

A Day in the Life of Arlette Eulert Checa

Star Peruvian chef **Arlette Eulert Checa** has worked alongside famous international chefs of Michelin-star restaurants, including Gaig in Barcelona, Nobu in London and D.O.M. in São Paulo. Today she runs the highly successful restaurant Matria in the Miraflores district of Lima – a city famous for the quality and also the diversity of its cuisine. As Matria celebrates its fifth anniversary, Arlette explains her philosophy of sharing what Mother Earth has to offer.

Sight and Life (SAL): *Arlette Eulert Checa, what inspired you to establish your own restaurant?*

Arlette Eulert Checa (AEC): I love food and I love cooking, and I always wanted to own a restaurant. Both my grandmothers had a great influence on me in this respect. One came from Bolivia and the other from Italy. My Bolivian grandma was a marvelous cook and specialized in big meals for special occasions. My Italian

grandma, by contrast, focused on day-to-day cooking. She was extremely maternal. I lived with her, and it was from her that I learned to cook, cooking with her every day.

I studied Art at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru here in Lima, but upon completing my studies, I decided I wanted to become a chef. And so I simply went into a restaurant and asked for a job. That was my start in the gastronomy business! I subsequently trained at Le Cordon Bleu in Lima – the largest network of culinary and hospitality schools in the world. My training took me abroad, and I was to work for some of the leading chefs in Barcelona, London and Brazil. I also learned a great deal from some of our top chefs here in Lima, where I worked at Rafael Restaurant, El Mercado and La Mar. Establishing my own restaurant in due course gave me the opportunity to offer people my own version of our native cuisine.

SAL: *What does 'Matria' mean, Arlette, and what kind of food does the restaurant serve?*


AEC: It means 'Motherland' – a cross between *madre* (mother) and *tierra* (land) in Spanish – and it refers to where our food comes from. Peru is a country of enormous diversity. With our long coastline and the Andes inland, we have a highly seasonal climate and great biodiversity. In fact, we don't have a government calendar for agricultural production because the country encompasses so many different regions and climates. My approach at Matria is therefore very seasonal, with four different menus a year, all based on Peruvian produce. I've been very fortunate: we Peruvians really love our food, and Matria has proved very successful.

SAL: *Why do you think that customers keep coming back to you?*

AEC: I think it's because of the overall experience – the space itself, the style of cooking and the variety of dishes on offer, in terms both of ingredients and of cooking techniques. I want all my customers to be happy and satisfied, and so our menu



Tiridato of Chilean silverside with sea urchins in a tiger milk of yellow chili peppers. *Tiridato* is a traditional dish comprising raw fish in a spicy sauce.

A photograph of a chef, Arlette Eulert Checa, in a white uniform and pink headscarf, smiling and looking to the right. She is in a restaurant kitchen, with a bar and bottles visible in the background. A green text box is overlaid on the image, containing a quote.

“I love food and I love cooking,
and I always wanted to own
a restaurant”



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Arlette at work in Matria. “You have to be always there, always involved, always improving.”

includes vegetarian and vegan options, as well as gluten- and lactose-free dishes. These are important trends in Peru, and we take care to cater for them while offering an authentic Peruvian eating experience.

SAL: *What is the relationship between Matria and its suppliers?*

AEC: I know my suppliers very well – many of them I’ve known for years. I’m always on the look-out for new ones, of course, and sometimes suppliers I don’t know will proactively approach me. Being in the capital, our sourcing isn’t really local. Everything comes from different regions of Peru. The essential thing is to create a relationship of trust between supplier and restaurant.

SAL: *What makes a successful restaurant, in your opinion?*

AEC: It’s a continual learning process. You have to be always there, always involved, always improving. You can always get better. I know some people think of running a restaurant as romantic, but it’s also very much a business.

SAL: *You are known as a member of the Peruvian **Generación con Causa** (“Generation with a Cause”). What is the **Generación con Causa**, and what does it mean to you to be a part of it?*

AEC: **Generación con Causa** is a movement of more than 50 young chefs from Lima and the provinces whose mission is to continue consolidating the foundations of Peruvian cuisine. I am also part of the **Manifiesto de Chefs** movement, a community of chefs from around the world, equipped with a set of simple actions to promote progress in addressing food problems, which looks towards a future in which chefs are socially com-

mitted and work consciously to protect the planet’s resources. We are going to establish a hub here in Lima at the beginning of 2019 in alliance with the new school of gastronomy of the Catholic University of Peru, where I am a professor.

SAL: *What is the overall nutritional status of the population of Peru?*

AEC: There is a positive trend here in Lima for healthy cafeterias aimed at children, but anemia is growing in rural areas, affecting 43% of the population, while overweight and obesity are also on the rise. I said that we Peruvians love our food, but some of us still see Western diets as aspirational. All too many spend their money, if they have it, on Coca-Cola – and then throw away the plastic bottle as though it were a fruit skin. There’s a great work of education to be done. We also need many more doctors in this country.

SAL: *What do you enjoy most about your work?*

AEC: Being creative. I know it’s a big thing to say, but running Matria makes me feel that I’m alive. I love developing new dishes and finding new ways of reaching out to people – via pop-up gastronomy events, for example. The social dimension is very important to me. And I feel that chefs have a responsibility to give something back to society.

SAL: *If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?*

AEC: That’s a difficult question. Having a restaurant that opens only at weekends, perhaps!



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Beetroot of various colors. The cuisine of Lima is famous for its quality and diversity.



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Arlette puts the finishing touches to a meal. "Running Matria makes me feel that I'm alive."

SAL: *And what do you do to relax from work?*

AEC: I enjoy a glass of wine, I like going to the movies and the theater and I love reading when I'm not too tired for it. I also enjoy Pilates from time to time.

SAL: *And what is your own personal favourite food in the world?*

AEC: Pasta. Just pasta with salt and olive oil. I also love cocoa – of which we have a lot here in Peru!

SAL: *There may be readers of our magazine in Peru or other parts of the world who would like to pay a visit to Matria one day. Do you have a message for them?*

AEC: I'd say that there are so many challenges facing us today that we really just need to stop talking and take some action. There are so many ways we can bring about improvements, even if it's simply on the level of reducing the amount of food we waste in the home. We just need to get on with it.

SAL: *Arlette, many thanks for sharing your thoughts with us, and the best of luck for the next five years of Matria!*

AEC: Thank you.

Arlette Eulert Checa was interviewed by Jonathan Steffen.