

# The Eye



Beach, Village + Urban Living in Oaxaca

March 2023

Issue 126

FREE

**“I am more modest now, but I still think that one of the pleasantest of all emotions is to know that I, I with my brain and my hands, have nourished my beloved few, that I have concocted a stew or a story, a rarity or a plain dish, to sustain them truly against the hungers of the world.”**

**— M.F.K. Fisher**



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# Editor's Letter

A few years ago I sat in a tapas bar in Madrid with a glass of wine ready to devour a copy of a well-respected food magazine that I had picked up at the airport. The cover promised stories about Mexican chefs. Sadly, as I read through, almost all the chefs mentioned were men and they all seemed to croon the same old story I had heard from almost every Mexican chef I know about how they started in their mother's or grandmother's kitchen. The tone of these tales always suggests some sort of bravery on their part for having taken a chance in the kitchen.

This issue of *The Eye* brings up a lot of topics that I have long debated. I once got into a discussion with a man who couldn't understand why I don't refer to myself as a chef.

"You run a kitchen, don't you?" he pushed, knowing full well that I do. I explained that none of the women I work with refer to themselves as chefs and therefore it would seem the height of arrogance to go around calling myself a chef. "I just like feeding people. I don't really need or want the title," I said and I could tell he couldn't understand this.

Why do I cook? Cooking for me started as an act of love-first in my childhood with family, then in college with friends, then in my first home for my husband, then for my daughter... I can scarcely think of a time in my life when I haven't run a kitchen.

I am always a little taken aback when I am invited to attend a food event such as a culinary festival as a presenter or judge, to find other people who run kitchens dressed up in their chef whites- I don't even own a pair of chef whites! I do have many elegant dresses that look great with an apron though!

My culinary creativity hasn't been spontaneous, it has been cultivated over time from my travels, sharing kitchens with others, being introduced to new ingredients and necessity- cooking *qu'est-ce qui*, a French term I learned today for "what there is."

Chefs also have a terrible reputation for getting upset- having fiery tempers and throwing things. I have rarely raised my voice in the kitchen and have never thrown anything. The kitchen is the heart of a home and even in a restaurant I think the vibe should reflect that- good food is made with care not ambition.

"What people expect from your kitchen isn't what people expect from mine," a fellow chef/restaurateur once told me with a tone that suggested his was superior. So while not calling myself a chef or strutting around in chef whites may lead to me being taken a little less seriously, I'm ok with that. I am far more honored to be a part of a legacy of women who cook to connect, to grow and to nourish.

See you next month,

**Jane**

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# Chefs Conquer - Cooks Nourish

By Kary Vannice

March is traditionally “The Women's Issue” here at *The Eye*. And this year, the staff decided to focus the majority of our articles on Mexican women in the culinary industry. However, one unarguable fact comes up in every “Top Mexican Chef” Google search – the majority of chefs listed are men. How can this be in a country where women so clearly dominate the household kitchen? Why don't more women rise up to the ranks of Top Chef in Mexico or even on the global stage?

María Canabal, a food journalist and founder of Parabere Forum, dedicated to promoting the work of women in restaurant kitchens around the world, put the numbers in perspective. Canabal points out that “93% of the people who cook at home are women. 48% of the graduates of culinary schools are women. 39% of the cooks in restaurants are women, but only 18% of the women in the industry are head chefs.”

In 2018, Kantar Worldpanel Mexico, a consumer behavior research center, reported that men do the majority of the cooking in only 8% of Mexican households, and yet 15 of the “Top 20 Chefs of Mexico” are men. Consistently, ranking after ranking, 80% of the most recognized and acclaimed Mexican chefs are male.

As María Canabal puts it, “Talent has no gender. Either you have it, or you don't.” So why the gender gap in handing out accolades? Surely, with nearly 50% of culinary school graduates being female, there has to be more than 20% of female chefs with talent equal to that of male chefs. If culinary distinction is based on talent alone, the numbers just don't add up.

Are there differences between the dishes prepared by a man and those by a woman? Is it even about the food? Perhaps it's more about the industry of culinary arts and its history?

Research shows it's actually a bit of all of the above.

Decades ago, many culinary schools admitted disproportionately fewer women than men, some admitting only 10% female students. Many of today's Top Chefs are older males, so it could be said that this is a contributing factor. However, not all of the top recognized chefs are classically trained. Another major factor in becoming an acclaimed chef is one must have a place to showcase their talent, in other words, a restaurant. However, when female chefs approach investors for a startup restaurant, they are often turned away, whereas male chefs often get the backing they seek based on the belief that men are better in business than women.

Not only does one need a well-backed restaurant, chefs who want to be recognized also need to be active in mainstream and online social media. Rising culinary stars must become comfortable in the limelight, spending time in front of a camera and giving interviews for print and television, all of which take time. Female chefs with families often have less time to dedicate to PR than single male chefs do. And the industry takes note of chefs the media is “buzzing” about. When asked about the role media plays in “making it” in the industry, one chef put it this way, “It's hard to know which comes first – great food that attracts media attention, or great PR that attracts media attention pushing you to be a better chef.”



In today's world, to be considered for high-profile awards or high-profile media coverage in the culinary world, you have to be a chef capable of presenting a certain kind of narrative. So, it could be said that both history and the industry have stacked the decks against female chefs, but what about the question of whether there are differences between the dishes that a man prepares and those of a woman?

From a purely culinary perspective, the answer is “no.” However, look deeper into the motivation, inspiration, and intent behind the dishes prepared and the answer may be “yes.” Men, it could be said, picked up the ladle for a very different reason than did women. They aspired not to nourish, but to create and conquer.

French chef Hélène Darroze said of the difference between men and women chefs, “They want to teach their techniques, show something new, be the first. We cook to generate an experience, to care, and this is a very different approach.”

Traditionally, in the world of haute cuisine, more daring and avant garde cooking is more rewarded and awarded than traditional methods of cooking. “Women don't usually do extreme cooking because they don't seek to assert themselves through the act of cooking. For them food is nutrition long before stupor, supremacy, jealousy or envy,” Italian chef Licia Granello says of female chefs.

Could this be the ultimate differentiating factor? Men simply approach the job differently, with a different aim in mind and, thus, seek recognition more than women because they are driven by a different ambition?

