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HELADEROS

PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN

Back in our 38th issue in April 2014 – The Food Issue Vol.2 – we spoke to the city's** heladeros**, or ice-cream men: 'Mostly male and relatively old, they scrape a living selling ice cream, either homemade or sometimes selling branded products from companies such as Delizia, Frigo, and Panda,' wrote Ollie Vargas. It's a precarious job: when the sun's not shining they have to think quickly about other items to sell as ice-cream just wont shift. Nonetheless, as the days get sunnier and we enter the dry season, you'll be hearing them blast their horn to announce their arrival.

Bolivia unlimited

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#82 *Innovators*

Editorial # 82:
Innovators

By: Caroline Risacher

According to the 2017 Global Innovation Index, Bolivia ranks 106th (Switzerland ranks 1st), making it the last South American country to appear on the list. This index, elaborated jointly by Cornell University, the INSEAD Business School and the World Intellectual Property Organisation, looks at 130 world economies taking into account a dozen parameters such as government expenditures in education and research-and-development investment. Bolivia ranking low on the list can be viewed as demoralising, but it also means that there is only progress to be made. One need only to look around to see the country's potential.

I mentioned in last month's editorial how a mentality of mediocrity can hold back both people and nations. A painful history of colonisation, dictatorship and inequality has impeded growth and, until now, hindered innovation. But this is changing. In this issue of *Bolivian Express*, we have selected 12 innovators, each with an idea and a vision, each thriving to create a new future for Bolivia. Twelve people, all very different, but who have in common the same underlying, indeniable and unwavering passion – a zeal for their work fueled by a profound love for their country.

Included are some that have adopted and embraced Bolivia. Based in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Guido Mühr brought German brewing techniques to Bolivia and created Prost, a new but already very popular beer. From Slovenia, Ejti Stih watched her home country splinter during the Yugoslav Wars and now paints politically-charged art. Stih's message is brutal – her last series graphically depicts abortion – but only because she wants to be a voice for social change. She is not alone in this: Film director Denisse Arancibia delivers in her movies light-hearted fun with an added layer of provocative social commentary.

Bolivian products are starting to shine; the country has much to offer in diversity and quality. Sebastian Quiroga, head chef of vegan gourmet restaurant Ali Pacha, showcases this in his dishes and the products he uses. And another underappreciated resource that is just beginning to stand out is the coffee from **Los Yungas**. Mauricio Diez de Medina, coffee enthusiast, is setting out to transform the Bolivian coffee industry. Paul 'Pituko' Jove, another entrepreneur we chose to highlight this month, is by day the owner of the vegetarian restaurant NamasTé and by night a DJ working on consolidating the electronic music scene in La Paz.

This month, we look at the innovators, entrepreneurs and influencers who are taking Bolivia and Latin America to the next level. There is fashion designer Ericka Suárez Weise and leather-goods creator Bernardo Monilla, two upcoming talents in Bolivia's creative scene. But ultimately, education is the key to encourage innovation and improve social conditions. Daniella García, CEO of the Elemental technological school, understands this and wants to empower Bolivian children to embrace and learn how to use technology.

These changes wouldn't be possible without the influence and impact of Bolivian legends Ernesto Cavour and Matilde Casazola, artists who keep new generations motivated with melodies and words that still resonate today. Here we present you 12 profiles, 12 passions and 12 ways to be inspired.

N.B. Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue. Their meanings can be found in our glossary.

VAGABOND

HANDCRAFTED LEATHER GOODS AND TRAVEL ACCESSORIES

TEXT: RODRIGO BARRENECHEA / PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

It is 25-year-old commercial engineer Bernardo Bonilla's dream that his enterprise, aptly named Vagabond, translates the experiences he's had during his travels abroad. When he finished his studies at the Universidad Católica Boliviana back in 2014, Bonilla embarked on a trip to France as part of an employment programme through Campus France, promoted by the French embassy in Bolivia. This eight-month trip opened Bonilla's mind to different ways of life and eventually inspired him to launch his business, a leather-goods shop that provides its male clientele with merchandise that evokes the freedom and the thrill of a carefree, nomadic life that the store's name suggests.

