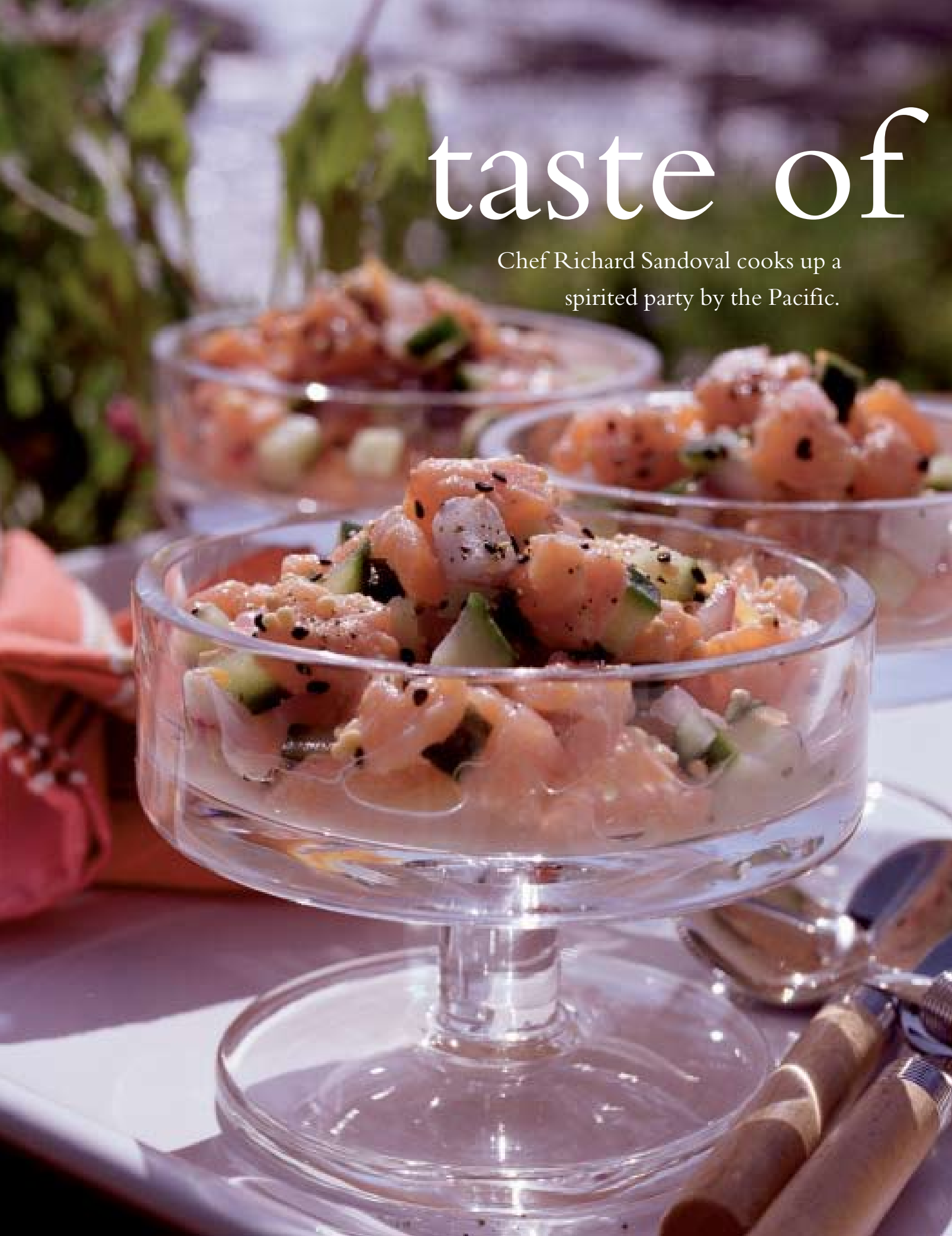


taste of

Chef Richard Sandoval cooks up a spirited party by the Pacific.

mexico

TEXT BY JEFF BOOK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOWARD L. PUCKETT
FOOD STYLING BY NICOLE FABER
PHOTO STYLING BY MINDI SHAPIRO



Richard Sandoval believes that good food and good times go together like chips and salsa. The conviction stems from his boyhood in Mexico, fondly recalled in memories of long, lively meals with his parents and grandparents and at his father's restaurant in Acapulco. He entered his teens outside Mexico City, in Toluca, "a melting pot for people from all over the country and for their favorite dishes," Richard says. "It really opened my eyes to the whole spectrum of Mexican cuisine." Moving to the

States to finish his studies, he found the south-of-the-border fare sadly limited.