French chef Olivier Roellinger certainly agrees. He is famously quoted as saying, “All kitchens in the world are feminine, they were created by grandmothers and mothers. But Spanish cuisine only began to be talked about when men began to cook.” Regardless of the reason, the fact remains that women are disproportionately under represented in the upper echelons of culinary culture. Whether it's industry, history, or ego, women have a long way to go before they gain equality in the world's top kitchens.

The online news outlet *Chefs 4 Estaciones* published a beautifully written article on this topic in Spanish noting that forty years ago, our books were the cookbooks of our grandmothers, mothers, great-aunts, and aunts. Without women in gastronomy, there would be no roots, no inheritance, no tradition in the kitchen. Definitely, much of what culinary cooks know today is thanks to women. They deserve our thanks and our tribute. And an equal place in the world of the professional restaurant.

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# Five Women: Mexico City's Star Chefs

By Carole Reedy

The streets of Mexico City overflow not just with people and cars but also with culture, art, science, and nature. There seem to be no limits. Growth is a near-constant, but the citizenry knows how to adapt to the colorful chaos, making this one of the most beloved cities in the world.

In this megalopolis, the choices for food, drink, restaurants, markets, street snacks, taco stands, and cafes, as well as their diversity of style, are staggering. And amidst this richness, numerous women chefs have made their mark, creating cuisines and venues worthy of their big-city status.

The food scene here supports so many women who shine brightly that it's impossible to name them all. The choices here are subjective, based purely on my experiences and those of my visitors.

One positive result of the Covid pandemic is the presence of more street dining in our cities. The Mexican government has allowed restaurants to build fashionable wooden structures on streets, sidewalks, curbs, and parking areas, making dining a more social experience, and certainly a better ventilated one. Add the near-perfect climate of Mexico City and you can dine *al fresco* most days and evenings.

Now, let's take a closer look at some of our top women chefs:

**ELENA REYGADAS** is the award-winning chef (Veuve Clicquot named her the Best Latin American Female Chef in 2014) at **Rosetta**, a delectable eatery on Colima street in the heart of trendy Roma Norte. New and repeat customers appreciate not only the high quality of the food and Mexican ingredients, but also her innovative presentation, which sidesteps unnecessary cleverness. This is the first stop for many of my visitors, a favorite dish being the sea bass, though any selection is delicately prepared with just the perfect balance of flavors.



*Rosetta is open Monday-Saturday, 1 to 5:30 pm and 6:30 to 11:15pm. Reservations strongly suggested, especially in the evening hours.*



Just across the street is Reygadas' casual **Panadería Rosetta**, known for its exceptional bread and pastries, as well as sandwiches. The traditional *pan de muerto* and *rosca de reyes* are to die for, although only offered during their respective Mexican holiday celebrations. You can eat on site or take out. The outdoor area is perfect for people watching.

*Panadería Rosetta is open Monday-Saturday 7 am to 8 pm, Sunday 7:30 am to 6 pm.*

Ten years after she opened Rosetta in 2010, Reygadas opened yet another successful eatery in neighboring Condesa, this time with a new European /Mexican/ Mediterranean concept. **Lardo** is a bit more casual than Rosetta, with a bar encircling the room, but the food still has the finest of flavors. Lardo's excellent breakfast is a good choice.



An interesting note about Reygadas for readers of *The Eye's* regular book review column: she studied English literature at UNAM, where she wrote her thesis on Virginia Woolf's experimental novel *The Waves*.

**MÓNICA PATIÑO** is a recognizable name among all foodies in the city. She's won numerous awards and, like Reygadas, two of her most famous and best restaurants are the formal **Casa Virginia** in Roma Norte and a more casual place next door, **Delirio**.



Casa Virginia has a fine dining atmosphere, with prices to reflect it. With an ample variety of choices, the French cuisine is delicately prepared and deliciously presented. From figs and Gorgonzola cheese to clams, fish, short ribs, and the classic French onion soup, the food encourages repeat visits.

*Casa Virginia is open 1:30 to 11 pm Tuesday-Saturday, and only until 6 pm Sundays. Closed Mondays.*

Delirio is a delicatessen with a few outdoor tables on busy Calle Alvaro Obregon (indoor seating is also available). Patiño also sells many of her delicacies at this location, both grocery items and freshly prepared foods. Chilaquiles are a particular favorite, as are the juices. I often stop in just for takeout.

*Delirio is open Monday-Saturday 8 am to 10 pm, Sunday 9 am to 7pm.*

Early in her life Patiño wanted to learn English and French and moved to Europe to do just that. She studied cooking in France, with an emphasis on pastries, ice creams, and pates.

**MARTHA ORTIZ.** Let's travel from Condesa and Roma to Polanco, another upscale neighborhood, close to Chapultepec Park. Here Martha Ortiz Chapa runs her famous restaurant **Dulce Patria** (Sweet Homeland).



When asked what she recommends to tourists who come to her restaurant looking for Mexican flavors, Ortiz replies:

“Everything we have on the menu. Our menu is small but articulates Mexican stories through marinades, moles, corn and beans. I feel proud of everything we have from a *nationalist guacamole* to *María goes to the flower shop*, the place's flagship dessert, and whatever you experience. What they ask for the most is the duck with mole and the coconut flan with pineapple *a la vainilla* for dessert.”

**CARMEN RAMÍREZ DEGOLLADO** created **El Bajío** restaurant with her husband in 1972, and has carried on the tradition since his death in 1988, expanding from one to 19 locations in the city.



This is one of my favorite places to entertain guests, and I usually do so in the venue at 222 Reforma. The restaurant is colorfully decorated in the purest Mexican style, and the food reflects the vast traditions of Mexico.

My favorite and probably the most popular dish is the carnitas, delicate pieces of pork butt served on fresh hot tortillas. You can ask for it *maciza*, which means with less fat, just solid meat. Mexican breakfasts, such as *huevos rancheros*, are also a treat. Please don't miss the hot chocolate!

**GABRIELA CÁMERA.** In 1988, this restaurant owner and author opened a seafood restaurant called **Contramar** that has generated buzz on the streets of Roma Norte ever since. This is one of the most popular restaurants in the city. Try the soft-shell crabs or spicy fish tacos in the airy dining room and plant-filled patio.



