

# Portfolio

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[As published in West Palm Beach Magazine's Summer 2017 Print Edition](#)

### CUBA: SABOR CUBANO

[A creative cauldron with delicious flavor that's mixed with the contagious rhythm of Cuban music, creates the world's great comforts and sets the upbeat mood and tone to any occasion.]

**By Maritza Cosano**

If you want to sample a slice of Cuban life, you must first start with its rich and exotic food. I was born in a Cuban home, so for me white rice, black beans, Picadillo [ground meat hash], and Platanitos Maduros [fried bananas], topped with Flan Cubano [vanilla custard], and Café Cubano taste like home-style goodness. But the essence of Cuban food is not just found in its traditional and exquisite sabor Cubano [Cuban flavor], which is a distinct blend of Spanish, Caribbean and African cuisine, but in its culture and its people.

It's just a Cuban thing to wake up early in the morning to the sound of Salsa music in the background and the smells of Café Cubano, one of the strongest coffees there is. Mix it with milk and suddenly you have the famous Café con Leche. My Abuela Nena [grandmother] had the magic touch. With the first few drops of brewed coffee, she would drop two tablespoons of sugar and briskly stir that into my special cup until it became a foam of sugary mix. She would then pour a cup of warm milk, and add more coffee until it was just the right combination of coffee and milk. And of course, I couldn't have my authentic Cuban desayuno [breakfast] without adding the pan tostado [toasted Cuban bread and butter]. Mind you, this small treat is not limited to the morning hours, as for Cubans this can be the perfect afternoon snack or late night meal.

Almuerzo y Comida [Lunch and dinner] are just as sacred as going to church on Sunday. And as for who's coming to dinner? Well, my grandmother's house was always open, and her table was ready to serve one or twelve, regardless of the time of day.

That gracious kind of hospitality is part of the Cuban heart, and at the core of it there's Cuba's rich and fertile soil.

Agriculture in Cuba has played a major role in its tropical and exotic cuisine. Before the revolution in 1959, Cuba was one of the main world producers of sugar, rice, coffee, corn, potatoes, tomatoes, yuca, malanga [Guaguí], tobacco, avocados, and an extensive list of tropical fruits: orange, grapefruit, coconut, bananas, guava, pineapple, papaya, anon, lime, mamoncillos, guanabana, caimito, and mamey, which is similar in taste to the papaya, only





sweeter.

Sadly, today, similar to other industries in Cuba, agriculture lacks in everything from fertilizer to growing fields, to distribution and open markets. It used to be, that in the cities of Cuba, million meals were served. That's equivalent to hundreds of trucks arriving to hundreds of bodegas [small markets] restaurants, and bakeries that tightly orchestrated the productions, transportation and distribution of goods.

Of all the varieties of food that can or could exist, what made Cuban cuisine come out of a small Caribbean island like Cuba and into the world's historical record? The answer is simple. El sabor Cubano is a creative cauldron with delicious flavor that's spiced generously, but not spicy. Mix with that the contagious rhythm of Cuban music and you've just created the world's great comforts and set the upbeat mood and tone to any occasion.

### **Classic Cuban Food & Beverages**

Spain played a large role in Cuba's culinary tradition. At the base of almost all dishes there's the sofrito—a mix of fresh diced onions, bell peppers, garlic, oregano, cumin, and tomato sauce, cooked in medium-low heat for seven minutes until tender, then added according to measure to any given plato [dish].

Spain's cuisine, especially in Andalucia, southern Spain, is largely based on bean soups and rices. These are grown in Seville, a province of Andalucia. Hence, black beans and white rice are ever-present in Cuban cuisine. The combination of these two dishes are known as Moros y Cristianos [Moors and Christians], an interesting reference to medieval Spain, circa 507-711, when Christians battled Moors from North Africa for control of Spain. Black beans get its distinct flavor from bell peppers, onion, garlic, oregano, olive oil, and a squirt of white vinegar.



Since beef and pork are another important part of the Cuban diet, most of the favorites dishes have one or the other, except for dishes with fish, shellfish, and chicken, of course. If you attend a Cuban party, chances are the main plate is Arroz con Pollo [chicken and rice], which is a sister dish to the Spanish Paella, which uses Valenciana yellow rice, chicken and mariscos [seafood], to complete this world famous delectable recipe.

