



# COOKING FROM THE HEART

*From feeding disaster victims to breeding a new generation of earth-friendly vegetables, chefs are stepping out of the kitchen to make a difference in ingenious ways.* BY ADAM ERACE

Small wonder: Row 7 Seeds' Honeynut squash.

## The Daily Special: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

*Gabriela Cámara and Emma Rosenbush fight inequality through creative and caring hiring practices.*

**A**BOUT TWO OUT OF the ten pairs of hands answering phones, shucking Sweetwater oysters, and mixing palomas and mezcal margaritas at Cala in San Francisco once wore cuffs. Hiring the formerly incarcerated has been a company endeavor since 2015, when the celebrated Mexican chef Gabriela Cámara opened Cala, her first American restaurant, with managing partner Emma Rosenbush.

“Our justice system is broken,” Rosenbush says. “The idea that you serve your time and you’re done ... that’s not how it works. It’s something you carry with you forever and is so specifically oppressive to poor people and people of color. It’s just such a blaring injustice.”

Before meeting Cámara in Mexico City, where the chef owns the famed Contramar, and signing on to manage Cala, Rosenbush worked with an educational program for juvenile detention camps outside Los Angeles and for the Prison Law Office in Berkeley. “I was really interested in reentry, specifically where that meets employment.” In the run-up to opening Cala, she approached Cámara with an idea: Hire people transitioning from prison back into society.

Cámara had some previous experience at Contramar with several employees who had criminal backgrounds. When conceptualizing Cala, she had concerns that the hospitality labor crisis in the Bay Area would hinder attracting dedicated staff who could provide the experience she wanted for guests. “Emma saw the opportunity and proposed it, and I gave her the green light,” Cámara says. When Cala opened, 70 percent of its staff had been previously incarcerated.

Cala partners with organizations in the Bay Area that work with the reentry community. The relationships are informal, with an open dialogue. Sometimes a group in the network will contact Cala about a candidate they think will make a great addition to the

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RACHEL WELLS





**Clockwise from top left: Gabriela Cámara and Emma Rosenbush review the menu; cocktails in the making; albacore ceviche with cucumber, daikon, and fig leaf oil; and Cala's staff.**



team. Sometimes Cala sends out requests for applicants. And while there are challenges – early on in the program, working with individuals in recovery from substance abuse in a restaurant environment was “the hardest thing we faced,” according to Rosenbush – the successes have greatly outweighed the setbacks. A back waiter, for instance, moved up to a server position, then became a shift supervisor on his way to management. For Cámara and Rosenbush, it’s about identifying where these employees want to go within the company and saying, “Let’s make a pathway to get you there,” Rosenbush explains. “It’s about creating opportunities and seeing restaurant work as a potential career.”

“Social responsibility should be a consideration for all of us,” Cámara says, “but as a chef and restaurateur, you constantly make decisions that can be of great influence.” Cámara feels strongly that circumstances often make it difficult for some to “find their way” in the beginning, and she’s a big believer in second chances, in hard work, and in creating the right environment.

“I want to work with people who are passionate about what they do,” she says. “I want that to be a shared value in my restaurants, and I’ve had extraordinary experiences with people starting to care about things when someone cares about them. That’s what I work for every day: caring.”



Clockwise from left: Cámara in Cala, its Peliroja (mezcal, Cynar, and fresh ginger and citrus), and the restaurant’s leafy interior.



## LOCAL CONNECTIONS *Building a better community, one ingredient at a time.*



Fairmont’s Hives for Humanity.

**CAPE TOWN** Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel teams up with Harvest of Hope, a South African CSA program linking farmers with buyers, to green the hotel’s menus with local produce from growers such as “Mama” Kaba, whose farm (a formerly neglected plot of urban land) guests can visit. The cost of the tour includes a donation of compost or seedlings to Kaba’s garden. *Doubles from \$250, including breakfast daily and one afternoon or evening tea for two.*

**VANCOUVER, B.C.** The guest count at the Fairmont Waterfront includes half a million honeybees housed in six hives on the hotel’s third-floor terrace garden. In addition to producing around 800 pounds of honey a year, the bees are part

of Hives for Humanity, a nonprofit that places “therapeutic apiaries” within local communities to help those in recovery from addiction, domestic violence, and homelessness. *Doubles from \$240, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

**BAHIA, BRAZIL** The Txai Fellows program at Txai Resort Itacaré in eastern Brazil helps 23 local families generate sustainable income from the Atlantic Forest through work-qualification training, farming, and environmental education. The resort purchases products and handicrafts made in the fellows’ workshop, and farmers directly sell their surplus at Itacaré’s organic market. *Doubles from \$400, including breakfast daily and a 50-minute massage for two.*

(CALA IMAGES) RACHEL WEILL