unity

Celebrating Food, Art & Culture

Viva Vegan!

Photography shot in the dark

Vargas Llosa wins the Nobel Prize for literature

El Charro

National Hispanic University's champion debate team


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# Easing global conflict, one morsel at a time

*Daniel Lubetzky*

What do healthy food products and the resolution of armed conflict have in common? For Daniel Lubetzky, a social entrepreneur who founded PeaceWorks Holdings LLC, they are at the heart of his company's mission.

Founded in 1994, the PeaceWorks enterprise began when Lubetzky was in Israel and stumbled upon a tasty sun-dried tomato spread. Upon learning that he couldn't buy more of it because the company was out of business, Lubetzky pursued the product, and through this effort began the pursuit of peace. Specifically, he connected the manufacturer, an Israeli, with Palestinian farmers and Egyptian glass importers, resulting in an Arab-Israeli co-op, the first of many unlikely cooperative business projects that has come about through PeaceWorks.

Today, the company sells and imports healthy foods to 30,000 stores worldwide, a feat made possible through partnerships with Israelis, Palestinians, Egyptians, Turks, Indonesians, Sri Lankans and Australians. The company donates 5 percent of all profits to the PeaceWorks Foundation, which promotes tolerance and co-existence in regions of conflict.

Lubetzky's generosity and philanthropic spirit were seeds that his family planted early on. "My dad was a Holocaust survivor and taught us of the importance to work so nobody else has to go through a tragedy like that again," he says. He recalls that, as a Jew raised in Mexico City, he learned how to build bridges between human beings.

"And my mom and dad were inspiring examples of being kind to strangers and treating everyone with dignity," he adds.

That example stayed with Lubetzky when he later studied in the Middle East, and he quickly made friends with both Israelis and Palestinians. He also studied in France, learning French and thus expanding his linguistic capabilities — as a child in Mexico City he learned Hebrew, English, Spanish and Yiddish — and his horizons. He worked in Tokyo for a strategic marketing firm before moving back to the United States — he'd lived there as a teenager — and earning a law degree at Stanford Law School.


His achievements are as numerous as the places he's lived. Lubetzky was named one of "America's Most Promising Social Entrepreneurs" by Business Week magazine and one of the "25 Responsibility Pioneers" of social innovation by Time magazine. Not only that, Lubetzky founded the PeaceWorks Foundation's One Voice Movement and co-founded 3000 Degrees, other international grassroots initiatives, and is CEO and founder of KIND Healthy Snacks and the KIND Movement.

KIND also has food at its core – snack food, to be specific. Lubetzky was concerned about unhealthy snacks and our country's rising obesity issues, so he launched KIND Snacks with the mantra of being "KIND to your body, your taste buds and the world." "I love food and am concerned about the dangerous trends of unhealthful eating in America," he says. In conjunction with these healthy snacks, the KIND Movement is an initiative designed to "Do the KIND Thing" and surprise others with unexpected acts of kindness.

*A quest for sun-dried tomato spread ended in Palestinians and Israelis working together to make a viable product.*

The results have been tremendous, not just for KIND but for the PeaceWorks Foundation as a whole. Local economies are being stimulated and new jobs are being created in conflict regions, creating the possibility of prosperity in these areas. But one of the biggest benefits is the human interactions. As the PeaceWorks website articulates, "As groups learn to work together, cultural stereotypes are shattered and the former enemy is demystified, and humanized."

"I love using market forces to achieve positive social change," Lubetzky concludes. "So I will continue to try to innovate to make healthful foods that are delicious and try to also make a little contribution to make this world a better place."

*Seventy-five-year-old Mario Vargas Llosa garnered the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2010, the first Spanish-language writer in two decades to win. Photo courtesy of Daniele Devoti*

# Peru's long-lost litterateur

Despite worldwide renown and the international literary acclaim surrounding him, he nonetheless remains something of an enigma.

One of Latin America's most influential novelists, the Peruvian-born Mario Vargas Llosa often draws upon his boyhood and college-age experiences in Lima, which occurred during a perilous time in Peru's capital city, as fodder for his work. Given the constant strife, he left Peru at the earliest opportunity, beginning what would seem to be a lifelong paradoxical relationship with his homeland. He moved abroad and began life anew, establishing himself as a writer while spending time in London, Paris and Madrid. Yet the pull of his native country was strong, and his writings often focused on corruption in Peruvian society.

