

FALL 2010

FROM PERU WITH LOVE  
NO HURRY TO GROW UP  
ON BEING ORANGE  
FOOTBALL PHARMACISTS

OREGON

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# ANDINA: FROM PERU WITH LOVE

By Claire Sykes

UP IN THE HIGHLANDS of northern Peru, the city of Cajamarca fans out across a fertile valley, surrounded by lush eucalyptus groves and herds of grazing cattle. The region is famous for cheeses and churches, hot springs and gold mines — and for being where Atahualpa, the last sovereign emperor of the Incan Empire, was executed by Spaniards in 1533.

An ancient civilization may have ended there, but in 1967 it was a place of beginning for OSU engineer John Platt, '81, '83.

Now, 5,000 miles away and 43 years later, he surveys his surroundings from a comfortable booth next to picture windows that frame the intersection of NW 13th and Glisan in Portland's

Pearl District.

This is the restaurant Andina, where savory aromas waft from plates of tapas, and diners' conversations mix with the breathy melodies of Peruvian pan pipes.

The Peace Corps and a passion for Peru led the blue-eyed, gentlemanly John to the love of his life — a woman from Cajamarca named Doris Rodriguez — and eventually to a day when they would help son Peter found and operate one of Oregon's best restaurants, and one of the best Peruvian restaurants anywhere.

From its “nuvo-Peruvian” cuisine and original raw-wood décor to its classic hospitality and hip location, Andina (meaning “from the Andes”) celebrates a marriage of two cultures.

“We want to give people the opportunity to know Peru in as authentic and multidimensional ways as possible,” says John Platt. He and his wife, Doris Rodriguez de Platt, maintain homes in Corvallis and Portland.

Andina's guests are greeted by an essence of traditional Peru melded with Pacific Northwest — the scent of seafood and peppers; interior colors of cayenne, saffron and cilantro; and the rhythms of South American-inspired music. A large, ornately carved gourd and a *charango* — the country's lute-like national musical instrument — join colorful textiles and photos of natives in the Peruvian highlands.

One can't help but feel welcome in this space, which offers much more

▶ Forty-three years ago, John Platt went to Peru to teach physics and math for the Peace Corps. As it turned out, a lot more happened there than he could have imagined.

PHOTO BY DENNIS WOLVERTON



than food, although there's some fine and serious dining to do.

"Peru is going through something of a culinary renaissance right now," says Andina's owner and the Platts' son, Peter, who grew up in Corvallis and has acted in a couple of OSU's "Bard in the Quad" productions. "After having gone through some very difficult years in the 1980s and '90s, Peru's economy is now stable and growing quite rapidly. The country has turned to food as one means of branding itself."

Peruvian fusion cuisine joins Peru's indigenous food culture with the tastes of immigrants from Asia, Europe and Africa.

"The food is considered to be the most sophisticated in South America," Peter continues. "There are a lot of younger-generation Peruvian chefs who are looking at expanding their restaurant concepts out of Peru and into the United States."

Often those chefs visit Andina to share their talents, but they are not the stars. It's always the food — like *Conchas del Señor de Sipán* (scallops with golden beet and crab meat "cannelloni"), *Antichucho de Corazón* (marinated beef hearts with spicy *salsa de rocoto*) and specialty cocktails from the restaurant's bar, Mestizo. Separate vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free menus are offered.

Says family matriarch Doris, "Every Peruvian chef we've had so far takes traditional food from generations before and improves the technique, embellishing it with a little twist in the flavor, doing what Grandma never could've imagined."

Doris should know.

She grew up in Cajamarca in a household where spirited meals were at the center of family life. When she was 23, John appeared in her life. He had earned an undergraduate degree in physical science at Harvard in 1966, then joined the Peace Corps.

"It was quite new then," he says of the Peace Corps, "and I had a wanderlust, and felt that if we were going to go out and try to understand and help the world, we should start with our own neighbors. Latin America was pretty unknown to me at the time."



So was the Spanish language, in which John immersed himself. He was assigned to Cajamarca to teach physics and mathematics at a teachers college and English at a cultural center, where Doris was among his students. Their friendship grew for two years, then he left for another year-long Peace Corps stint on the Peruvian coast. The following summer, in 1969, he taught physics at the Universidad Católica de Perú in Lima, and ran into Doris, by then a pharmacist studying chemistry education. Soon the two were separated by their work for another two years, only to have fate bring them back together again in Lima as colleagues.

"That was it," Doris says.

In the giant city, away from the curious eyes and formality of village life, their romance blossomed, and in 1975 they married in Cajamarca. John

Jr. ("Johncito") was born the following year and Peter the next, while the couple taught for the Peruvian Ministry of Education.

"With two kids, it was time to think about where would be a good place for them to grow up and what my future career path would be," says John, who had already spent nine years in Peru. "I couldn't see staying in Lima. It'd be like trying to raise your kids in New York City. Also, I realized I needed to get further education."

A native of Portland, he wanted to be close to his family. "And Oregon State has the best engineering school in the state," he says.

They made their home in Corvallis where the Platts' third son, Victor, was born in 1979. John

earned master's degrees in engineering physics and in electrical and computer engineering, then worked as an engineer at Hewlett-Packard, first in McMinnville and then Corvallis, until he retired in 2005.

That was two years after Andina opened.