Vagabond was conceived in 2016 when the Bonilla family spotted a gap in the **paceño** market: There were so few stores that sold distinctive gifts for men that the typical go-to was to simply buy a nice shirt – and there are only so many times you can buy someone a shirt. So Bonilla, together with his mother and sister, began to brainstorm. It was clear from the onset that they would sell products for everyday use with a high level of functionality and a clean, minimalist design. Another key aspect of the company is that each product is 100% Bolivian, although without being made from the usual traditional materials such as llama or alpaca wool. And, although the leather market is relatively undeveloped in Bolivia, the Bonilla family's ethos demands they produce the highest-quality products at affordable prices.

Bonillo remembers his brand's first product, a travel-document holder that itself becomes a memento. 'Each wrinkle in the leather gives the item more personality and, with the passing of time – as it gets older, more aged and more wrinkled – it becomes a special, collectable item that carries with it the memories of the places it's been,' he says.

Now the items in the Vagabond line range from wallets and purses to tablecloths. The company also creates personalised products according to customers' specific requests. This was the case with Mauricio Lopez, head chef of La Paz's prestigious restaurant Gustu, who asked for a case in which to keep his chef's knives. Businesses such as Huawei, the Hotel Rennova, Banco Fie, Restaurante Margarita, Cervecería Boliviana Nacional and Samsung have similarly followed suit.

Vagabond not only sells products – it's also making social change. The company has had a hand in improving the quality of life of such people as Alberto Maidana, who's worked his whole life as a tailor. Although he had never previously worked with leather, Vagabond trained him to create leather goods for the Bonilla family business.

Among the company's current projects is a newly launched women's-wear sister company called Slavic. And, in addition to opening more branches in La Paz, Bonilla would like to develop his brand's capacity to improve people's quality of life. He and his family are currently looking for ways in which Vagabond profits can go towards good social causes.

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LA PAZ WELCOMES THE MASTERS OF WINE

WINE, FOOD AND TRADITION ON HIGH FOR THE BEST SOMMELIERS IN THE WORLD

TEXT: CARLOS MOREIRA ASCARRUNZ / PHOTO: COURTESY OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AGENCY 'LA PAZ MARAVILLOSA'

There are only around 390 sommeliers in the world accredited by the prestigious Institute of Masters of Wine in England. On a recent Sunday night, 11 of them, all of different nationalities, are at the **mirador** Jacha K'ollo in La Paz, receiving the blessing of an **Amauta** who shakes maracas and, with a feather, dispels bad energy that could affect these experts. It is an evening full of culture, cuisine and wine for these masters of wine.

In Bolivia for eight days, these wine luminaries have been visiting the vineyards in Tarija and Samaipata, tasting culture and observing tradition, and on this night their journey ends at the seat of the highest government in the world. It is an evening which promises to unite the best wines, produced at heights of 1,700 to 2,900 metres above sea level, with the best dishes prepared with local products harvested from lands higher than 3,600 metres above sea level.

While a fire consumes an offering to Pachamama, the 11 masters of wine raise their hands to receive the cosmic blessing of the **Apus and the Achachilas**, and of **Mama Phaxsi**, who shines fully, revealing herself amidst the mountains and joining this unforgettable welcome.

After a short 20-minute trip by bus to the city's **Zona Sur**, the landscape is transformed. The masters of wine find themselves in the modern Hotel Boutique Atix, surrounded by artwork by Gastón Ugalde. They talk and laugh amongst themselves and enjoy several innovative meals that José Carlos Sanjinés, the hotel restaurant's young chef, serves them. Quinoa French roast, llama stew and **chaqueño** carpaccio cured in **k'oa** are just some of the dishes on offer. Wine educator and writer Cees Van Casteren chooses the wine accompanying each meal to create an unforgettable experience. 'We learned about Bolivian wine, about Bolivian culture, and the peak has been tonight, because we arrived here and were well received. We had this amazing ceremony and the view of the city. We felt completely at peace,' says Van Casteren as he savours a potent **tarijeño** Riesling.

During the toast, Patricia Grossman, the director of the Tourism Development Agency and the event's hostess, thanks the masters of wine for coming. She emphasises the importance of these movers and shakers in the food and wine industry, who demonstrate by being here that La Paz, City of Wonders, is a vital tourist destination for people from all over the world.