Always keenly interested in politics, Vargas Llosa's fiction often, understandably, homes in on the political arena. What is less clear is how a one-time supporter of Fidel Castro's government became a conservative neo-liberal – or why one of the Spanish-speaking world's leading authors, who had nurtured a desire to write since childhood, would abandon his craft, albeit temporarily, for politics. And it's that excursion into politics, coupled with his criticism of the Cuban and Venezuelan governments, that has earned the author the occasional unfavorable critique.

His literary prowess and talent, however, have never been in doubt. With countless prestigious awards under his belt, the now 75-year-old Vargas Llosa garnered the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2010, the first Spanish-language writer in two decades to win. The Swedish Academy cited the writer's "cartography of structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual's resistance, revolt, and defeat" when announcing the Nobel Prize.

Vargas Llosa's love of writing took hold during the 10 years he spent in Bolivia as a boy, before he and his family returned to Peru. As a teenager he covered crime stories for Lima tabloids, and later, published a collection of short stories at the age of 22. He hit his stride in the 1960s with such works as "The Time of the Hero," his controversial first novel that tells of cadets' experiences at a Peruvian military academy. Military leaders in Peru burned 1,000 copies when the book was first released. This was followed by "Conversation in the Cathedral," a novel of political corruption set in 1950s Peru, and many other highly praised works, including the comic and partially autobiographical novel "Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter." The writer later pursued a doctorate in literature at the University of Madrid but the draw of his homeland had still not lessened.

In 1990, he turned his sights on the public domain, running for president of Peru as a candidate for the center-right Democratic Front. Despite a favorable showing in the polls for much of his campaign and the eventual need for a runoff election, Vargas Llosa was defeated.

He fell back on his writing, authoring a column for El País, the Spanish daily newspaper in Madrid that is distributed throughout Latin America. He also detailed his failed bid for the presidency and foray into public life in "Tale of a Sacrificial Llama" and "A Fish in the Water: A Memoir," and resumed his craft on a full-time basis. Given the many genres and forms of writing he's pursued over the span of his life, Vargas Llosa remains as prolific as ever. Indeed, over the course of his career he's worked as an essayist, journalist, critic and screenwriter, in addition to being a novelist. And, as ever, Vargas Llosa continues to be known for his thought-provoking writings of his homeland, the paradox that is the Peru of his childhood, and far beyond.

# Poignant pictures of a beloved culture

To celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month, we proudly feature three artists who exemplify the values of Hispanic culture through their art in fundamentally similar ways yet radically different artistic styles. From photography to painting to photorealistic painting, George Velasco, Felix Berroa and Ismael Checo introduce viewers to the culture and traditions within the global Hispanic world with compassion, tolerance and enthusiasm.

*"Cobblestone in Old San Juan" (top) and "La Candelaria" (bottom) by George Velasco*

**George Velasco**

"I'm nostalgic by nature," writes George Velasco of his path to becoming a photographer. "I had over 200 pictures of my daughter before she even left the hospital when she was born — and this was in the days of film."

For Velasco, photography is about memory and milestones. His father, who was also a photographer, exposed him to the art at an early age, but it wasn't until frequent trips to Mexico, Colombia and Puerto Rico that Velasco realized his full potential as a photographer. The trip expanded his vision because "it really inspired me to experiment with my night time photography … and the architecture, landscapes and people you see abroad are just not the same in the United States," he says.

Velasco was born and raised in the United States where he lives today with his family. His father was born in Mexico and his mother in Puerto Rico; however, despite his proximity to Hispanic culture, Velasco spent most of his life feeling largely disconnected from his heritage.

"Things were very different in those days," he writes, "because there were very few Hispanics, compared to the population as it is now. Over the years I've gotten a sense of my culture in varying degrees, but (it has been) my photography during my travels (that has) provided a tremendous sense of closeness with the Hispanic community at large, and it makes me want to become more connected."

