

From cultural fusion to culinary leadership



3 Kitchens

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Véronica Alcivar
Spanish-Ecuadorian chef and founder of Candela

Véronica Alcivar

Country
France

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My Story

My name is Véronica. I grew up in San Sebastián, in northern Spain, but my parents are from Ecuador. I have always lived in this cultural melting pot, which is very much reflected in my cooking. My grandfather, who ran a restaurant, passed on his passion for cooking to me at a very early age, which has been a real source of inspiration. To train, I obtained a CAP in cooking in Spain, then did an internship with a sommelier in France, where I deepened my knowledge and discovered my passion for cooking. After several years as an employee—first as a commis chef, then as a sous-chef—I wanted to strike out on my own to have more freedom, choose my own team, and above all create a respectful and inclusive work environment.

Motivation

For me, it all started with the desire to share my roots through cooking. I defined a clear concept: cuisine that respects traditions but is accessible and evolving. I created a menu based on the seasons and customer feedback, adapting dishes according to their popularity. Before the official opening, I tested my recipes through a catering service. When the restaurant opened, I was keen to keep complete control over the kitchen, because that's where my passion lies: developing the menu, supervising quality, and ensuring that everything runs smoothly.

I also wanted to be able to fully express my cuisine, which is a blend of my Ecuadorian roots, Mediterranean gastronomy, and my travels throughout Latin America. So I created Candela.





Challenges

At first, I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to get my cuisine recognized and find my place. The restaurant business is a difficult, highly competitive environment. On top of that, being a foreign woman in this environment raised doubts about my integration and the respect I would be able to earn. I was also afraid of lacking management experience, even though I was passionate about cooking.

I think it's important to educate people about culinary diversity from the outset and show them that there are many different cuisines. Women also pass on a lot of knowledge in the home, even if they are less visible in restaurants. We also need to recognize the experience of older people, who have valuable expertise.

There needs to be a profound change in mentality: respecting people from other places and valuing different culinary cultures. French cuisine is renowned, but every country has its own flavors, history, and spices. Gastronomy is the culture of a people, and it must be valued in all its diversity.

What learning can you share?



I've learned that you have to believe in your skills, even when others try to make you doubt them. People have told me I didn't have the "right" background, or that this job wasn't meant for a woman like me. I've also felt the weight of prejudice tied to my origins. In the kitchen, sexism still exists—some people speak to you like you don't belong, or assume you're only helping out. But I've learned not to let these attitudes define me. Instead, I let the quality of my work speak. It's not always easy, but things are changing, and I try to be part of that change—by showing that women have their place in the kitchen, and that talent and determination matter more than stereotypes. To any woman who wants to get into cooking, I would say: don't be afraid, and believe in yourself. Yes, it's a lot of work, but it's also a deep source of joy. Persevere, trust your instincts, and don't let other people's judgments hold you back. Most importantly, surround yourself with people who believe in your vision—because that support can make all the difference.

What are your Future Plans?

Things are going well at the moment, but I'm staying humble about the long term. I hope it will grow little by little. I'm also developing a catering service, which allows me to expand my business without straying too far from cooking. I do the production and a partner takes care of the logistics.

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