



PARTNER / EXECUTIVE CHEF CLAUDETTE ZEPEDA

El Jardín

Semifinalist for the title of James Beard Award Best Chef: West, Claudette Zepeda is the executive chef and partner of El Jardín, a regional Mexican restaurant in San Diego. Inspired by the regional cuisine in Mexico, where her passion for food was first cultivated, El Jardín is an expression of Zepeda's culinary journey as a chef as well as her upbringing as a border kid raised between Tijuana and her birth town, San Diego. Prior to El Jardín, Zepeda was chef de cuisine at Javier Plascencia's celebrated Bracero, and she also spent time alongside Chef Gavin Kaysen at his former San Diego restaurant, El Bizcocho. A member of BuzzFeed's inaugural Tasty talent program and former "Top Chef" season 15 and "Top Chef Mexico" competitor, Zepeda continues to find inspiration from her frequent visits to Mexico. Since opening, El Jardín has received local and national critical acclaim, including a glowing review from The New York Times, inclusion on Esquire's "Best New

Restaurants in America, 2018," and recognition from Michelin on their 2019 Bib Gourmand California list; while Zepeda was named both Eater San Diego and San Diego Union-Tribune's "Chef of the Year" in 2018.

What is the heart of your culinary passion?

Weaving stories within our dishes and giving people a piece of Mexico is at the heart of my passion.

What are you most proud of in your culinary career?

The roster of talented friends I have all over the world that can count on me and vice versa. Cooking in collaborative dinners has made me a better person and better cook.

What advice would you offer to young chefs eager to build a successful career?

Be patient, take the time to be humble, and learn as much as you can before changing jobs. Seek to be well-rounded in the kitchen and learn all the roles—hot line, cold line, pastry, how to start a fire, properly roast a vegetable, etc.