This connection is omnipresent in Velasco's nighttime photographs, arguably the essence of his portfolio. At first glance the fantastically illuminated city streets seem familiar, yet the photographs present a complex layering of social and cultural context clues. "La Candelaria," for example, captures a historic neighborhood in Bogota, Colombia, where tourism has caused English to be a widely spoken second language. The alley lined with hostels, bars and other relics — seen and unseen — bear the influence of globalization.

"Cobblestone in Old San Juan," photographed during twilight, is especially significant as it was taken on Velasco's first trip to Puerto Rico. On this trip he brought his parents along and it was the first time his mother had returned home in 50 years.

These and other nighttime photographs showcase the silent bridge between ourselves and other worlds, with Velasco as our guide, offering us his own experiences in connecting to his Hispanic heritage as a template.

*"Caretero" by Ismael Checo*

*"Accordeonist" by Felix Berroa*

## Ismael Checo

From simple beginnings as a young boy who adored his older brother has evolved a painter of incredible proportions.

The paintings of Ismael Checo, a native of the Dominican Republic and president of the Colectivo de Artistas Visuales Dominico-Americanos, are flawless: executed perfectly with an almost maniacal attention to detail. Yet, Checo's story begins as simply as any story could. Asked what inspired him to become an artist, Checo explains that his older brother, Jose, studied cartooning and he watched him draw.

*"Degas" by Ismael Checo*

In this way, for Checo there is no distinction between life and art. There is no separating his career as an artist from his roots as a child in the Dominican Republic, and there is certainly no way to extract the influences of his Hispanic heritage from his work.

"I have Hispanic heritage stamped on my soul. There is no way for me to paint without thinking about my roots … Like the painting 'Caretero' ("The Mask Maker") is based on the mask (worn) by people in the Dominican Independence Day parade."

Painting affords Checo the opportunity to support connections within Hispanic communities at home and abroad.

"By painting a scene that represents my tradition, I'm keeping it alive," he explains.

Checo paints scenes of global Hispanic heritage with an eye to the familiar. His scenes are never so specific as to not invite all of us to consider traditions within our personal heritages, yet the invitation to learn about Hispanic culture is there if we choose to accept it.

## Felix Berroa

Starting with the colors and shapes of the Dominican visual landscape, Felix Berroa forges bizarre and fanciful characters that occupy far-off lands existing only in our wildest imaginations.

"In each place where I exhibit my art, I have been a visual voice of what I represent: an artist … a Dominican in American lands. When the name 'Felix Berroa' is added in a … exhibition of … American artists … I honor not only my family but (also) my country — my great Hispanic community."

That is not to say, however, that Berroa prioritizes being Latino or Hispanic over being an artist; rather, they are one in the same. In this way, Berroa uses his artistic capabilities to stoke the embers of Hispanic tradition and further infuses it with new life. Going off a lifetime of honed artistic instinct, Berroa makes use of vivid pigments and surrealistic narratives to celebrate the softer side of Hispanic mythology and legacy. Women and children in particular are celebrated for their roles in the life cycle, as well as their tenderness and vulnerability. "Huggers," featured on *Unity's* cover, illustrates these qualities, however, with enough ambiguity to allow us as viewers to see ourselves in the embracing figures. Similarly, Berroa seems to place himself amongst these characters at times as well, identifying with them or identifying them as someone who has a personal relationship with him.

*"Touching" by Felix Berroa*

Above all, Berroa paints the picture of Hispanic culture as being centered on people and the connections between them. His paintings embody the values of Dominican culture and tradition just as much as family and community. The fact that they happen to do so in an idealized vision of the world we live in makes them not unrealistic, but rather all the more romantic and celebratory.



*Top: The Flin family home, built in the 1890s, now houses El Charro on Court Street. Left: El Charro still serves diners on Broadway, where it operated in the 1930s. Photos courtesy of El Charro Cafe. © El Charro Café.*

# Tradition and time

Who would have guessed the nation's oldest family Mexican restaurant would begin with a French stonemason who helped build the stone façade of Tucson's San Augustine Church in the 1860s? But in 1922, when Jules Flin's widowed daughter, Monica, returned from Mexico to Tucson, she earned a living by opening a one-room restaurant. She served the Mexican-style food she had learned to cook and named her little place "El Charro" for Mexico's "gentlemen horsemen."