Cámara published *My Mexico City Kitchen* in 2019, the same year she and her staff were the subject of the Netflix documentary *A Tale of Two Kitchens* and *Time Magazine* listed her as one of its most influential people.

This modest list of women-led restaurants represents just the tip of the iceberg, but a good place to start your Mexico City food frenzy.

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# IS HUATULCO BECOMING OVERDEVELOPED?

*Interview With Lanny Berner CEO Of Segovia International Real Estate  
Conducted by Jessica Freebairn*



## What is Segovia?

Segovia International Real Estate is a 100% Canadian company owned by myself and Heidi Berner. Segovia has been in Huatulco since 2006 and the majority of our clients are Canadians. Segovia has been responsible for both major developments and many single-family homes.

### **Do you think Huatulco is becoming overdeveloped?**

To answer that a person needs to understand why Huatulco was developed in the first place. Fonatur, which also developed other Mexican tourism destinations such as Cancun and Ixtapa, was the major driving force to develop Huatulco. Fonatur is an economic development fund created and funded by the Mexican federal government.

The sole purpose of Fonatur was to create employment for residents by developing tourism in the southern states of Mexico. The state of Oaxaca in particular desperately needed some economic development as Oaxaca was always one of the least affluent states in the republic. Looking specifically at Huatulco, before Fonatur came here there was not much here. Very few schools, if any. Only very basic healthcare. No jobs. When Fonatur started to develop Huatulco people were able to work and provide for their families. The continued development of Huatulco is what provides jobs here. There are jobs for locals in restaurants and hotels but that was all a result of Fonatur spending millions of dollars to develop the area.

Fonatur is still responsible for the majority of the upkeep of Huatulco. All property owners pay property tax to the municipality but it is Fonatur employees cutting the grass, raking leaves, and cleaning the streets. Without Fonatur, Huatulco would not be what you see today.

So do we think Huatulco has too much development? Perhaps that question is better asked to the thousands of families who depend on the construction industry for a living. The money they earn in the construction business is what puts food on the table and pays to educate their kids. If and when that development stops so does the cash flow to thousands of families.

So no, we do not think that there is too much development. As much as some people like to think that development is taking away their private beach they like to go to when they are here on vacation, those people need to look at the big picture and consider what exactly the thousands of families who depend on the income generated from the development would do if further development stopped. The vast majority of people working on the development sites are not college-educated people. They are just good hard working people who want to support their families and there are not a lot of jobs here for non-college-educated people other than construction.

All of our employees whether office or on-site construction have health care paid for them as part of their benefits program. If they were not working the majority of those families would not have healthcare coverage at all. So many people come to work with us as everyone in the family is covered.”

**What is your opinion about the water shortage in Huatulco, and will continued development hinder the water supply?**

Certainly the water situation is an important issue. We plan to be the first institution (government or private) to install a desalination plant in Huatulco to take the water from the ocean and convert it to drinking water. It will be a long process because of the environmental permits, but it is being worked on.

In the meantime, we do everything we can to be efficient in the use of water including recycling of gray water and even black water. It is not a complete solution but every bit helps and one day desalination plants will be a reality.



**How many local people do you employ?**

In 2022 we were employing more than 600 people in Huatulco including office staff and onsite construction. This year, 2023, we plan to have close to 1500 people working with us.

**Who benefits from development here in Huatulco?**

The list of people who benefit from development in Huatulco is very long. Of course, all the families that we spoke about earlier but it's much more than that. All of the businesses that sell building materials such as cement and rebar have employees who have families who benefit. The municipality benefits as we pay a lot of fees for licenses and that money is used for municipal projects. The municipality also has many employees. The restaurants, grocery stores, bars, and any other place where our employees spend their wages all benefit. The money invested in these developments trickles down to many many people.

**Please explain more about Fonatur & the municipal government.**

We have very good relationships with both Fonatur and the municipal government, and work to do exactly what Fonatur was designed to do. Develop Huatulco and create jobs. The municipal government also benefits because every time we do a new development it expands the property tax base in Huatulco and that tax base needs to grow substantially over the next 5 to 10 years so that the municipality can one day be self-sufficient. Of course, any business entity that creates jobs is always welcome in any town anywhere in the world.”

**Do you all work with Semarnat (the Environmental Department)?**

“Yes, we do. Semarnat is the Environmental Department here in Huatulco. We have always had a positive relationship with Semarnat. Way back in 2007, we were one of the first companies here to consistently do environmental studies and wait for permits before we started to build.

While the permit process can be slow it is essential that all developers as well as all the people who live here follow the environmental rules. Without the guidelines



set forth by Semarnat and the enforcement of those rules, Huatulco would not look like it does. Semarnat has very stringent controls over what a developer can and can't do. Segovia always does everything necessary to protect and preserve the local natural flora and fauna.

**What do you see for the future of Huatulco?**

We see a very positive future for Huatulco. Over the last 15 years that we have been active here we have seen some dramatic changes. Fifteen years ago there was no Chedraui or Soriana. No OXXO stores, no Auto Zone, etc. There are now more than 800 licensed places to eat in Huatulco.

So there are a lot more services here, which makes life easier and less expensive than it was before. That attracts more long term tourism because foreigners can come and stay in Huatulco for six months and find almost everything they might want at a reasonable price.

As more and more foreigners and Mexican nationals move to Huatulco the demand for more services increases which presents more business opportunities and more jobs for local people.

It is very important that we keep Huatulco clean, safe and prosperous. A strong local economy is good for everyone. A high level of unemployment is never a good thing for a community and we see the demand for skilled and unskilled workers increasing over the next few years.

# Tortillas, Women and Circles

By Brooke O'Connor

It's impossible to think about Mexican food without immediately thinking about tortillas, whether made with flour or variously colored corn. A legend says tortillas were invented by a humble peasant to feed a hungry king. We have records of corn tortillas being made as far back as 10,000 BCE. Why have they been a staple of the Americas and how have women making tortillas become such an important part of society?