But Cubans believe in beef. If you're sick, you're told to eat sopa de res [beef soup]. And if you need a more hearty meal, you're told to eat the old time favorite, Ropa Vieja, literally meaning old clothes, but in reality it's just shredded beef, which you can make with the same beef you used to make the beef soup. Here's my family's recipe:

Prepare the sofrito in a skillet cooked with virgin olive oil. Boil two pounds of flank steak in two quarts of salted water for two hours. Drain the flank steak

and let it cool to room temperature. Shred the beef into long strips. Add it to the sofrito and sauté for ten minutes. Pour 1/2 cup of Edmundo Vino Seco, [dry wine] and cook it for another 7 to 10 minutes. Serve immediately with white rice and black beans. Just what the doctor [grandma] ordered!

Another beef classic recipe is the Picadillo, which is truly versatile, as you can eat it with almost anything. Quick to prepare and serves lots of people, it is a match made in heaven when you try it with white rice and black beans, or in empanadas and papas rellenas [stuffed beef potatoes]. For more great options, read the Picadillo recipe below.

Cuban dishes are basically easy to prepare and most are platos criollos [home-style or peasant type] recipes, which were meant to feed a large family. It used to be that nothing was imported in Cuba. Everything—from the animals to fruits and plants were home grown. The island's archipelagos, which supported thousands of plant and animal species, made Cuba the most naturally diverse Caribbean nation.

Because sugar cane is a major crop on both the island of Cuba and in South Florida, the guarapo, a drink made from sugar cane juice, is as common in Cuban communities as Coca Cola is in the States. Did you know that sugar cane juice is also the essential ingredient in a Mojito? The Mojito is a refreshing cocktail that has gained popularity in the last decade around the world, especially in South Florida establishments. At CityPlace there's a Cuban restaurant by the same name, serving Mojitos, as well as traditional and more trendy renditions of Cuban cuisine.

Batidos [milk shakes] are without doubt another preferred Cuban beverage. They come in a variety of tropical flavors and they're whipped with fresh mamey [my favorite], anon, or pineapple and coconut [another favorite] and lots of sugar.

### **Uprooted Nation Digs New Roots**

In the late 1950s, when Cuba underwent a catastrophic change as Fidel Castro's revolutionary and political communist regime took over the land, many Cubans fled the island seeking political refuge, with most heading for Florida, New York, and other countries like Spain, which has the same common language, culture, and cuisine. After all, most Cuban families originate from Spain and its neighboring islands like the Canary Islands.

By the 1960s, Miami, Florida was dubbed Little Havana, and many Cubans found a new "temporary" home, always thinking that one day they would return home—to the land they'd left behind. Miami became a haven for the large Cuban community that came to its shores looking for a better life, and among those was Felipe Valls Sr., a businessman from Santiago de Cuba.

Cubans, as a people, have an entrepreneur spirit. And Valls' desire was to give his family and the



rest of the Cuban community in Miami a piece of home. His vision was to offer his countrymen the complete Cuban experience—a Cuban hub. A place where he would serve them a home-cooked meal with the same "tu casa, es mi casa," open-door Cuban hospitality Cubans are known for. His place would give his people comfort, reduce the sadness and help maintain their identity in a foreign land. They could come and congregate, sip freshly brewed café Cubano, using the typical tasitas de café [small espresso white coffee cups], while they talked about their beloved island in its heyday, cuando Cuba era Cuba. In 1971, Vall's dream came true. He opened Versailles Restaurant.

### **Cuban Restaurants: Continuing the Tradition**

That's around the time when the Cuban cafeteria was born in Miami. But these cafeteria shops grew not so much because of the need to start a business, although that was a big part of it.

As Cuban actor, director, and producer Andy Garcia eloquently wrote in his foreword for The Versailles Restaurant Cookbook, created by Ana Quincoces and Nicole Valls, "All exile communities will find places of solace wherever they end up. Places that provide this most necessary emotional and spiritual space. Where one can gather with fellow exiles and share a profound love and nostalgia for the country they have left. For those of us in the Cuban exile community in Miami, Versailles is such a place."

