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Biography

One of the very first “Remarkable Women” recognized by California First Lady Maria Shriver, Isabel Cruz continues to build a remarkable career as a restaurateur, chef and, recently, author. For over a decade she’s earned acclaim for her signature Latin/Asian fusion style, leading an expanding flotilla of renowned west coast restaurants including her flagship Seaside Cantina (San Diego), The Coffee Cup (La Jolla, CA), Isabel’s Cantina (Pacific Beach, CA), Dragonfly (Ashland, OR) and Isabel (Portland’s upscale Pearl District).

In August 2007 she released her first book, *Isabel’s Cantina: Bold Latin Flavors from the New California Kitchen* (Clarkson Potter/Random House). In it Cruz shares the deceptively simple recipes that make all of her restaurants so popular, as well as many of her own personal favorites. Using boldly flavored ingredients common to both Latin and Asian cuisines – mango, lime, chile, mint, ginger, coconut, cilantro, etc. – she creates meals both healthful and delicious.

A native of Los Angeles who spent her childhood in Huntington Beach and other parts of Orange County, California, Cruz grew up in a large Hispanic family. “My parents used to throw these crazy parties. The women would cook all day, and there was a Tito Puente-type band in the backyard. My father started inviting the neighbors so they wouldn’t complain about the noise,” she recalls. Many of these neighbors – Puerto Rican, Cuban, Peruvian – would bring food, each with their distinct flavors and fragrances. While learning to cook at home, she also spent time in the kitchen with her Asian friends learning Japanese, Chinese and Korean cuisine.

After high school Cruz dabbled in catering, baking cakes for local restaurants and realizing that cooking was her true passion. With no formal education as a chef, she nonetheless seized the chance to open her first small restaurant in San Diego in 1992, cooking what she loved to eat: simple Latin comfort food embellished with the bold Pacific Rim flavors she knew from her old neighborhood. This fusion style allowed her to cut some of the calories and fat so often found in Latin food without sacrificing taste.

From baked goods and basic breakfasts at her Seaside Cantina in San Diego, Isabel Cruz honed her Latin/Asian style at The Coffee Cup, a local institution she took over in 1998. Steadily creating such recipes as Nirvana, a healthy breakfast with sesame grilled tofu, egg whites, broccoli, zucchini short grain brown rice, fresh Salsa Cruda or Double Happiness, a popular lunch item made with tender chicken and steak and marinated in a sesame ginger sauce with brown rice, steamed vegetables and peanut sauce. Isabel has built a palette of reliable dishes that can be replicated at each new venue. In 2002 Cruz opened Isabel’s Cantina, a visually engaging space two blocks from Pacific Beach, followed three years later by her first venue outside California, Dragonfly, formerly a 1930s-era Baptist church in Ashland, Oregon. In 2007 she opened the doors of her fifth restaurant, Isabel, a modern gem in the heart of the Pearl District in Portland, Oregon.

Having traveled a significant amount throughout Europe, Latin America and Puerto Rico, Isabel Cruz has also traveled the talk show circuit, from segments on “Good Morning America” to those on ABC, NBC, Fox News and others. Her signature recipes have similarly populated the glossy pages of such magazines as *Cooking Light* and *Dining Out* and her *Isabel’s Cantina* cookbook has received notable mentions in *The New York Times*.

Named among “Fifty People to Watch” by *San Diego Magazine* and “Women Who Mean Business” by the *San Diego Business Journal*, Cruz became one of the first “Remarkable Women” recognized by California First Lady Maria Shriver. Shriver herself has visited Cruz’s restaurants, as have numerous other celebrities: from Ayurvedic medical doctor/author Deepak Chopra to Hard Rock Cafe and House of Blues co-founder Isaac Tigrett.

A member of the San Diego Culinary Institute board of directors, Cruz is also a board member of the Center for Community Solutions (CSS), an organization focused on domestic violence for which she spear-heads an annual food fundraiser, “Chef Showdown.”

Isabel Cruz, her husband William and her two teenage sons, Robert and Ryan, live in San Diego.

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About



Restaurateur/chef Isabel Cruz has earned acclaim over a decade for her signature Latin/Asian fusion style. Her west coast restaurants include the bakery/breakfast eatery Seaside Cantina (San Diego) as well as her Latin/Asian restaurants The Coffee Cup (La Jolla, CA) Isabel's Cantina (Pacific Beach, CA), Dragonfly (Ashland, OR) and Isabel (Pearl District, Portland, OR). Cruz is author of the cookbook *Isabel's Cantina: Bold Latin Flavors from the New California Kitchen* (Clarkson Potter/Random House), in which she shares the deceptively simple, healthful and delicious recipes that make all of her restaurants so popular, as well as many of her own personal favorites. *Isabel's Cantina* has received notable mentions in both *Food and Wine* and *The New York Times*.

Named among "Fifty People to Watch" by *San Diego Magazine* and "Women Who Mean Business" by the *San Diego Business Journal*, Isabel Cruz is also one of the very first "Remarkable Women" recognized by California First Lady Maria Shriver

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Isabel's Cantina



- The first cookbook to fuse Latin cuisine with exotic Asian flavors, *Isabel's Cantina: Bold Latin Flavors from the New California Kitchen* (Clarkson Potter/Random House) brings South-of-the-Border together with the Far East in unique, delicious and healthful ways.

Cruz's signature Latin/Asian fusion style has earned acclaim at her west coast restaurants, which, along with the bakery/breakfast eatery Seaside Cantina (San Diego), include The Coffee Cup (La Jolla, CA), Isabel's Cantina (Pacific Beach, CA), Dragonfly (Ashland, OR) and Isabel (Portland OR's upscale Pearl District). Now for the first time, Isabel Cruz shares many of the deceptively simple recipes that make her restaurants so popular, as well as some of her personal favorites. Within its 224 pages, including 100 color photographs, Isabel's Cantina inspires home cooks of all ability levels.

Utilizing boldly flavored ingredients common to both Latin and Asian cuisines – mango, lime, chile, mint, ginger, coconut, cilantro, etc. – Isabel's Cantina forges new ground in the movement known as "lifestyle eating." Its Starters section outlines such delicious fare as Grilled Vegetable Salad with Sofrito Vinaigrette and Shrimp Bites Wrapped in Greens. Among her Main Courses are dishes including Chipotle Marinated Grilled Ribeye and Grilled Mahi-Mahi with Jalapeno-Ponzu Sauce, vegetarian options like Grilled Tofu with Avocado Salsa Cruda, and a breadth of meat-based dishes which include Steak Skewers with Mint Mojo, Latin Burger with Chipotle-Lime Barbecue Sauce, Green Chile Posole with Pork, and Char-Grilled Rack of Lamb with Cinnamon and Cumin.

Heavy refried beans and processed white rice are replaced by Chipotle White Beans and whole-grain Power Rice. In another invaluable chapter, Cruz reveals how to dress up any meal with healthy sauces and salsas, such as Papaya-Mango-Mint Salsa and Avocado Salsa Cruda. Along with innovative breakfasts like Coconut French Toast with Mango, Isabel's Cantina lets readers know the secrets behind signature desserts like her famous Bananas Cantina. An array of themed menus also guide home cooks in assembling entire feasts.

With a friendly personality and you-can-do-it spirit that radiates through every page, Isabel Cruz marries Latin comfort food and bold Pacific Rim flavors to make Isabel's Cantina "a warm neighborhood place" that everyone will want to visit.

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