



MARKET MOJO

MATILDE FRANQUELLI IS JUSTLY FAMED FOR SERVING LIGHT-AS-A-CLOUD OMELETTES, GARLIC PRAWNS AND SPICY CHORIZO ROLLS AT HER TAPAS STAND AT THE ENTERTAINMENT QUARTER MARKETS IN SYDNEY. BUT IT'S HER CANARIAN MOJO PICÓN SAUCES THAT REALLY BRING THE DISHES TO LIFE.

“I’m going to follow that wonderful smell!” says Margaret Viney to her daughter Jen, making her way towards the Mojo Picón stall at the markets in Sydney’s Moore Park. She’s not alone. The aroma surrounding Matilde Franquelli’s tapas stand is the sensory definition of mouth-watering. United with the noisy sizzle of chorizos, prawns and mushrooms, those garlic and citrus notes are hypnotic.

As Matilde’s husband Allan Swarbrick works the hotplate, the exuberant Spaniard tends to a growing swell of customers. Unflappable, she chats and laughs while assembling jamón serrano rolls, plating up prawns and serving Spanish omelettes.

Matilde’s tapas are created with passion from only the freshest premium produce. However, it seems to be her homemade Mojo Picón sauces, which honour authentic Canarian recipes dating back four centuries, that inspire the most devotion from dedicated regulars. “They’re cooked with, or served on nearly everything,” says Matilde.

Matilde and her six siblings grew up on Fuerteventura, one of the Canary Islands, located just 96km from the Moroccan coast. Life on the Spanish archipelago was simple: Matilde’s family lived in a house with no electricity, set amid a spectacularly barren landscape. In between climbing dormant volcanoes and practising sewing, she spent her time in the kitchen, and outside, by the clay oven, learning to cook alongside her mother.

“Like most of the islanders, we got by on goat’s milk and chicken from the small farm at the back of the house, and fruit from the trees. Hanging from the kitchen ceiling was everything made from the pig, such as *morcilla* (black pudding), chorizo and jamón,” says Matilde.

Although Matilde’s mother’s cakes were famous throughout the village, her fondest memories of the family kitchen were always of her mother preparing the mojo picón, which translates to ‘hot dip’.

“It’s the essence of the Canarias,” says Matilde, describing mojo picón. “It’s a real infusion of the flavours of Spain and North Africa, and actually not very hot at all,” she adds. “It was the sauce that meant ‘party, fun, family and friends.’” Mojo Picón (red) is a combination of garlic, cumin, smoked paprika, a pinch of chilli and olive oil, while Mojo Picón Verde (green) is made from garlic, parsley, coriander, olive oil, wine vinegar and salt.

Although the simplicity of her life on Fuerteventura sounds romantic, Matilde says she was desperate for more. At 17, against her mother’s wishes, she headed to London looking for adventure. She then made her way to Australia in 1994 to study acting in Brisbane, where she met and fell in love with Allan.

It had never crossed Matilde’s mind to get into the food business, until she started making her sauces as gifts: “The feedback was always crazy, with friends always wanting more.” In 2002, she quit her telemarketing job to make and sell her sauces full-time. Two years later, Allan built their stall from blue tiles, recycled timbers and an old verandah gate. And so their tapas stand began. In between operating her stall, and running a catering business specialising in *pinchos* (skewered tapas dishes) and giant paellas, Matilde makes and sells around 150 litres of Mojo Picón sauce every week.

The love of the mojo continues to spread far beyond the shores of the Canarias with the help of Matilde and Allan. Margaret Viney grabs two jars to take home to Newcastle, after a brunch of Matilde’s garlic prawns. “Absolutely delicious,” she confirms. “I’ll definitely be back.”

The Mojo Picón stall is at the Entertainment Quarter Markets, Bent St, Moore Park, Sydney on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays 9am–3pm, and Melody Market, Victoria St, Chatswood on Thursdays and Fridays, 11am–8pm. Visit mojopicon.com.au, (02) 9558 0140. 🍷