"I wanted to show Americans that Mexican food can be more than supersize burritos and hard-shell tacos," he says. This mission has led the energetic chef to forge a restaurant empire in less than a decade. First came two locations of his Maya restaurant, in New York and San Francisco. Five others followed, including eateries in Denver, Las Vegas, and Washington, D.C. The establishments' specialties vary, but all

“celebrate Mexican culture, from food to art, furnishings, and tableware,” Richard says.

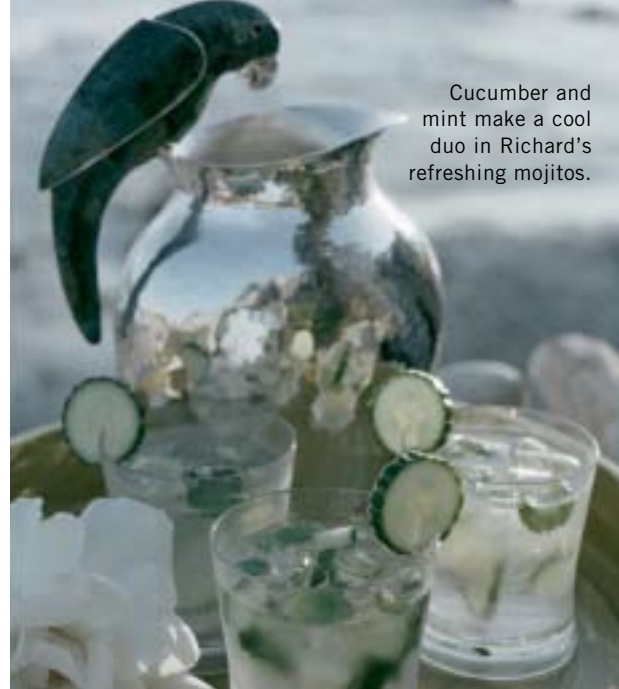
At a get-together at his parents’ oceanfront home in Newport Beach, the guests are friends and family members who know that Richard’s dishes are unfailingly festive—“a party on a plate,” as he puts it. This chef delights in weaving diverse tastes into a harmonious whole. His palate extends beyond sweet, sour, hot, and spicy, to visually appetizing colors and textures, such as the eye-candy sauces that daub his dishes. The resulting finesse surprises those who think Mexican food is heavy and two-dimensional. “French and Italian cuisine had already gone through a similar transformation in this country, toward a lighter approach,” he notes. “I call it ‘old ways in new hands.’”

Richard’s spin on traditional Spanish gazpacho enhances it with scallops sautéed in lemon oil, “but it’s still as refreshing as the gazpacho I used to make to cool off my guests in Acapulco,” Richard says. One version of seviche uses salmon—“a fatty fish, so it takes a more acidic broth,” he explains. For parties he often makes *sopes*, his rendition of a versatile snack sold by street vendors. “What’s great is that you can fill them with anything,” he says. Inspired by Mexico’s distinctive hot chocolate, he created a mousse that pairs perfectly with the country’s answer to the doughnut—churros. Many of his dishes contain chiles, in all their dazzling diversity. “Chiles have a wonderful range of characteristics,” Richard says. “I use fresh ones, which have more heat, for salsas and seviches, and dried ones for sauces and blending and more complex flavors.”