Midnight approaches and the evening comes to a close. With friendly smiles, the renowned sommeliers express their desire to return to La Paz, to uncover more of its marvels. Before retiring, they enjoy a chamomile ice cream flavoured with **quirquiña** and recall the earlier scene of the setting sun transforming the colours of the Andean mountains.

'We learned about Bolivian wine, about Bolivian culture. We had this amazing ceremony and the view of the city. We felt completely at peace.'

—Master of Wine Cees Van Casteren

Within four hours, these luminaries have descended from the heights of the **mirador** Jacha K'ollo at 4,300 metres above sea level and its panoramic views, full of stars in the sky and sparkling lights on the ground. They have arrived at the modern city that shelters luxurious hotels featuring gourmet dishes to captivate even the most demanding palates in the world. All in all, it is a spectacular night in tribute to the good nature of the highlands and Bolivia's mystical scenery.

THE MUSICAL WORLD OF ERNESTO CAVOUR

INSIDE THE FERTILE MIND OF THE BOLIVIAN MUSICIAN, INVENTOR, AUTHOR AND INVESTIGATOR

TEXT: DAVID FEGAN / PHOTOS: ANA DÍAZ

Once described as 'the best in the universe' when it comes to Bolivia's national-heritage instrument, Ernesto Cavour can be found playing his beloved charango and other musical creations at the **Teatro del Charango** in La Paz every Saturday night. I catch up with Cavour to discuss his colourful life, in which he's succeeded in making his creative visions a beautiful musical reality.

Completely self-taught as a musician, Cavour cites 'a strong and profound love and passion' as one of his biggest motivations since he first picked up a charango as a boy in 1950s La Paz. His mother, who raised Cavour alone, didn't want him to be a musician, 'but I resisted and made promises,' says Cavour.

This wasn't his only professional obstacle, however. 'I was completely timid as a young person,' explains Cavour. 'I was scared to get up to the microphone and play… I found it impossible to play in public, and when I did manage to, I'd start to stutter. My voice, my fingers… nothing responded, to the point that I would play almost paralysed.'
But with a successful career as a soloist as well as part of renowned groups such as Los Jairas and El Trío Dominguez, Favre, how did he overcome this?

'One day, a man who came to my house with my neighbour told me, "You play instruments well, why don't you join the theatre?" And I said, "No, I'm too scared." And he told me that I needed to socialise with music and art, that I couldn't just play on my own. And that's how I ended up joining the national ballet,' says Cavour.

In this way, the future charango maestro was able to travel all over Bolivia performing for miners and workers, while at the same time experiencing the country's timeless magic and beauty. 'The time hadn't passed, it had stayed in the same moment,' Cavour reminisces, as he takes me back to the 1960s. 'Bolivia was paradise in those days.'

It was also during these travels that he started collecting musical instruments of all kinds, a habit that would later influence his work as a museum curator, an investigator and an inventor of musical instruments. 'I started to collect instruments because they were very cheap, around 15 bolivianos each,' says Cavour, who appreciated the beauty and the natural, varied sounds of these instruments which were made in the countryside. 'I saw **vihuelas**, guitars, charangos, and so many other instruments with different names,' he continues. 'There were flutes of all sizes, of every colour, and every material. There were incredible things that just aren't around anymore.'

In 1962, Cavour founded the first incarnation of the **Museo de Instrumentos Musicales de Bolivia** in his house. The museum now resides in a beautiful and spacious colonial house on Calle Jaén in La Paz, where it is home to more than 2,500 musical instruments, including pre-Hispanic pieces. The building also houses the Teatro del Charango, an art gallery, a library, and a workshop, where music lessons are also offered.

During a brief tour of Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s with Los Jairas and Alfredo Dominguez – pioneers of the **criollo** style – Cavour had the opportunity to develop his skills as an inventor of musical instruments. Inspired by what he observed in the workshops of the master luthier Isaac Rivas, Cavour was further encouraged to invent when he started writing his first music-theory books. 'I started, for example, writing methods that would allow people to play the charango more easily… because there were no methods available then,' he says. His first book, **El ABC del Charango**,

was published in 1962, and 'it was with these books that I started to create.'