First, let's look at the making of tortillas. Traditionally, dried corn is cooked in lime water. Not limes from trees, but an alkaline bath made with wood ash and/or white lime powder from the earth. This process creates a chemical reaction releasing the bioavailability of B vitamins, particularly vitamin B3, which is not widely present in traditional vegetable-based diets. Boiling in this water also increases the mineral uptake such as calcium, iron, copper, and zinc by hundreds of percentage points. After the corn is boiled for at least 90 minutes, the skins can be slipped off and the corn can be ground into masa and used for tortillas, or other bases for foods like tamales or sopes.

This process is called nixtamalization, coming from the Aztec language Nahuatl word *nextli* "lime ashes" and *tamalli* "unformed/cooked corn dough."

We don't know how the process was discovered, but we think it goes something like this. People in the Americas didn't have metal cooking vessels in 10,000 BCE, and the traditional pottery was not strong enough to cook directly on hot coals or fire. The earthenware pots were elevated above the fire, then hot stones were put into the pot (with the food) to increase the temperature and cook food thoroughly. Limestone is an easily attained and abundant resource in the Americas, so it the heated rocks were generally pieces of limestone. The lime leaching into the water created the nixtamalization, but a side effect was better flavor and aroma in the cornmeal (masa). Soon it became clear that cooking with limestone versus other stones created a superior product, so this became the standard. Most likely the stones were heated in the wood ash underneath the pot, and some ash was likely to enter the food as well. Savvy cooks experimented with various amounts of ash and stone until they achieved the desired flavor.



Once the corn was made into masa, small round balls were flattened by hand, and laid over a large concave piece of pottery called a comal. The comal was treated with a thick layer of limestone dissolved in water, creating a non-stick coating. This would leave a light additional dusting of calcium on every tortilla, making it even more nutritious. Periodically the limestone would be washed onto the comal again, and tortillas naturally slid off the cooking surface, using only fingers. Much safer and longer lasting than the non-stick pans we have today, despite all the advantages of modern chemistry and manufacturing.

Because cooking was traditionally a woman's chore, tortilla-making was an essential women's role in Mexican society, but not given much importance. It was just another job in the kitchen. It evolved into micro-businesses for women who developed a particular flair for their nixtamalization process. The skilled tortilla maker began selling to other women, freeing them up to concentrate on other things.

As the industrial revolution hit Mexico, the "wage gap" between women and men became more of a "wage chasm." However, because tortilla making was not mechanized, it remained an industry owned and run by women. It was an essential strategy used by women of the era to maintain some form of autonomy and financial significance.

Centuries later, we have tried to industrialize nixtamalization, with terrible impact on the environment, the nutritional quality of masa, and excess use of energy resources – not to mention the lack of complex aromas and depth of flavors.

In modern days, the role of women in Mexico has changed. Women who make tortillas to sell, for the most part, are using industrially produced corn meal. The concept of societal roles, and the loss of recognition of traditional flavors, have morphed the tortilla industry into an interesting reflection of society at large. Tortilla making is considered a lower-status job for women. In fact, anthropologist Lauren A. Wynne details how modern Yucatecan Maya women have no intention of making tortillas at home because they consider it lower-class activity, and the qualities of good-tasting tortilla have changed ("I Hate It": Tortilla-Making, Class and Women's Tastes in Rural Yucatán, Mexico," *Food, Culture & Society* {18:3, 2015}.

An interesting side note to corn and its history, is what happened when the Spaniards came to Mexico. They were enchanted with this new grain. They'd never seen corn before and described it with delight in their letters back home; they created the name *tortilla* (little cake). They called it this because in southern Spain, where there was a significant Arabic influence, they made small round disks from chickpea flour, and it seemed similar. The Spanish then imported wheat and the flour tortilla was born.

After Europeans began cultivating corn, it became a popular food but led to a pandemic in poorer parts of society because, without nixtamalization, it lacked niacin; the deficiency brought on a disease called pellagra. Symptoms include inflamed skin, diarrhea, dementia, and sores in the mouth. Over time, the skin became thicker, peeled, and bled. If not treated, it was fatal. The same thing happened when Europeans settled in the southern part of the United States. Settlers relied on easily grown corn crops to survive, but neglected to learn the indigenous way of preparation. One could argue Nature herself served up a little social justice.

As most things go, history repeats itself. The traditional ways of cooking are becoming more interesting again, as our food resources become more expensive and less nutritious. There are several cooking schools in Huatulco that offer classes in traditional and modern Mexican cuisine.

There are also still women who make tortillas by hand, with corn they grew and processed themselves. If you are fortunate enough to have organic, indigenous corn, nixtamalized over a fire, and cooked over a traditional comal, you will notice the difference immediately.

Like history, women have always been circular. We have cyclical bodily rhythms, pregnant bellies, round with ripe life. It's through the family circle we serve our immediate loved ones. We support each other, disguised as crafting circles. It only seems fitting, women will bring this art of circle-shaped tortilla-making back into the mainstream. There is something wholesome and delicious in the process. There's a connection with the earth, history, and the elements when we connect with indigenous ways of cooking. If you have a chance to make even one tortilla with your own hands, take it. It's a science and an art, and hopefully, together we can revive the womanly art of circles and tortillas.



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# Mexican Hand Signals: A Short Glossary

By Julie Etra

**H**ave you ever observed the *taxistas* (taxi drivers) hand signaling each other and wondered what they were saying? The skills at Santa Cruz directing you to various activities or restaurants? Maybe a waiter signaling to another waiter?

I decided to ask an expert, Sofia Citlalli, a *huatulqueña* (a Huatulco native). Now 18, Sofia (aka Sofí), is the daughter of a native Californian English professor and a Zipolite local diver/fisherman, with a Mixtec and Zapotec bloodline. There is no doubt she will pursue a higher education; her professional interests include the conservation and protection of the coast and surrounding environs of southern Oaxaca. She is bilingual and studied karate at the Dojo Costa Oaxaca. Other interests include linguistics and travel. While living in Huatulco she studied at the Liceo Estudiantil Discovery. Her quiet but also bright young brother is equally fortunate to be raised in a mixed culture household. In 2019, we went to their family home in Zipolite to shoot photos for these hand signals – thank you, Sofí!

## Your New Vocabulary

#1. *Codo* (elbow). It means 'don't be a cheapskate' (*no seas codo/a*). The gesturer is indicating that someone is cheap. The gesture can be combined with pointing at the eye (#2) to indicate who is the subject.