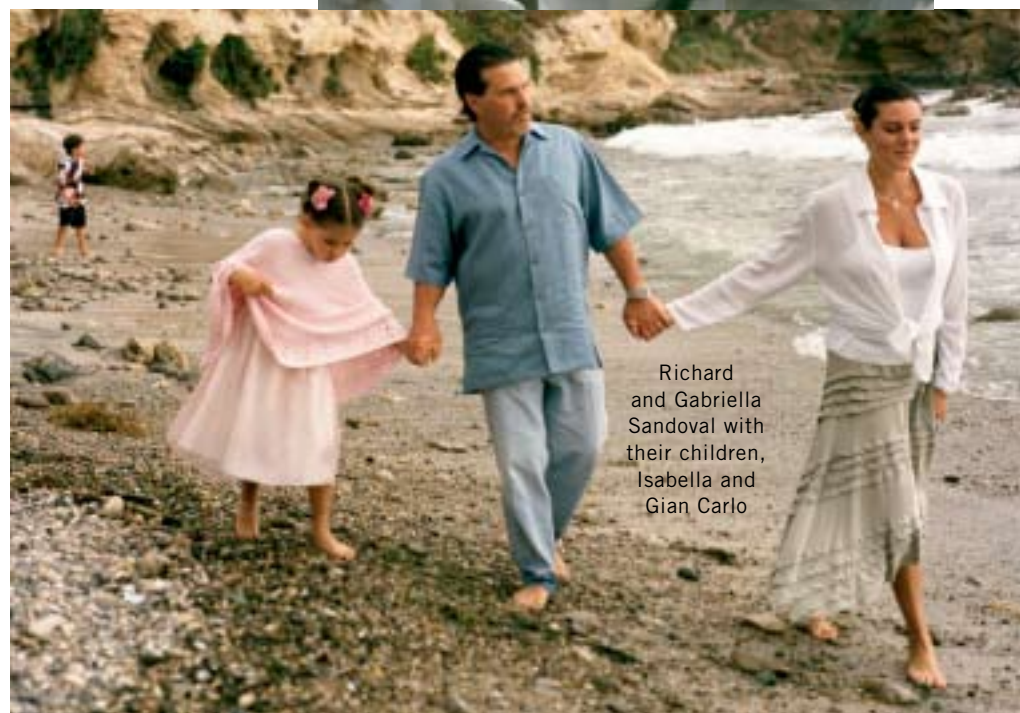
With the growth of the Hispanic population north of the border and the wide availability of authentic ingredients, “We’re witnessing a new wave of appreciation for Mexican cuisine in this country,” he says proudly. Richard has not only caught the wave—he’s feeding it.

For recipes, turn to page 156.

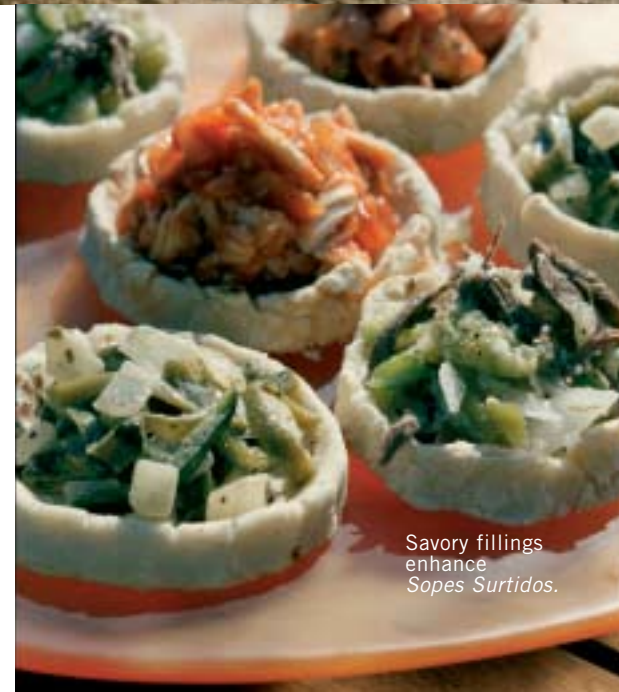
For information on Richard Sandoval’s restaurants and his cookbook, *Modern Mexican Flavors*, visit modernmexican.com.



Cucumber and mint make a cool duo in Richard’s refreshing mojitos.



Richard and Gabriella Sandoval with their children, Isabella and Gian Carlo



Savory fillings enhance *Sopes Surtidos*.

Of his version of the traditional spicy Spanish soup, Richard says, “It’s as refreshing as the gazpacho I used to make to cool off my guests in Acapulco, after a long day at the beach.”



The festivities take place on a backyard terrace and in the seaside garden below.