“My grandfather created something that people missed at home,” said Luly Valls, part owner of Versailles, which also owns La Carreta, another great Cuban establishment serving the growing Latin community in Miami. “When Cuban exiles came to Miami, they didn’t have a place to come together and talk, and eat the foods that they missed. And my grandfather filled that void.”

Since it opened its doors, Versailles has become an iconic Cuban landmark in Miami with multiple locations, including their latest venture located at the Miami International Airport. It was the first of its kind, the same with the window, “La Ventanita,” where you can get “on the go” café Cubano, or sweeten your day with a pastelito de guayaba [guava pastry] or read the day’s news while you eat a couple croquetas de jamón [ham croquettes].

Lunchtime is equally bountiful, as you can choose from a versatile menu, starting with



La Palomilla, a skirt steak prepared either with white rice and black beans, or as a Pan con Bistec [Steak Sandwich]. This is served on a bed of fresh, slightly toasted Cuban bread with sauté onions, parsley, plus shredded lettuce, sliced tomatoes, ketchup, and served with the addictive Cuban version of French fries, papas fritas. This sandwich is so grand that it serves two to four people. According to Versailles, “Almost every Cuban establishment serves Pan con Bistec. There’s little variation to how it is made, but ours is traditional and really delicious.”

And as delicious is the Pan con Lechón [pork sandwich], also served with a side order of papas fritas. The mother of all Cuban sandwiches, of

course, is the Cuban Sandwich, and very similar to that is the Medianoche [Midnight Sandwich]. In the early 1950s, these sandwiches originated in cafeterias that catered to Cuban workers in Tampa and Key West, two early Cuban immigrant communities in Florida. Later on, in the mid-1960s, it became famous in Miami, as the Cuban exile community grew in population and status.

But before then, the Medianoche was usually served at or after midnight at Havana nightclubs, and that’s how it earned its name. These two undeniably delicious sandwiches’ only real difference is the bread that is used to make it.

The Medianoche bread is a soft egg bread that is long, like a hoagie. While the Cuban Sandwich uses the typical Cuban bread found at Cuban bakeries or markets. Both sandwiches consist of “sweet ham, roast pork, cheese, pickles, and a slathering of yellow ballpark mustard enclosed in a sliced length of Cuban bread and then grilled on a plancha [sandwich press] until crispy on the outside and warm with slightly melted cheese on the inside,” reports The Versailles Cookbook. “Featured on the Food Network, the Travel Channel, CNN, and named by TIME magazine as one of the top ten places to visit in Miami, Versailles Restaurant has been at the heart of the Cuban-American community for

“This is my abuela. My family is very into our Cuban roots. I’ve heard the stories of Cuba a million times; I was raised hearing them. One day I’ll be able to go, but for now this is my Cuba.”

—Vanessa Reyes, Havana Restaurant

decades.”

And that’s not surprising. People all over the world love Cuban food. It is a simple fare and one of the world’s most sought after cuisine, often offered in a casual ambience that tries to replicate a family-friendly eatery, or “la cocina de abuela” [grandma’s kitchen]. And in the Cuban communities, food is the link. “Even if you are not Cuban, you gravitate to these iconic locations that have seen and tasted both Cuban songs and tears,” explained Valls, who sees Versailles like her kitchen, where her family cooks. “This is my abuela. My family is very into our Cuban roots. I’ve heard the stories of Cuba a million times; I was raised hearing them. One day I’ll be able to go, but for now this is my Cuba.”

Valls recalled when Fidel Castro died, and all the main TV and radio stations coming at Versailles,

looking for a spot to film, either from inside or outside. CNN, Fox News, and other worldwide stations claimed their spots as well. In Miami, when the Marlins or the Heat win, the community comes to celebrate at Versailles.

In West Palm Beach, where there is a large Hispanic community, locals and travelers from all over the world go to Havana Restaurant or Don Ramón to eat a good Cuban meal. You can easily spot a celebrity having lunch or dinner in their dining rooms, and as in the case of Havana, also at “La Ventanita,” which serves a full menu 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Martha Stewart, Robert Duval, and James Taylor are just some of the famous faces caught on camera happily displaying a café Cubano cup with the Havana logo in their hands.

