

Loeb Fellowship 2019 Reception Schedule

October 26, 5pm - 9pm

At the home of James Brown and Isabel Dutra

A Oaxaca-reverent menu focused on mariscos, heirloom corn masa, and mole.

5pm

-Guest Arrival.

5pm - 6:30pm

-Wine program by the Rose Wine Bar, & traditional aguas de frutas.

-Mezcales Armadillo Negro: Wild, artesanal & ancestral mezcal tasting with the mezcalero.

-Smoke & the Sea: Small plates of mariscos from a wood-burning grill.

-The Importance of Corn: Tray passed petite versions of traditional corn masa delicacies.

6pm

-Chef Talk: A brief explanation of the menu by chef Lea Marie Dennis.

6:30pm - 9pm

-Wine program by the Rose Wine Bar, & traditional aguas de frutas.

-Mezcales Armadillo Negro: Wild, artesanal & ancestral mezcal tasting with the mezcalero.

-The Importance of Corn: Tray-passed petite versions of traditional corn masa delicacies.

-Plato Fuerte: Chicken Black Mole

7pm

-Mezcalero Talk: Luis & Yenni of Mezcales Armadillo Negro discuss the historical cultural context of mezcal, its movement into the contemporary gastronomical field, and their mission of sustainability and education.

7:30pm

-Dessert: Chocolate of Oaxaca, tray passed service.

Chef Lea Marie Dennis founded and runs Home Kitchen Culture, a boutique catering company, and Sugar Kiln, a wholesale cookie and desserts catering company.

Lea is a self-taught chef whose art education background made her sensitive and attentive to all aspects of visual presentation. Her company has become known for highly crafted hors d'oeuvres and lavish tables of cheeses, meats, and desserts remarkable not only in flavor and quality, but for their elevated and elegant presentation.

Working close to the US border with Mexico has influenced her deeply. Lea has spent eight years working with her sous chef, who was raised cooking in her grandparents' iconic mariscos restaurant in Tijuana. Early on, Lea made the decision to run the kitchen in Spanish, rather than push her staff to speak English. This essentially was a decision to enter into their space and experience the humility of being an outsider with only a rough command of a language, rather than the other way around. Gradually Spanish became comfortably her second language, and she fell in love with and became driven to learn the complexity of chiles, salsas, consommés, braises and mariscos fundamental to our border region.

Lea's love of learning goes beyond the kitchen. Over the last decade, she has studied mezcal, an endlessly expansive subject of soil & climate (terrior), agave varietal, and cultural stories. Her intellectual curiosity took her to Mexico City and Oaxaca, where the centuries-old history of recipes only further inspired her desire to learn.

Though Lea is a chef, a narrow focus of food is not enough. She became sensitive to the struggle to protect thousands of years of wild and sustainably cultivated agave, corn, and plants on the brink of being lost to industrialization and genetic modification. To raise awareness, she hosts a lively mezcal education and tasting group, introducing friends and industry professionals to rare, artisanal and ancestral-process mezcals and sharing the cultural stories, science, and the urgency of preserving traditional knowledge and sustainable agave cultivation. She is an advocate for the protection of heirloom corn and practical ways to make it feasible for US restaurants to use it. She facilitates classes, tours, and professional connections for San Diego industry friends to learn from traditional master chefs, distillers, specialists in corn & nixtamalization, farmers, and artists in Oaxaca, as well as artist residencies and museum exhibitions here in the US for Oaxacan artists to create a dialogue between our Mexican-American border community, and both contemporary and folk artists and craftsman in Southern Mexico. She is currently arranging an artist residency in San Diego for a muralist and painter who tells visual stories with Zapotec and Nahuatl symbols and language, and an exhibition for a modern textile jewelry artist and the Zapotec weaving community who exclusively supplies her textile and thread.

Her catering clients include the San Diego Symphony, the La Jolla Music Society's Conrad Prebys Performance Center, the San Diego Museum of Art, the Mingei International Museum, and others.



Mezcal Armadillo Negro

Ancestral & Artisanal Spirits

Luis & Yeniffer Martinez

Founders of Mezcal Armadillo Negro

Teaching the Art of Mezcal

The industrialization of mezcal brought a significant decrease in its quality and an impressive increase in its production. Mass production allowed for a faster distillation process at higher volumes, putting the traditional ancestral and artisanal mezcal in palenques at risk by flooding the market with inferior product at prices that traditional palenques could not compete with. As sales fell, families lost support and momentum to compete against an increasingly aggressive industry.

Because of this, most of the communities in Oaxaca, Mexico joined forces against the expansion of industrialized mezcal and started consolidating into family cooperatives to rescue the cultural significance and taste of ancestral and artisanal mezcal produced in a palenque. Producing mezcal in small batches in a palenque is the artisanal and ancestral way to achieve a mezcal that fully expresses the agave varietal, micro-regional soil composition, climate, and the masterful style of the Maestro Mezcalero in a way that industrialized, high volume mezcal can never achieve. The process respects the environment and the sustainability of wild agaves, since the Maestro Mezcalero only uses fully mature agaves from the region and altitude they are native to, and avoids over-exploitation of the land. The Armadillo Negro cooperative is a consolidation of four Oaxacan mezcalera families led by Yeniffer and Luis Martinez since 2017. They represent their family and other Mezcalero friends, together as a community. They micro-batch produce, bottle, label, and promote on social media and in educational tastings one of the most important artisanal spirits in the world. This mezcal expresses an artistry and mastery of botany, soil, climate and fermentation that took centuries of accumulated family experience to attain. Yeniffer and Luis seek to share these mezcals and teach the mysteries that influence the flavor of each agave, while also raising awareness about the urgency of preserving sustainable practices. When the mezcal master is present at mezcal tasting experience, He / She will teach you how to drink and savor it. Every time you see the Armadillo Negro label, be aware that it is a clean, self-sustaining product responsible to our mother earth. Behind the label exists entire communities fighting to ensure that the ancestral and artisanal inheritance of this distillate is not lost.