#2. This means *ojos* (eyes) or *fijate bien* (watch something/someone, be careful or cautious). The index finger might be closer to the eye and afterwards might point to the thing that they are trying to warn about. For example, watch out for the rocks while swimming, or be careful with someone, like a *ratero* (thief) or a suspicious person.



#3. This means *mochate* (divide yourself) or *saca* (take out). The gesture is a slicing action of the top hand down towards the palm of the bottom hand. It means share whatever you have – food, beer, work, money, or the cost of something like splitting the bill.



#4. This is universal. It means *¿Que honda?* (What's happening? What's up?)



#5. *Ven acá*. Come here.



#6. *Ven acá, ven aquí*. (Come right here.) *Aquí* and *acá* are very similar and interchangeable, but *acá* tends to mean right here.



#7. *Ahorita, esperame, dame tiempo, dame chance* (just a second, a minute, give me a minute, one moment). It could be a minute or 20 minutes. Although universal, it instills fear when the clerk shows me this gesture in Coppel or Chedraui.



#8. *Cobarde* (coward, scared, chicken). This is an up-and-down motion, and is rather a vulgar term.



#9. This means *no puedo hacerlo, no sucede, negativo* can't/couldn't do it, not happening, negative). Similar to "hang loose" in Hawaii, where they rotate the hand side to side.



#10. *Metiche* or *entrometido* (to be nosy).



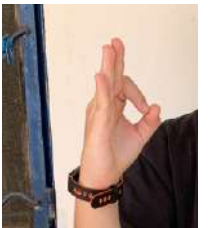
#11. This is the *gusano de acuerdo* (the worm of agreement). It means, "I agree with what was said." This gesture can be fleeting and subtle.



#12. *Dinero, un fajo de billetes, efectivo* (money, a wad of bills, cash) – a culturally universal sign.



#13. While we might think this gesture means "A-okay," no – it basically means a\*\*hole. Vulgar and offensive; use the thumbs-up sign instead.



#14. Even more vulgar than #13, can be translated as mother f\*\*\*er. As above, I recommend using the universal thumbs up.



## An Even More Exotic Way to Communicate in Oaxaca

On another note, so to speak, in remote regions of Oaxaca villagers to this day communicate in whistle-speak. In the Sierra Mazateca de Oaxaca near the state of Veracruz, Mazatec – one of the many Oaxacan indigenous languages – is spoken. In these remote and mountainous regions where people are less visible in the dense, forested vegetation (and where I assume there are few cell phone towers), whistling became a necessary tool to communicate over long distances and from peak to peak. It is part of the Mazatec identity. Whistling reproduces the tones of the spoken language; a slight difference in the tonality renders a significant difference in meaning. Learning from their parents and relatives, the children say that the birds are also their teachers. Imagine that.

Al Jazeera has produced a short video explaining the Mazatec whistle language:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhNPirsg00>



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# The Saga of Huatulco's Quinta Avenida (5th Avenue)

By Randy Jackson

**D**uring the presidency of Felipe Calderón (2006-12), FONATUR relaunched a multi-year development plan for Huatulco (*Relanzamiento del CIP Huatulco*). This plan spelled out specific long-term development goals for each of the nine bays of Huatulco. The plan also included three large shorter-term projects that were initially funded by the Calderón administration. These were expanding the Huatulco Airport (completed in 2015), constructing the museum at the Parque Eco-Arqueológico Copalita (opened in 2010), and building Quinta Avenida – a pedestrian corridor connecting Santa Cruz and La Crucecita. This corridor project is still not complete, but after some years of inactivity, construction has now started on a number of the commercial lots along Quinta Avenida.

This pedestrian corridor goes by a few different names. One is Quinta Avenida (5th Avenue); it is also referred to as an *andador turístico* (tourist walkway), or as *corredor turístico* (tourist corridor). The corridor runs between Boulevard Benito Juárez in Santa Cruz, starting next to the Hotel Castillo, and the sports complex in La Crucecita. Many of us regular Huatulco-ites are familiar with this sunbaked 1.5-kilometer walkway that, for some years now, has maintained trees and shrubs and has security personnel on either end, looking at their phones.

My optimistic thoughts projected a soon-to-be completed pedestrian avenue, lined with shaded restaurant terraces, shops and hotels. Except here I'd like to paraphrase Woody Allen: "Optimism is the feeling you have before you understand what is going on." The commercial construction projects along the pedestrian corridor would appear to be the start of the final stage of this project, but significant hurdles remain.

## Development of the Pedestrian Corridor

The FONATUR plan for the corridor, issued in 2008, called for 33 lots with a parking area on each end. The plan spelled out in detail all the work to be undertaken by FONATUR to prepare the corridor, including water, sewer, internet and electrical infrastructure, as well as environmental impact and remediation. In 2009 the environmental approval for the corridor was granted, and then the project seemed to fall into a kind of dark age. Over the following seven years construction started and stopped. In 2014 there was a media report that the pedestrian corridor had been completely abandoned. Cables had been stolen by thieves and the company constructing the corridor had withdrawn.



But, as the children's song goes, "The cat came back." Sometime in 2016-17, FONATUR completed the project at a cost of 300 million pesos (\$15 Million US) and the 33 lots went up for sale. FONATUR was looking for a single buyer of all 33 lots, and would not entertain selling individual lots. There were no takers. More years passed.

Then, following outside advice from a local business consortium, FONATUR reconfigured some of the lots that were too small, making 24 lots from the original 33. They then offered all of the lots for sale to individual buyers, and by September 2020 all 24 lots were sold. All of the lots are deemed as mixed commercial and residential. This means shops or restaurants on the ground level, and up to three stories above will be either hotels or apartments.

Following the lot sales, the pandemic delayed construction another two years, bringing us to the winter season of 2022-23. There are now a number of construction projects evident along the corridor. And this brings us to the unresolved issues facing the pedestrian corridor today.

## Outstanding Issues with the Pedestrian Corridor

Pedestrian tourist corridors are a standard feature of FONATUR-developed resorts and exist in Cancun (Playa del Carmen) and Ixtapa. They are all named 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue after the famous shopping street in New York City. But unlike the pedestrian walkways in these other resorts, or any pedestrian street anywhere, Huatulco's 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue climbs a (not insignificant) hill.