The restaurant's history spans from a time when Monica's menu of combination plates for 15 cents stated "No service for less than 10 cents." During the country's Great Depression, Monica sought additional business by moving El Charro to an empty part of a building owned by her sister on Broadway Boulevard. By 1968, she was ready to open another location — in the stone home Jules Flin had built for his family more than 70 years earlier. And in the 1970s, she turned ownership over to her niece, Zarina.

Today El Charro serves diners in five Tucson spots, including one at the airport. El Charro has been noted in Gourmet magazine and USA Today for its variety of dishes based on the usual Mexican ingredients of chilis, corn, rice, garlic, and the spicy rub called pico de gallo. El Charro's Carne de Seco (a traditional sun-dried beef) has set a standard among visitors who arrive from around the country.

Current owners Carlotta Flores, Zarina's daughter, and her husband, Ray, have made El Charro a nationally recognized name associated with a warm, welcoming atmosphere and an extensive and delicious menu. Carlotta herself is the chef and author of cookbooks that allow fans to make the restaurant's signature meals at home.

Carlotta and Ray have given a modern sensibility and flair to the menu by adding such choices as gluten-free dishes to their traditional Mexican and Southwestern favorites. They have expanded El Charro to include a catering service, Latin entertainment and tequila bars, venues for private parties, and an online store for ordering salsas and gifts.

"Food, in general, should always be delicious, nutritious and affordable, whether you are dining out or cooking a meal for your family," says Carlotta. "When you eat at our restaurant, we are inviting you to dine at our home," she adds, remembering that Monica often said, "Whatever the meal, whatever the season, every meal at El Charro is served with color, music and, whenever possible, good company."

## El Charro Chopped Fajita Lettuce Cups

Ingredients per serving

3 ounces of chopped steak, chicken or shrimp
2 1/2 ounces chopped green peppers, red peppers and onions
2 ounces of chipotle dressing
2 ounces of pico de gallo: chopped fresh tomato, onions and green chilies
1/2 head iceberg lettuce, yellow hard hearts removed

Grill the veggies and meat on a flat top or sauté in a frying pan. Season with salt and pepper. Make sure the meat is thoroughly cooked and veggies are soft.

Separate lettuce into wedges and serve with your fajitas in place of tortillas.

Add chipotle dressing and pico to lettuce cup and enjoy!

## Rhubarbarian Teacake

Makes one 9½-inch cake

1 pound rhubarb stalks
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

**For the cake**

1 cup plain or vanilla soy milk
2 teaspoons apple cider vinegar
2/3 cup sugar
1/3 cup canola oil
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon orange extract or grated zest of 1 orange
1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
¼ cup yellow cornmeal
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2/3 cup ground almonds

**For the topping**

3 tablespoons turbinado sugar
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat bottom and sides of a 9½-inch springform pan with cooking spray, then lightly dust bottom and sides with flour. Slice rhubarb on an angle into ½-thick pieces. Place in a mixing bowl, sprinkle with flour and toss to coat rhubarb.

In large mixing bowl whisk together soy milk and apple cider vinegar. Stir in sugar, canola oil, vanilla extract and orange extract/zest and whisk until smooth. Sift in flour, cornmeal, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and then pour in the ground almonds. With a rubber spatula stir together just enough to moisten the dry ingredients, then fold in rhubarb. Stir only enough to coat rhubarb chunks with batter. Spread in an even layer into the prepared springform pan and bake for 40-42 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes clean (a few moist crumbs OK).

Remove from oven onto a cooling rack; let cool for 25 minutes, run a knife along the edges of the cake and carefully remove springform ring. Slice warm cake with a sharp knife and serve immediately with vanilla ice cream or vegan whipped cream. Store leftover cake in a loosely covered container in a cool place; it will soften considerably overnight from the fresh rhubarb and humidity of your kitchen, but you can heat it gently in the oven to help re-crisp the top a little.