In a large abandoned factory in Switzerland, Cavour experimented with instrument design. 'There were machines there, at my disposition,' explains Cavour. 'There wasn't anyone there to bother me or tell me, "You can't do that!", and there were already a lot of guitar necks. So I made the most of it and that's how the **guitarra muyu-muyu** first came about. I then finished it when I returned to Bolivia.' One of Cavour's most successful musical inventions, the *guitarra muyu-muyu* has been popularised by the technical skill of colleague Franz Valverde who, along with esteemed **quenista** Rolando Encinas, accompanies Cavour each Saturday night at the *Teatro del Charango* concerts.

However, it is the two-row chromatic **zampoña** that Cavour is most proud of creating. 'I searched around and figured out how to get all the tones in two rows,' says Cavour. 'Of course, it made things very simple. I played it [he hums the flute intro melody from his 1975 **carnavalito** classic 'Leño Verde'] at Carnaval and it became famous... It was the departure for the *zampoña* to be used to make all kinds of rhythms.'

When I ask Cavour about the essence of his music, he is quick to point out that he doesn't like to sing about women much, as there are so many degrading songs 'about how [other artists] want to kiss them, their necks... bending them over... it insults women. What moves me more are customs, the earth and its foods,' says Cavour, who laments that traditional Bolivian music has 'stagnated' in general, despite enduring in certain rural areas and with some contemporary musicians. 'The way the world is advancing... [people] don't want a huaynito,' he says, referring to globalisation, consumerism and modern communication's influence on popular tastes.

Despite this, Cavour has continually produced a lush banquet from the fruits of his passionate lifelong labours. I ask him what he hopes will happen with all this work in the future. 'The museum still isn't finished yet. I hope that in a year the museum is done. I have a few very important rooms in mind. It will enlighten the world about things that have happened, things that have been lost. Many tourists come here [to learn],' says Cavour.

One room Cavour has in mind will be dedicated to the natural origins of musical instruments. 'Some things were created to be played as musical instruments,' marvels Cavour, referring to any number of the naturally-formed instruments displayed in the museum. 'I'm also working on a book [on musical instruments from around the globe] that will be important at world level. That's what's taking up my time.'

GRABBING BOLIVIAN CINEMA BY THE BALLS

DENISSE ARANCIBIA FLORES, DIRECTOR AND STAR OF LAS MALCOGIDAS

TEXT: CHAUNCEY CRAIL
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

'In Bolivia, there is no film industry,' says Denisse Arancibia Flores, director of the 2016 Bolivian musical-comedy film *Las Malcogidas* (roughly, 'the badly fucked'). Arancibia, who works as a television editor and graduated with degrees in cinema directing and social communication from the Universidad Católica Boliviana and the Private University San Francisco de Asís, carries a tote with an image of a Stanley Kubrick clapperboard printed on the front. She says that the Bolivian filmmaking community is simply too small to sustain an industry, estimating that the country produced only about five features last year.

'The most difficult thing is the financing,' Arancibia says. Making *Las Malcogidas* took seven years. 'It's very difficult to find [funding] because we don't have state support. This is how cinema usually works elsewhere in South and Latin America. But we don't have that, and sponsorship or private investment are minimal.' She says a grant from the Ibermedia programme, an organisation that supports South American filmmakers, enabled her to produce her film.

It takes strength and passion to make a film in a country with few resources and little infrastructure, but Arancibia, whose neon-red hair and commanding presence provide evidence of the bold and determined personality it takes to achieve such a feat, doesn't seem to think production itself in Bolivia is as dramatic a challenge. She says that directing is about being a part of something bigger and credits the people she works with for making it happen. 'There are many people who want an industry,' she says. 'There are great actors, great directors of cinematography, and the electricians are ninjas.' (If you've ever seen a Bolivian electrical lineman work, you'll know what she's talking about.) 'In reality, there is a lot of talent [in Bolivia],' she adds. Arancibia argues that with fewer resources available, this talent is part of what makes filmmaking in Bolivia possible; a lack of capital and materials requires greater creativity on the parts of the cast and crew.