The biggest issue appears to be that of parking. The final phase of the pedestrian corridor project calls for parking lots at both ends as well as a pedestrian crosswalk to connect the corridor with the shops and businesses of Santa Cruz. The parking areas are yet to be developed, as FONATUR expects to sell the parking areas to a commercial parking lot investor for multi-level paid parking. To date these parking areas have not been sold and FONATUR is looking to the purchasers of the 24 lots along the corridor to collectively buy and develop the parking areas. My suggestion to anyone who suffers congestion anxiety is to suppress any thoughts of what traffic might be like with hundreds of new residents from the corridor, plus casual visitors, who need to cross the main thoroughfare into Santa Cruz at the traffic circle next to the Hotel Castillo.



Lastly, there is a temporary problem with electricity to the pedestrian corridor. When FONATUR built the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the process of connecting the electrical network to the CFE system was not followed, leaving the purchasers of the lots without electricity. CFE is now providing temporary power until the exact protocol connecting the network is completed.

March is the month when many of us snowbirds migrate back northward, but construction on many developments in Huatulco continues throughout the summer, creating a buffet of surprises for us when we return next season. As for the pedestrian corridor, two of the construction projects have a posted completion date for the end of 2025. Assuming this is indicative of the other projects along the corridor, we can expect another couple years at least in the saga of Quinta Avenida Huatulco.

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# Eye on the Writers of *The Eye*: Brooke O'Connor

By Marcia Chaiken and Jan Chaiken

**B**rooke O'Connor began writing for *The Eye* in October 2022, and is the most recent member of the *Eye* staff. She stands out among the already-international *Eye* team as having lived in the most countries – Mexico is just her latest.

Brooke was born in Los Angeles County and was adopted when she was 4 months old. She was raised in Diamond Bar, California, near Anaheim, until she was a three-year-old. Her family moved to Salt Lake City and Brooke was educated there through high school. She spent a gap year working as a nanny in Syracuse, NY and Mountain Lakes, NJ, before matriculating in a special pre-med program at the University of Kansas, graduating with a BS degree. She decided to spend the summer before med school working in Alaska. There she met her soon-to-be husband, and her plans for further medical study were set aside in favor of marriage. Brooke and her husband lived in Squim, Washington, where they would later start their family with first child – a daughter. After several months of being a stay-at-home mother, Brooke discovered she had a talent for multi-level marketing, and marketing became her long-term career.

The young couple moved to Dublin, Ireland, when her husband's employment required. Brooke realized that many grocery shops in Dublin were small family enterprises providing both housing and income, so she bought and ran such a shop for three years. In addition, she began coaching others in life choices and business decisions, the beginning of another long-term occupation. Her son was born during that period.

Once again following the employment of her husband, who had family ties in Italy, the family moved to a small town outside Milan. They lived in a rented wing of a castle and although the quarters were freezing during the winters, they lived there for three years until they bought a house in the area. When Brooke was divorced in 2012, she became a consultant for a Los Angeles-based company specializing in interior design and an architectural firm with clients in the Middle East. She spent nine months as their agent in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain, promoting their projects.

Later she realized that she wanted her teen daughter to have opportunities that were available in the U.S. but not in Italy, so they moved to Alexandria, VA. Brooke bought and ran a limousine service there for three years. Then, to live closer to her brother, she moved to Denver where she was trained and practiced as a clinical hypnotherapist, specializing in working with people who had experienced trauma. It was in Denver that she met her current partner, Scott, and within a few weeks they decided to be a couple for life. They moved to Salt Lake City when Brooke's mother needed assistance through an illness.



After her mother died, Brooke discussed quality-of-life challenges with Scott and began to explore places in the world where they could enjoy growing old together. After considering several places that appeared to support a lifestyle they hoped for, Huatulco rose to the top of the list ... but they had never been here. After a one-month visit checking out the town, they returned to Salt Lake City, sold everything, and returned to Huatulco to a condo they bought in La Crucecita.

Today, Brooke and Scott are partners in a relatively new business called Better You Marketing. Brooke spends her free time snorkeling in our beautiful bays, writing for *The Eye*, and working on her memoir. She has always enjoyed baking and, like many of us, is finding baking in our environment a challenge. The culinary skill for which she's best known is her creative breakfast

skillets using leftover ingredients.

Brooke arrived shortly after our long-time *Eye* writer Brooke Gazer moved to Mérida in the Yucatán. We miss Brooke Gazer but are happy to have a new Brooke join us.

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# E-Bikes: Friend or Foe?

By Randy Redmon

I grew up in the 1970s. As I reflect on my younger years, I often think of my 1974 Schwinn Sting Ray, neon green (actually called “flamboyant lime”) with gearshift in the middle, yeah a little dangerous for boys. I loved that thing – banana seat, sissy bar, you know the one! It was the worst riding and pedaling bicycle in the world, but I loved it.



After that I moved onto my BMX bike, and I was on top of the world! We'd get up every day, and if it was a weekday, we'd ride our bikes to school and ride back from school. If it was a weekend we'd ride our bikes as far as we could, which was probably only about three miles away to some friend's house and dump our bikes in the front lawn and hang out. It was a different time then, we didn't have video games or any other indoor game (besides spin the bottle, lol). We went out jumping trash cans and crashing our bikes – we found our limits.

Flash forward forty years, visiting my hometown, Newport Beach, CA. Seeing every surf kid riding a \$3000 E-bike down the boardwalk at 30 miles an hour, I began to wonder – does anybody pedal anymore? Are we doomed for the most unhealthy people in the future? I was dead set against the E-bike.

Then I started noticing that these kids were also with their families as a family unit! They were biking farther than anyone could actually pedal a bike casually, and they were laughing and they were having a blast! That made me rethink my opinion of E-bikes. Anything that can get a kid out of the house away from violent video games is OK with me.

Looking around Huatulco, I noticed this is the only resort town in all of Mexico that really had no E-bike presence! It's as if they hadn't been invented yet, lol. But it's starting – there are one or two companies in Tangolunda that provide E-bike rentals. And I do believe the “sleeping monster” is about to wake here in Huatulco, and soon we will be barraged with these beautiful silent E-bikes. They make it so easy to enjoy the scenery and wildlife, and as more and more families move here, the E-bike will happily carry families out together as warm beach breezes fill the streets of our beautiful beach town!