"We never



imagined it becoming what it is today,” says Doris. The family had often joked about running a Peruvian restaurant, “because we all love to eat, and my mother’s a great cook,” says Peter, who made the restaurant a reality. But not until he worked for some Portland nonprofits, including Mercy Corps, which sent him to Peru, did he consider it seriously.

At a crossroads in Peter’s career, co-worker Jaime Saavedra, a fellow Peruvian, suggested that the two open a restaurant. “Originally, we thought it would be a cebiche shack in Newport,” Saavedra says.

That plan changed, and Andina has never left its first location, a three-story building in “The Pearl.” The setting is perfect for adventurous cuisine, and Andina’s showcase of Peruvian culture fits well with the neighborhood’s gallery scene. Within the first year, Saavedra’s other entrepreneurial

pursuits pulled him out of the business.

“I approached my parents at that time,” Peter recalls, “and said, ‘We can go through with this or we can pull the plug and walk away.’”

They pressed on and success came. After the first year, Peter turned over his managerial role to Jels MacCaulay, general manager, who oversees a staff of 110. Peter and chef Hank Costello manage the two Peruvian cooks and a rotating roster of visiting chefs.

“And I’m the accounting, IT and engineering department,” John quips.

True to Peruvian hospitality, Doris greets diners at their tables. “Being at Andina reminds me of my family,” says Efrain Diaz, a Peruvian and a loyal patron. “Every time I go there I get homesick.”

Doris is a wealth of knowledge, relaying the tradition and history of the dishes and their often

unusual ingredients. Some of these ingredients can only be found in Peru, such as the *ají amarillo*, *ají panca*, *ají mirasól* and *rocoto* peppers, which the restaurant imports as a paste; and an ancient fruit called the *lúcuma*, shipped as frozen pulp.

The Platts are considering bottling some of their sauces and publishing a cookbook so people can take the flavors of Andina into their own homes. Meanwhile, local farms provide fresh produce, and Peter is exploring with Beth Emshoff, metro specialist for the OSU Extension Service, how the university can work with farms and restaurants like Andina for better distribution from field to fork.

Former co-owner Saavedra says the Platts have made Andina a winner.

“Nobody else in Portland is doing this kind of cuisine. There’s not even a restaurant like this in Peru,” he says, attributing the success to

▲ *Chicha morada*, a spiced purple corn drink, is sometimes served with *altafores*, traditional Peruvian butter cookies. In the tradition of the home region of Doris Rodriguez de Platt, mothers bake *altafores* and have them waiting for children who come visiting on Mother’s Day. PHOTO BY DENNIS WOLVERTON

Opposite page, top: John, seated bottom left, first went to Peru to teach at a regional college. PAGE 26 PHOTOS COURTESY PLATT FAMILY

Opposite page, middle: John and Doris stand on a bridge in Lima in 1974, during their courtship.

Opposite page, bottom: Wedding Day, 1975, Cajamarca, Peru.

! Andina has been *The Oregonian’s* Restaurant of the Year and has won rave reviews from critics near and far.



the restaurant’s quality, consistency and selection of food; and its location, ambience and connection with community, both locally and internationally.

Partnering with the community extends beyond the region and into the rest of the world for the Platts and Andina.

For five years the restaurant has hosted a fundraising dinner for Green Empowerment in support of building renewable energy and water systems in rural areas of seven developing nations, including Peru.

“The Platts have enormous compassion for the people of Peru,” says Anna Garwood, executive director of Green Empowerment.

Andina also hosts an annual tapas and cocktail evening for MEJOR Communities — Managing, Executing and Joining Opportunities for Rural Communities — which used the support generated at Andina last year to train local youths to advocate

for better nutrition, hygiene and mental health in the impoverished northern-Peru village of San Francisco.

Andina “connects people here in Portland to the country that we’re serving, in a way that we couldn’t do otherwise,” says Katie Masferrer, MEJOR’s executive director.

The service and gratitude don’t end there.

Dr. Thomas Albert, co-founder of FACES (Foundation for the Advancement of Cleft Education and Services), notes that Andina’s donation of catering supports FACES in helping children born with a cleft lip or palate.

“The Platts have a heartfelt desire to help people in need ... and an appreciation that the world is more connected than ever,” he says.

Doris says no thanks are necessary for the family’s charitable work.

“People tell us, ‘Thank you,’ and we always answer, ‘No, we are the ones, as a Peruvian family, who tell

you, ‘Thank you very much for what you do for our people.’”

“Not many Peruvians are as lucky as me, to be married to such a wonderful man and have the opportunity to have a restaurant like ours,” she says, her eyes filling with tears. “It’s a blessing.”

For John, the restaurant reflects the magic from those many years ago when he went south with an urge to help and teach.

As in a beautiful Peruvian tapestry, the threads running through his life have woven together and formed a colorful pattern in the shape of Andina.

“Like the Peace Corps, Andina has been a very challenging, educational and rewarding experience for me,” he says.

“And the family appreciates others’ interest in the experience we’ve set out to offer.” 🍷

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▲  
John, Doris and their son Peter have established Andina as a favorite of Portland diners. PHOTOS BY DENNIS WOLVERTON

At right: *De Pescado 5 Elementos*, a catch of the day made with a traditional cebiche, which on this day was fresh ono, similar to tuna.

! Andina’s Mestizo bar offers *Sacsayhuamán*, a drink with habanero pepper vodka, pureed passion fruit and cane sugar.