*Rhubarbarian Teacake*

# Hope for Latin Vegans


Love Latin foods? Most people do, but preparing it vegan-style is a challenge. Terry Hope Romero, co-author of "Veganomicon," comes to the rescue of cooks — e.g., your humble writer — whose imagination limits their vegan output, and vegans who want more Latin dishes on the menu. In Romero's new release, *Viva Vegan!*, there are 200 recipes and a generous amount of color photos, including favorites like tacos, burritos, and tamales (and everything else you'll find in popular Mexican, Cuban, Costa Rican, South American and Spanish restaurants). Hope presents a full course with wonderful desserts, salads, stews, snacks, sweets, casseroles and corn dishes. Surprise — there's a recipe for a vegan Cuban pressed sandwich!

Many of the dishes in "Viva Vegan!" are also soy- and/or gluten-free, but don't be misled. This is vegan, not diet, and the recipes are rich and delicious. Minor adjustments in spices are made for those who like their meals hot, not-so-hot, jalapeno-free and sans lime. Once that's accomplished, there is a great selection of dishes that everyone will enjoy.

Everyone has private standards for what makes a cookbook great. This writer leans heavily to the desserts, where I found the unimaginable, a dairy-free *dulce de leche*. Romero also offers recipes for ice cream made with coconut milk and soy milk, and baked goods without eggs or other dairy products. Crepes with Un-Dulce de Leche and Sweet Plantains are swoon-worthy.

For non-Latino cooks, many of the ingredients will be unfamiliar, so Romero includes a chapter on the "Vegan Latin Pantry" that introduces new ingredients and new uses for familiar items. And there's a primer on utensils and cooking tools that make Latin cooking that much easier.

One of the barriers people encounter when they want to try any type of ethnic cooking is the availability of some ingredients. "Viva Vegan!" includes a list of Internet sources for both Latin American and vegan ingredients.

Cooking terms are explained, as are a variety of techniques, and there's a convenient metric conversion chart for those who don't have a netbook in the kitchen.

*By Bob Etier, reprinted from Blogcritics.org*

*Members of the debate team from National Hispanic University rarely mince their words and often come home from competitions as winners.*

# A winning way with words

National Hispanic University, located in California's Silicon Valley, is renowned for having a "culture of familia," a concept of strong connections that is readily embraced by the 500-plus students who attend the school. The university was founded in 1981 to provide Hispanic students with access to quality higher education. The concept resonates in particular with the school's award-winning debate team, considering the strong bonds between the participants and team coach Michael Jordan, as well as the reverence that the rest of the campus has for the team. Additionally, the intense preparation required by the team's members means that they spend a lot of time together —researching cases, tearing down and perfecting arguments, and constantly critiquing — effectively turning this small group of students into an extended family.

It is a process that has paid off. The team has competed locally and across the nation, becoming the first National Undergrad Bioethics Bowl champions in 2008 and consistently placing in the top three within competitions. The team's members have earned NHU, according to Jordan, a reputation as "a small school with a large reputation."

"One of the things that makes us unique is that we have been to many competitions where we are the only Latinos in the room," Jordan adds.

Jordan, an NHU philosophy professor, founded the team in 2003 when a group of his students asked if he would be willing to meet outside of class to talk through philosophical issues. They entered their first event the following year and regularly participate in a nationwide Ethics Bowl, designed to develop the students' abilities in ethical analysis and judgment. Topics include personal, professional, ethical and bioethical issues relating to current events.

"The cases are usually designed in such a way that there is not a right answer," says team member Ernie Martinez. "And at the event, we could be given either side to argue."

Martinez and his teammate, Stephanie Anchondo, have both found the debate team to be a life-changing experience. "I have really delved into my studies since joining the team," says Anchondo. "I'm much more confident at school and have met people around the state and the country."

For his part, Martinez says, "I take quite a bit of pride in knowing that we're potentially breaking down the idea that Latinos may not do that well. But we do just as well if not better than all the other schools."

Cover photos: Top, Rhubarbarian Teacake from Terry Hope Romero; center, the nation's oldest family Mexican restaurant; bottom right, "Huggers" by Felix Berroa; bottom left, "Cobblestones in Mexico City" by George Velasco. *Unity* is a celebration of food, art and culture. Published six times per year, *Unity* is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both world leaders in foodservice. To contact us, send an e-mail to unity@thompsonhospitalityjv.com.