You might ask, how are we going to charge these bikes? Actually, charging an E-bike is no more expensive, on average, than leaving one light on all night. I have noticed lately quite a few posts on Facebook from folks saying that they wanted to fly their E-bikes here, but airlines refuse to fly the batteries because they might explode and cause a fire on the plane. So ... what to do? I guess you're just going to have to buy or rent your E-bike right here in Huatulco. (Shameless plug for Huatulco E-Bikes, the newest venture of the Huatulco Surf Co., conveniently located in the shops of Punta 1 in Tangolunda.) Some E-bike facts: average speed is 47 km/h (you don't have to go that fast!), average battery time is 70 km before you need to recharge. These latest E-bikes are more comfortable and easier to ride than ever.



Remember this little article, remember the days when there wasn't a single E-bike to be found in Huatulco, when you soon find the streets of Huatulco filled with smiling happy people rolling quietly along – way better than the motorcycles with broken tail pipes roaring through town!

Ride on, people!!!

English-speaking AA group meets every  
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A stylized advertisement for Huatulco E-Bikes. It features a central graphic of a bicycle with large, feathered wings on either side. The text is arranged in a vertical stack: "HUATULCO" at the top, "E-BIKES" in large letters, "AVAILABLE NOW -RENTALS &amp; SALES-" below that, "LOCATED @ HUATULCO SURF CO." at the bottom. At the very bottom, it says "Call to Reserve 958 106 2258" and "Certified MURF E-Bike Dealer". The entire ad is framed by a double-line border.





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# In Search of Diana Kennedy's *Huachinango Veracruzana*

By Deborah Van Hoewyk

In 1979, seven years after British-born Diana Kennedy published *The Cuisines of Mexico*, I went to Veracruz, both the city and the state. I thought the food was extraordinary.



The culinary website Serious Eats describes “Jarocho” (the colloquial term for being native to Veracruz) cuisine as “one of Mexico's simplest,” but “one of its richest.” It was on the shore of Veracruz where Hernán Cortés first set foot, and Spanish cooking – already Mediterranean and Moroccan in its heritage – was quickly adopted and adapted to Jarocho ingredients and techniques, followed by West African influences. (Cortés brought the first six African slaves to Mexico; eventually, over 200,000 Africans came through the port of Veracruz, to be sold in the town of Antigua, about 28 km [±17 miles] west of the port).

The food of coastal Veracruz thus offers all kinds of fish and seafood, cooked in all kinds of ways, served with all kinds of sauces – and Huachinango Veracruzana – Red Snapper a la Veracruzana – was the queen of all the dishes I tasted there.

On returning to the States, I went out and bought the *Sunset Mexican Cookbook*. My copy was from 1977, and was subtitled *Simplified Techniques, 155 Classic Recipes*. The American palate of the 1970s was not yet familiar with Mexican cooking, but the *Sunset Mexican* cookbook sold over a million copies, through 20 printings, with at least five updates between 1969 and 1983.

And one of its recipes, from Diana Kennedy but adapted to American ingredients, was “Snapper Veracruz (Huachinango a la Veracruzana).”



Loved that recipe. Loved especially the green olives, orange juice, golden raisins, cinnamon, and capers. After six moves to three states, I lost my *Sunset Mexican* cookbook – not that I don't have others, but none has that exact recipe. That, according to Diana Kennedy, is because the recipe is anything but exact!

## The Woman Who Wrote My Remembered Recipe

Culinary anthropologist, cookbook author, chef by default, Diana Southwood was born a hundred years ago (March 3, 1923), in the town of Loughton, England, about 20 miles north of London. The daughter of a kindergarten teacher and a salesman, she lived to be 99, dying at her home in Heroica Zitácuaro, Michoacán, on July 24, 2022. In her twenties, she was a “Lumber Jill” with the Women's Timber Corps, replacing the men who had gone to fight in WW II, and a housing manager in Scotland, working with mining families. When she was 30, she emigrated to Canada and worked in a film library and sold Wedgewood fine china. She loved to travel, and loved to explore new cuisines; from Canada she started visiting the Caribbean.

On a 1956 trip to the Caribbean, she stopped over in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on her way home. Staying in the same hotel was American journalist Paul P. Kennedy, the *New York Times* chief correspondent for Latin America. Kennedy was covering civil unrest in Haiti, where the people were using strikes and demonstrations to force their dictatorial president, Paul Magloire, out of office. She was 33, he was 51 – apparently the attraction was instantaneous; Diana described it as *un flechazo*, an arrow “shot straight to the heart.” She followed Paul and his “half-promise of matrimony” to his home base, Mexico City; they were married within the year.



The ever-versatile Diana Kennedy took up Spanish and worked as a typist at the British consulate in Mexico City. The Kennedys were popular in the English-speaking community in Mexico City, entertaining and being entertained on a frequent basis; when they ate dinner at the homes of friends, Kennedy as usual was taken with foods they were served. When she asked her hostess (this was the 1950s, people) about a dish, they usually replied that the maid or the cook knew about it.

When she asked the maid or the cook, they replied they made it the way they did it back home in their village. Off Kennedy would go to find out just how they did it back home in the village. This was the process that became Diana Kennedy's hallmark in researching Mexican cuisine in all its regional variations: ask about the recipe, go to where it came from, ask questions, and learn how to make it with authenticity. All her recipes identified who made them and where they made them.

Her trekking about the rural villages also led her to the cookbooks of Josefina Velásquez de León (1899-1968), who had visited church groups in the countryside to document regional cooking. (One might call Velásquez de León the first celebrity chef – she cooked on radio in the 1940s and television in the 1950s, published cookbooks, opened a cooking school, and set up her own cookbook publishing house; her papers are in several archive collections, but one of them is the Special Collections of the University of Texas at San Antonio, alongside those of Diana Kennedy.)

One of the Kennedys' guests in Mexico City was Craig Claiborne, who had joined the *New York Times* in 1957 as its food editor and off-and-on restaurant critic. When Diana offered to buy him a Mexican cookbook, he is supposed to have said "Not until you have written one!"