Always packed with local devotees and travelers seeking an authentic Cuban dining experience, these Cuban restaurants are a great choice for a crowd or if you are eating late in the evening. The food is home-style and comforting, with large portions and a good variety that includes the signature dishes including the Lechon Asado [roast pork], always flavored with lots of garlic. The lechon asado is perhaps the star of Cuban cuisine. At both restaurants and family gatherings a whole pig is flavored with salt, pepper, and lots of garlic and sour orange, then roasted in a pit barbecue covered with banana leaves.

Like most Cuban restaurants, Havana has an interesting story. This family business was founded by Roberto Reyes, his daughter Martha, and her husband Rafael Perez. With hard work, dedication and of course, a lifetime of Roberto’s traditional Cuban recipes, Havana has grown to become a landmark in West Palm Beach since 1993, when they opened its doors. Recently, Havana underwent and makeover. From a great distance you can spot its new facade: white Spanish towers depicting that beloved 1950s era that Cubans often reminisce.

“God has had his hand in this business,” said Havana’s marketing director, Vanessa Reyes, granddaughter of Roberto Reyes. “That’s why we have been so successful.” Havana Restaurant stays well connected with its community, giving back to it by providing tons of their food and their time to charitable organizations, such as the Food for the Poor, Farmworkers Council of Palm Beach County, Shuzz Fund, and many more. Reyes admits the family business is a tough business, as it is none stop. “But this is our community,” Reyes said. “And serving Cuban food is our business. Cuban food is different! It’s so good!” Why, I asked. “It’s our flavor. It’s our music!” She replied. And I concurred. Reyes’ favorite Cuban dish is the Ropa Vieja, something else we have in common.

Down the block from Havana on South Dixie Highway there’s Don Ramón Restaurante Cubano & Social Club. Previously owned by Ramon Vilarino, who has been dishing up home-style Cuban goodness

for his customers since the 1990s, this particular restaurant, which was his first in West Palm Beach, is now owned by Juan and Dina Rubio. Theirs is a cool union. Juan was born in Cuba and Dina in Nicaragua. And together they have managed to offer their customers a nice blend of old and new Cuban recipes.

### **Side Dishes & Desserts**

The main dishes that are very popular in their restaurant are some of the most authentic Cuban dishes, including the highly popular side dishes found on any Cuban plate, such as tostones [fried green plantains] or platanitos maduros [fried sweet plantains]. “Plantains are not really considered to be authentic Cuban, as many Latin American countries, especially in the Caribbean, eat it too, but they are part of the Cuban cuisine,” said Dina Rubio.

When it comes to food, you must be consistent. And that’s what Don Ramón strives for. You can’t have the tostones one day being too soft and too crispy the next day. Their goal is to be consistent, and Rubio said, “We love to cook Cuban food and happiness is part of the ingredients we use!”

Another side dish they cook to perfection is the Yuca con mojo, which is a root that’s boiled and served with a rich garlic sauce. It was unknown to America and other countries, until Cubans brought this delicious side dish to their plates. However, once they tried it, they found the texture is so much better than a potato. At Don Ramón, they serve it with slightly cooked onions and sprinkled chopped parsley over the top. Simply delicious!

Cubans are notorious for having a sweet tooth. Nothing beats the taste of a Flan Cubano [Cuban flan] with melted caramel, guava, or crushed coconut on top. There are many variations of the topping, but no matter what that may be, in all Cuban restaurants and bakeries it is the most common of all Cuban desserts. The Tres Leches [Three Milks], a super sweet delight that was originally a Nicaraguan delicacy, but adapted to Cuban tastes, is a second contender and best seller at most Latin establishments. Pudín de Pan [bread pudding] comes in third place, but has already gained lots of popularity in American restaurants and markets, as it has a different texture and not as sweet as the Cuban flan or Tres Leches.

### **Great Prices. Delicious food.**

At the end of this Sabor Cubano exploration, I’m glad that Versailles, Havana and Don Ramón lived up to their hype. The combination of good and authentic Cuban food, along with great prices and delicious food, not to mention both quick and friendly service is something all restaurants should strive for, and all three nailed it. Would definitely recommend them if you’re in Calle Ocho in Miami or South Dixie Highway in West Palm Beach. Buen apetito!



