubana. It joins a large Seaport menu that includes mainstays from the past 20 years, such as pabellón criollo (a plate of rice, black beans and beef that is often considered Venezuela's national dish), alongside new

notions such as 13 styles of ceviche that include lobster dressed with leche de tigre, a Peruvian citrus marinade, and a Bloody Mary-inspired bowl of mussels steamed in gin with tomatoes and peppers.

Alarcon isn't done growing yet. In February, he'll open the Rapido Cafe, a separate area for grab-and-go meals, including "tacos all day," plus coffee drinks and fresh juices, designed with the Seaport's busy office workers in mind.

Alarcon, meanwhile, continues to toil at his new dream home in the Seaport. He's built up more than a once-depleted bank account; he's built an American dream.

Today, said Alarcon, "I feel like a million-dollar man."



DELICIOUS TASTES: La Casa de Pedro serves up charcuterie plates of meats and cheeses, above, as well as a parrillada, right, featuring a variety of grilled meats, sausages and yuca fries.



Casa de Pedro shares house specialties

By SCOTT KEARNAN

La Casa de Pedro chef-owner Pedro Alarcon shares a signature recipe from his new restaurant in Boston's Seaport.

CAMARONES AL AJILLO

2 lbs. raw shrimp (size 31/40)
1½ t. extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for cooking
1 t. chopped garlic
1 T. chopped cilantro
½ lime
Salt and pepper to taste
Warm rustic bread

In a bowl, mix the shrimp, extra-virgin olive oil and garlic and let marinate for 15 minutes.

Heat a saute pan and coat the bottom of the pan with a thin layer of extra-virgin olive oil. Add the shrimp and garlic mixture. Cover with a lid. Let the shrimp cook for about 4 minutes, or until it is bright pink, then remove from heat.

Squeeze fresh lime juice on top of the shrimp. Add cilantro and season with salt and pepper.

Serve in a bowl with slices of warm crunchy bread on the side to soak up any leftover liquid. Makes 4 8-ounce portions.

Luis Maggioli, Alarcon's nephew, developed the restaurant's cocktail menu, which includes this smoky mezcal-based number.

FUEGO CON HUMO

2 oz. Montelobos mezcal
1 oz. Ancho Reyes ancho chile liqueur
¼ oz. lime juice
Peychaud's Bitters
Dried ancho chili for garnish (optional)

Shake mezcal, ancho chile liqueur and lime juice and pour over crushed ice. Top with Peychaud's Bitters and a dried chili pepper for garnish.

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