Arancibia's creative use of resources shines in her work. *Las Malcogidas*, an intimate character piece, follows Carmen (played by Arancibia), a 30-year-old in a search of her first orgasm. As Carmen struggles to lose weight in order to please her narcoleptic grandmother, she also tries to earn the money her brother (played by Arancibia's actual brother) needs for a sex-change operation. Arancibia's sharp, musically comedic writing keeps the audience close to its subjects. The film is set in La Paz, but could be almost anywhere – with only a few, simple locations, Arancibia saves herself the hassle of moving people and equipment from set to set while keeping her story focused on the plot. Her close, efficient use of the frame reduces the work necessary to decorate and construct large sets while keeping her audience focused on the characters' emotions. While many musicals pull audiences in with extravagant, resource-intensive dance choreography and complex cinematography, Las Malcogidas feels deservedly personal with simple yet engaging orchestration, carefully edited to keep viewers interested without the expensive flash characteristic of big-budget cinematic productions.

What makes Las Malcogidas truly Bolivian, however, are not the circumstances of its production, but rather what its production means for Bolivia. Arancibia says stories set Bolivian films apart. 'We have very particular stories to tell,' she says, 'things [to say] that are very Bolivian.' In Las Malcogidas, Arancibia's story, full of characters searching for gratification and acceptance in a world of denial and rejection, presents a clear message: to find fulfillment in life, acceptance of the self is paramount. Arancibia herself appears a confident, articulate testament to this message.

'I have a lot of faith in Bolivian cinema,' Arancibia says. She has a positive outlook for the future of film in Bolivia and sees potential to continue making movies. It's clear in her work, too, that Arancibia isn't the sort of artist to back down from a challenge. In its name alone, *Las Malcogidas*, while preserving the bold artistic storytelling traditions of her native land, takes a step away from traditionally conservative Bolivian thought and makes it clear that a new generation of Bolivian artistry has something to say. '[Bolivian cinema] is diversifying,' Arancibia says. 'We're looking to explore. We're open to possibilities.'

THE EVOLUTION OF NAMASTÉ

HEALTHY LIVING BY DAY, ELECTRONIC FIESTA BY NIGHT

TEXT: SOPHIA VAHDATI
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Paul Jove's soft, measured voice rises over trance-like music as he explains the origin of the psychedelic artwork adorning the back room of NamasTé, a vegetarian restaurant in La Paz. When Jove (a.k.a. Pituko) bought the building in 2005, it was a dingy bar with darkened windows that has since passed through many transformations. The space has served as a tea-shop, a yoga room, a workshop space, a venue for electronic and reggae parties and art exhibitions as well as a restaurant serving delicious vegan and vegetarian lunches.

The pillars of NamasTé are creativity, family cooperation and heightened awareness.

The trajectory of NamasTé reflects Pituko's personal growth. First and foremost he was, and still is, an enthusiastic DJ and avid fan of electronic music. From 2008 to 2011, Saturday nights at NamasTé saw a health-conscious restaurant metamorphose into an exclusive, late-night party venue for **paceños** with discerning music tastes. Pituko, however, lamented the commerciality and excessive attention that these parties generated so he decided to cut down to monthly, then yearly and then hosted events even less frequently at the venue. In its current state of evolution, NamasTé is a relaxed lunch restaurant and Pituko is concentrating on playing house and techno music on weekends at a variety of venues across La Paz.

Although Pituko discontinued the NamasTé parties to separate his double-life of vegetarian restaurant owner and electronic music producer, the aesthetic and music in the restaurant still indicate his keen interest in electronic music. He was a musician and DJ in the United States before coming to Bolivia in 2005. His dedication to vegetarian food and animal rights came later. His career as DJ and music producer is the manifestation of his personal passion. The driving force behind NamasTé is his love and respect for his family.

Surprisingly enough, Pituko was not a vegetarian when he opened up NamasTé. It was his sister, an animal rights lobbyist and activist in the United States, who suggested he only serve vegetarian food at his restaurant. As a sign of support, Pituko acquiesced and began his journey into lobbying and fighting for animal rights. In 2011, he began to eat a purely vegetarian diet himself and in 2012 he started offering vegan options and reducing dairy products across the menu. In a similar vein, when his father contracted coeliac disease, Pituko began researching gluten-free alternatives and slowly reduced the use of gluten in NamasTé's products. From the rave-coloured murals painted by his brother and friends, to the philosophy behind eating a vegetarian diet, the pillars of NamasTé are creativity, family cooperation and heightened awareness.