# THE ART OF CREATING TEMPLATES FOR THE FUTURE

By Maritza Gosano

After seventy years as an entrepreneur, the author of “Start Up” delivers an inspiring story filled with business tips and life lessons on how to lead with humility and grace.

As other people in their mid-eighties experiment with retirement, David Gilmour, the quintessential entrepreneur and founder of Fiji Water, Zinio.com, plus a gold mining empire, and a hotel and resort chain, is doing business as usual and laser-focused on two things: education and health. His latest ventures, a preschool family center in West Palm Beach and a company called Wakaya Perfection, are designed to change the way we see education and health.

Talking with Gilmour at his elegant Palm Beach estate, I was immediately aware that this was no ordinary man, although he likes to portray himself as one. In his study, there’s a portrait of England’s Prime Minister [1940 - 1945], Winston Churchill by Frank O. Salisbury, titled “Blood, Sweat, And Tears.” It is one of his most prized possessions, because as he says, “Churchill has been a hero and mentor of mine.”

Early on in his career as a businessman, he came to realize that Churchill embodied qualities that may be deemed essential to entrepreneurial success. Gilmour writes in his recently released book, Start Up, “His innate ability command attention, his talent for engaging people’s interest, his skill at convincing people that his cause was their cause, his capacity for clearly articulating his thoughts and objectives,

[\[As published in West Palm Beach Magazine’s Summer 2017 Print Edition\]](#)

his forward thinking, and his decisiveness are aspects of character that would have made him a formidable business leader—had he not been otherwise engaged.”

Gilmour has been labeled as a “creative genius” or “a rare star who has chosen to keep the spotlight on his companies and not on himself.” And while all that is true, in my time sitting with him as we chatted in his living room, I saw a remarkable man with an extraordinary ability to observe people, and a strong sense of who he is and what he wants. As he tells it in his book, “The story of my life cannot be separated from the story of my entrepreneurial ventures.” And at closer look, you’ll discover why.

### **What inspired you to write this book?**

Well, I was bullied into it by business associates, educators, and friends. Not because of me so much, but because of the strange circumstances of being born in 1931—85 years ago. I remember that period well, which was going through a depression, and my experience in attending the coronation of King George, VI and Queen Elizabeth, at the Buckingham Palace in 1937 with my father, who was a very well decorated soldier in WWI.

I watched this at age six, a young person without experience in life. With clarity, I remember all of this. Then, the war came and I returned to Europe in 1947, and practically every year thereafter. With my businesses also involved products in Europe, but also the importation of European design. And so, with all of that experience, and seeing so much, writing a book was a good idea. I’ve traveled eight million miles around the world and spending those years, certain things come with real clarity. And one that pertains to Palm Beach and Florida, which I love. I have been a snowbird for 25 years, and now I spend more time here, because of my age. I recognize that one of my passions is pre-school education.

### **And that’s why you’re building the Erin H. Gilmour Early Learning Center in West Palm Beach.**

Yes, this is our tenth school. I’ve built schools in places that had an urgency, such as Las Vegas and San Diego, and now West Palm Beach. I suddenly realized, when I started spending more time here, that five miles away from my house is a tragic situation developing. There are 41 gangs, crime, drugs, in a county with 1.6 million people, and out of that there’s a great percentage who don’t know where their next meal is coming from. We have a wonderful police force and a very efficient sheriff’s office. But, here we are—seeing our police force chasing around teenagers who have gone off the track. So, the time is now for more pre-school education, which in my 15-year study has proven that between six weeks and five years of age, your character is formed. Did you know that 70% of

pre-school age kids [six weeks to five years] who have not attended an organized preschool program during those years, are likely to fall into crime by the time they are 18, and can become perpetual felons? This is atrocious. Sadly, many people are unaware of this crisis.

### **What’s the answer?**

The only answer is for the private funds to get involved and take care of this, because obviously government needs help, and a call to action. There is a charity called Opportunity, Inc., which was started in 1939. It has been around for 70 years. And they built a school for 85 students, which is wonderful. It was beautifully done and run. However, 85 students are not going to change the future. So, what I’m doing is building this school in West Palm Beach, which is for 300 students. Then, I am going to Washington to get them geared up to use this prototype to expand the national efforts, between the government and private sectors. What may be critically needed can be achieved.