### Diana Kennedy in New York

But the cookbooks came later, and Craig Claiborne would have a hand in that. Paul Kennedy fell victim to cancer, aggressive prostate cancer. In 1966, the couple drove North to New York City for his treatment. In *Nothing Fancy*, one of Kennedy's most personal cookbooks (1984) and a 2019 documentary of the same title by filmmaker Elizabeth Carroll, Kennedy tells a story of that last trip. Eating takeout in some motel somewhere in Texas, "Paul laid his knife and fork down soon after he had started his meal. 'I don't know whether to thank you or not,' he bellowed. 'Most of my life I could eat anything anywhere, but now look what you have done to me. This damned rubbish!' and pushed his plate back in disgust."

Paul Kennedy died on February 2, 1967. Diana was left alone in their apartment on the upper west side of Manhattan. Although all the apartment offered was a galley kitchen, Claiborne had featured Diana's work on regional Mexican cuisine in the *New York Times*, and suggested that she could teach authentic Mexican cooking classes. Word got out that Diana's classes were great, and when Frances McCullough, a poetry editor at Harper & Row, took a class, she told Kennedy that a cookbook was in order. Not that Diana Kennedy knew how to write, but McCullough shepherded her through the process and Kennedy's first cookbook, *The Cuisines of Mexico*, came to life in 1972.

It was a struggle to get it published as a quality cookbook, however – Harper & Row thought it would never sell, said they had no money to print it with pictures, and sent a cover design that featured a sombrero sitting on a cactus. Kennedy was furious but McCullough said, "OK, Diana, let's invite them to lunch. We'll give them a great meal and lots of margaritas." It worked. After the publishing executive finished, they started looking at Diana's slides of the dishes they'd been served, and started saying, "Well, we have to have THAT one ... and THAT one," and so on. "I ended up with a great designer," Diana recalled.

McCullough would edit the next five cookbooks Kennedy wrote, and remained a friend for life.

### Diana Kennedy Moves to Michoacán

Diana went back to Mexico repeatedly to gather the recipes in *Cuisines of Mexico*, but continued working professionally in the various cooking schools popping up in the U.S., returning to Mexico to hunt up more authentic recipes and culinary techniques in the summer. It took until 1976 to leave New York permanently. According to Kennedy, she told herself, "My God, I've got to get out. What am I doing with all these smells, the doggie odors, the exhaust from the restaurants in my face? It's all so artificial."

The contrast of authentic and artificial would epitomize the rest of Diana Kennedy's life. When she went back to Mexico in 1976, she stayed; in 1980, she bought three hectares (just under 7½ acres) about 130 km (about 80 miles) west of Mexico City in Michoacán. There she designed and built Quinta Diana (country house) Diana, her Mexican home and culinary research center. Quinta Diana was supposed to be just a little food museum for Diana's collection of cooking tools, but the idea that museums were of "dead things" was anathema to Kennedy. She hired an architect and ecological engineer and started a house that incorporated large boulders on the site, rambling up and down a steep hillside, amply graced with perforated walls to encourage fresh breezes through the house. Down the slope is her eco-garden full of local Mexican herbs and vegetables and home to a motley collection of livestock and bees. Quinta Diana is mostly off the grid; Kennedy eventually used it to establish the Diana Kennedy Center, a place for research, teaching, and sustainable living – with sustainable native foods at its heart.



*Continued on page 28*



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For fifty years or so, Kennedy led a busy professional life from Quinta Diana. She wrote more cookbooks; before leaving New York, she produced her second, *The Tortilla Book*, in 1975. The rest included *Recipes from the Regional Cooks of Mexico* (1978), *Nothing Fancy: Recipes and Recollections of Soul-Satisfying Food* (1984), *The Art of Mexican Cooking* (1989), *My Mexico* (1998), *From My Mexican Kitchen: Techniques and Ingredients* (2003), and *Oaxaca al Gusto: An Infinite Gastronomy* (2010).

She taught cooking classes and participated in events devoted to international cuisine. She won awards – from the James Beard Foundation, from Mexico (Order of the Aztec Eagle), from Britain (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire).

### The Perils of Authenticity

Always a stickler for doing things in just the right way, all the time, Diana Kennedy has had her detractors. There are those who think that cuisine changes and adapts over time, that it was not a “fly preserved in amber.” Kennedy has even castigated the Mexican cooks who took her recipes and evolved them.

There were those who feel her insistence on using lard and lots of *crema* is unhealthy, and her notion that you should read all the explanations and notes before attempting a recipe – a recipe that might take five days to make all the salsas and bases – is antiquated. Kennedy, on the other hand, says “It’s difficult to educate a whole public ... Americans were raised to expect that horrible combination plate – the quick cheap fix.”



Tejal Rao, a New York Times restaurant critic and food writer, believes that Diana Kennedy “changed the way millions of people perceived Mexican Food.” On the other hand, when Kennedy taught Martha Stewart to make Oaxacan *tamales de frijol* on television, “Wasn’t something lost?” Kennedy would say no, but Tejal Rao pointed out that perhaps a Zapotec cook should have been serving as the expert on her own tamales. Rao also faulted Kennedy for never backing down “from her ludicrous position of dismissing Tex-Mex, California Mexican food and all of the rich, regional cuisines that grew from the Mexican diaspora.”

Nonetheless, after spending more than half her lifetime in grass-roots scholarship across the kitchens of rural Mexico, bouncing around in a beat-up pickup truck with a revolver in the glove compartment, Diana Kennedy made an immeasurable contribution to our understanding of and appreciation for Mexican gastronomy. With her attention to regional differences in Mexican dishes, she laid much of the foundation for the United Nations’ designation of Mexican cuisine as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Will I still look for the “right” recipe for Huachinango Veracruzana? Even though Diana Kennedy told me that it’s more likely made with orange juice and raisins in the mountains of Veracruz, maybe in Jalapa? Of course I will.

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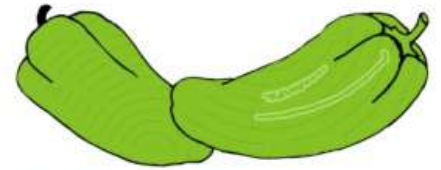
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