

A Family Affair

At El Tule, chefs Carmen Egoavil and her son-in-law, Said Anguiano, share the kitchen.

By PAM ANDERSON | Photos by CAROLINA RIVERA



Said Anguiano (left) handles the Mexican side of the menu at El Tule, Carmen Egoavil the Peruvian.

Arbole El Tule, rooted in Oaxaca, Mexico, is a towering Montezuma cypress whose trunk—137.8 feet in circumference—is believed to be the largest in the world. If you know something of this 1,500-year-old tree, you'll understand the family behind El Tule in Lambertville, New Jersey.

Carmen Egoavil and Said Anguiano are the unassuming chef duo at El Tule. Before they became culinary partners, however, they had to find their separate ways from Peru and Mexico, respectively, to the United States, where Said met and married Carmen's daughter, Michelle. Theirs is an immigrant saga.

Wanting a better life for their kids, Carmen and her husband, Fausto, immigrated to the United States from Peru in 1992, three children in tow: Jack, 16; Michelle, 15; and little Sylvia, 6. They settled in Pennsylvania because Fausto's brother worked in the

packaging department at QVC in Horsham, and Carmen and Fausto soon found work there too. Jack, Michelle, and Sylvia started school mid-year, neither one speaking English. By the time school resumed in the fall, the kids were fluent. They graduated from high school, went to college, got good jobs.

Said followed a similar path. He was a tireless seasonal worker from Zacatecas, in Mexico's north-central region, and once resettled he worked summers at Anthony & Sylvan Pools in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, where Carmen's daughter Michelle happened to work. When they wed, in 2005, Carmen and Said became in-laws.

Said was also a gifted carpenter, gardener, and cook, and he long dreamed to open a taqueria. In December 2010 he got word that a property had come available in Lambertville. El Tule



opened three months later.

At first, Said cooked the traditional dishes he had learned from his mother, Raquel, but within months the family realized El Tule needed Carmen's deft Peruvian touch. She started making her fresh ceviches, and little by little she added other Peruvian specialties she had learned from her mother and grandmother. Once El Tule started to gain attention—in 2014 the *New York Times* fawned over its “surprisingly sophisticated menu”—she decided to up her culinary game, and returned to Peru to attend the famed cooking school, D’Gallia, in Lima.

In the kitchen, Said thrives in the bustle and

buzz of the line while Carmen shines at a quieter station, methodically assembling her popular ceviches. Said prefers ingredients that flash-cook—shrimp, especially, but seafood of any kind. Carmen is drawn to long-simmering dishes, Peruvian lamb stew among her favorites.

While Carmen steers Peruvian and Said leans Mexican, it’s their collaborations that yield so many of El Tule’s signature dishes. Mole-sauced Skirt Steak served over the classic Peruvian rice cakes, Tacu Tacu, Chilaquiles paired with the Peruvian stir-fry Lomé Saltado, and the addictive little appetizer Black Bean-Quinoa Balls are some of their best work.

The Egoavil/Anguiano family has suffered the familiar challenges of doing business in a global pandemic—sourcing ingredients, shifting to takeout, keeping their loyal customers, and taking care of their employees, most of whom are family. But Covid-19 also dealt a particularly cruel blow: In June the virus took the life of Fausto Egoavil, the 69-year-old family patriarch. If Carmen and Said are the souls of El Tule, Fausto was the heart. “He was always at the restaurant—welcoming people, making them feel at home,” says his son, Jack, who serves as general manager at both El Tule and the family’s sister restaurant, Quinoa, in Doylestown. “He worked hard for his dreams to come true—first to come to this country, then for his kids to go to college, then the restaurants.”

Spend some time with this restaurant family and you understand how they came to name their new business venture after the storied Montezuma cypress. That majestic tree is like their family—strong and solid, with a wide canopy that shelters and protects. Across generations and borders, through triumph and loss, the family goes on, much like the tree. Nearly a decade after its opening, Carmen Egoavil and Said Anguiano keep on making great food and serving it with grace under the shade of Arbole el Tule. ≈

Pam Anderson is the author of nine cookbooks, including How to Cook Without a Book (Clarkson Potter). She lives in Riegelsville, Pennsylvania.



