

MODERN LUXURY

JANUARY 2018

F/OOD & D/RINK

BRAVO!

Claudette Zepeda-Wilkins is certainly making San Diego proud on this season of Bravo's *Top Chef*. We talked to her about *Top Chef Mexico*, her soon-to-open Liberty Station project El Jardín and the S.D. culinary landscape.

How did you end up on *Top Chef Mexico*?

Javier [Plascencia, with whom she worked at Bracero] had joked about it. I gave in to the idea and started the interview process. It taught me what I can accomplish regardless of what my scared subconscious tells me. My approach to cooking changed.

Current inspiration?

My travels and the people I meet inspire me, much more than food trends. El Jardín will be about going back to the basics and making good food without a ton of garnishes.

The food and flavor should be what shines, not necessarily how photogenic a dish looks.

Other insights into the project?

The flavors are very much inspired by travels across Mexico and the people I've learned from. I've connected with Mexican artists to add special touches, from furniture to the coffee mugs.

It was important for me to create a transporting aesthetic, one that was inspired by my culinary heritage.

What are your go-to spots?

I like small spots: Awash Ethiopian, Punjabi Tandoor, Mitch's in Point Loma. For a nice dinner, I love Juniper & Ivy. —David Morris