### **So, you are creating a template for the future.**

Yes, I would love to create another school in Riviera Beach, where it’s much needed. And if we don’t, within five years our society is going to regret it. It’s dangerous to live in a time when not all crimes are being reported, and where we’re creating a society with children at risk.

### **And like you said before, you were one of the lucky ones.**

That’s right, I was. In watching the coronation back at Buckingham Palace, on May 12, 1937, and seeing the royal coach surrounded by the Royal Household Cavalry, inspired me to join the sister to the British regiment, the Canadian Governor General’s Horse Guard, 13 years later during the time of Korea. I spent five years in the regiment, best thing that ever happened to me. But, had I been born like one of those children in a risk area, you know where I would have been at six years old? I would have enlisted in a gang, because I would not have gotten any respect, no education. Finally, somebody said, “I am going to make you an important man.”

### **What change do you hope to see in our future?**

In five years, I hope you will see the difference. And a child who gets into our school, let’s say when he goes home and is around his parents and other siblings, they will look at him and wonder: what’s going on here? There’s something different about this kid; he has a future. And you would see an extraordinary ripple effect in the household.

### **You want to save the world...**

I am not just a part time do-gooder who wants to do something. This school is named after my

daughter Erin, who was murdered when she was twenty-two years old by a drug dependent criminal. We always think that those kinds of horrible things happen to somebody else. You read it in the papers. But, then one day you find out that it is a reality. She was my only child, and my wife and I have built these schools to try to stop this sick cycle. And when I go on ahead, my whole estate will be left to help people who will continue building schools in her name.

**In Start Up, you talk about how you went from being a bad student at school to a learner of the world. How did that happen?**

After my parents sent me to boarding school, I traveled the world. I learned to observe the characters of the world, and their behaviors. And I met some extraordinary people, like Ernest Hemingway. The thing is, when one is alone, people want to talk to you, but when one is accompanied by others, not so much. I hate to see kids traveling in Europe today, who are traveling in a pack—flirting, drinking, smoking. I was alone every day, living in a small place, and did nothing but look and listen. And so I came back to America with ideas I would have never thought of. I would have had the most boring life and ordinary career had it not been for this fickle turn that changed the direction of my life. Now my focus is on two things: health and education. Education is tragic in this country. There's no study of history. And as Churchill said, "If you don't take a long look at the past, you'll never understand the future." Ask any two students who have just graduated from high school if they know who won WWII.

**And what about your commitment to health issues?**

After Fiji Water, I started Wakaya Perfection, a natural, organic product that combats inflammation. In Time Magazine's February 2004 cover, they reported: "The Secret Killer"—The surprising link between inflammation and heart attacks, cancer, Alzheimer's and other diseases—What you can do to fight it." The truth is, we all are slowly dying from inflammation. And in this article, they featured all the cures available using common pharmaceuticals such as Aspirin and similar agents showing promise in controlling inflammation. But, we discovered that the combination of ginger and turmeric is the best natural product that stops inflammation. And you can easily get these through the Wakaya Group.

When Gilmour was a young man, his father thought he should take a job in an office. But although he loved his father and valued his advice, he just couldn't see a path for himself doing that. All his entrepreneurial experiences have led him to have a brilliant career. While his resume is quite

impressive, with notable job entries such as Fiji Water founder, co-founder of Southern Pacific Hotel Corporation, of Brick Gold Corporation (the most profitable gold-mining firm in the world), and of Horsham Corporation, which later became TricHahn Corporation, one of the largest publicly traded REIT companies in North America, and more recently the founder of Wakaya Group, as he tells it, "I was never as consumed by acquisition and management as I am by helping to start things up."

The Erin H. Gilmour Early Learning Center is starting to break ground this month. They're inviting everyone to be an agent of change in Palm Beach County by investing in our community.

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For more work samples, please visit my website, [maritzacosano.com](http://maritzacosano.com).



Maritza Cosano is a Cuban-American journalist/author/scriptwriter, and a storyteller at heart. She wrote her first story when she was seven years old and hasn't stopped writing since then. As a child, she grew up in Madrid, Spain, then later moved to South Florida, where she has dedicated a life to honing her craft, finding satisfaction on the work that happens when you put pen to paper.