Piqueo Del Mar (Appetizer From the Sea) comes with shrimp ceviche, corvina ceviche, yellow potato cake filled with shrimp salad, and crispy calamari, fish, and shrimp.

Local Dining Guide

Caleb's American Kitchen
5738 Route 202, Lahaska, PA.
215-794-8588
Calebsamericankitchen.com
New American
Open daily, Caleb's American Kitchen celebrates Creole and California style American cooking with delicious steaks, burgers, lobster, shellfish and vegetarian options. Seasonal produce grown by local and regional farmers are featured daily. Patrons visit several times each week to enjoy breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Monday is "Locals Night" and Tuesday is "BYO (Build Your Own) Burger Night".

Duck Soup Café

Logan Square, 6542 Lower York Road, New Hope, PA.
215-862-5890

French breakfast and lunch
New Hope's Duck Soup Café, located in Logan Square, has been serving French-inspired breakfasts and lunches to locals for years. Run by a husband and wife duo who get to know their customers by name, Duck Soup Café is known for using local farm fresh ingredients, including eggs from local chickens. Gluten free and other options to meet dietary restrictions are available. There is also a pet-friendly outdoor dining area and a French flea market inside the café.

Francisco's on the River

1251 River Road, Washington Crossing, PA.
215-321-8789
Franciscosontheriver.com
Refined Italian/Mediterranean cuisine
Chef Francisco Argueta has been cooking fine Italian/Mediterranean cuisine for over 20 years. His consistency, dedication, and passion for fine cuisine have made his food a favorite of both locals and destination diners alike.

Genevieve's Kitchen

19 E. State Street, Doylestown, PA.
267-614-9635
Genevieveskitchen.com
Italian bistro
Located in the heart of Doylestown, Genevieve's Kitchen, a popular BYOB, sits directly across the street from the iconic County Theater. A seasonal, locally sourced menu is available for lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch, with Italian specialties. Outdoor patio seating is available seasonally. A Customized catering menu is also available.

JustFood

4920 York Rd, Buckingham, PA.

215-794-3663

Jfcatering.com

Gourmet deli and catering
JustFood is a full-service catering company offering specialized menus based on what's in season, using all natural and organic ingredients from local farms and other vendors. JustFood sources the finest of ingredients in their chef-prepared foods, giving customers assurance that they are enjoying delicious, locally sourced food of the highest quality. JustFood also caters parties of any size.

Lambertville Station Restaurant and Inn

11 Bridge Street, Lambertville, NJ.
609-397-4400
Lambertvillestation.com
Classic, local dining on the river
Lambertville Station Restaurant and Inn offers sophisticated casual and fine dining in one of the City's most historic and beautiful buildings. Featuring a variety of distinct venues including white tablecloth dining rooms and a canal-side outdoor dining area. More than 50 boutique wines and tapas can be enjoyed in the unique ambiance of The Wine Cellar.

The National Hotel

31 Race Street, Frenchtown, NJ.
908-996-3200
Thenationalhotelnj.com
The National Hotel, a historic hotel and restaurant located in the charming Delaware River Town of Frenchtown, NJ, was established in 1833 and rebuilt in 1850. The restaurant and the Rathskeller Tavern offers guests a delightful outdoor dining experience and serves the freshest ingredients of the season with an array of handcrafted cocktails and drinks to enjoy. With thorough cleaning protocols, overnight guests can experience comfort and luxury in beautifully appointed guest rooms.



Duck Soup Café
Breakfast & Lunch All Day
Outdoor Dining
Locally Sourced Real Maple Syrup
Homemade Apple, Blueberry & Pear Pancakes
Beautiful Salads and Fresh Quiches
Logan Square
6542 Lower York Road,
New Hope, PA 18938
(215) 862-5890
Tues. - Sun. 9AM - 4PM

A photograph showing the exterior of Duck Soup Café, featuring a red umbrella and tables set up outdoors under a blue sky.

Doylestown's best kept secret



Genevieve's Kitchen

19 E. State Street
Doylestown, PA 18901
267.614.9635

[genevieveskitchen.com](http://Genevieveskitchen.com)

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