'There has been a conscious shift towards vegetarianism over the past five to seven years,' says Pituko, as he applauds the ongoing work of La Paz's stalwart advocates and producers of vegetarian food. But just as he passes on the ethical nutrition baton, he picks up another, and this one glows in the dark. Pituko is a multifaceted man who embraces challenges. As NamasTé settles comfortably into its current form, he is already itching for his next transformation.

As cofounder of San Pedro Music, an electronic music record company, Pituko's sights are set on creating high quality electronic music events in La Paz. He realises the current nightlife laws in the city pose a challenge for this dream, which is why he aims to organise semi-private gigs in the altiplano wilderness and return to the basics of the electronic movement. His voice rises as he recounts tales of travels, plans for records and his DJ career in Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand. NamasTé may no longer be the hub of activism and hedonism that it once was, but there is no doubt that Pituko will carry on innovating, growing and creating, whether it be via a vegetarian restaurant in La Paz or the decks at full moon parties in Thailand.

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DANIELLA GARCÍA MORENO'S ELEMENTAL SCHOOL

THE YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR IS PROVIDING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION TO BOLIVIA'S NEW GENERATION

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER / PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

How can you make a car go from point A to point B using only the power of the wind? This is one of the technological quandaries that children and teenagers aged 7 to 18 are trying to solve in the Elemental technological school, founded in 2016 by Daniella García Moreno, that teaches programming and robotics and prepares students for the jobs of the future.

'Generation Z are digital natives. They use the technology like natives, even better than their parents. How is it that education hasn't adjusted to these needs?'

—Daniella García Moreno

A systems engineer, entrepreneur and educator, García was featured in MIT Technology Review's 2016 'Innovators Under 35' list for Paraguay and Bolivia for her work with Elemental, a recognition she received only six months after opening the school. She also received a grant to be one of the selected fellows in the US State Department's Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative.

Born in Oruro, García studied in Cochabamba at the University of San Simón, where she graduated with a degree in systems engineering. She developed software for eight years before moving to La Paz and founding her school. García's impetus in creating the Elemental school was to address a problem she had frequently encountered while she was working. 'There was alway a high demand for technological talent, and they were always looking to hire, but there

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were never enough qualified professionals,' García says. 'I wondered, "What was the problem?" The work environment is good, schedules are good, and we live in a country with high unemployment. So it didn't make sense.'

The answer, she found out, was deeply rooted in education and in how technology is not appropriately taught to new generations: 'Children are not incentivised or exposed to technological areas,' García explains. 'We don't see programming in schools; they [only] use Word, Excel, Powerpoint, and this is very basic,' García says. 'Especially since Generation Z, those who are between 7 and 21 years old, are digital natives. They use the technology like natives, even better than their parents. How is it that education hasn't adjusted to these needs?'

García sees a real potential in the new generation. Her flagship programme, **Criados Digitales**, bets on that. Through it, teens participate in the Bolivian Olympiad of Informatics. 'It started as an experiment; [last year] in the departmental competition, we won 80% of the medals, and eight medals on the national level,' García says. 'Sixteen children were selected; they were good at maths but had never seen programming before. And we took them from not knowing anything about programming to winning medals in seven months.'

Which is why, García says, it's essential to stimulate and give children technological tools from an early age. Initially, the school started with programming classes and robotics. The children learn how to create electronic circuits and install sensors and other robotic devices. Now the programmes are expanding to 3D design, drone assembly, mobile-app creation and even video production for YouTube.

García's vision encompasses more than just technology, though; Elemental's motto is 'To Prepare Our Children for the Jobs of the Future.' And this involves instilling creativity, leadership skills and resilience. Using the car experiment mentioned above as an example, the students develop critical thinking: 'They start building the car, we give them the materials, and we give them a balloon,' García says. 'So they blow the balloon but it's not stable, or it doesn't go as far as they want. Only with trial and error can they solve the problem.'

Launching this month on 9 April is one of Elemental's new programmes: STEAM, which stands for Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. It's an inclusive, months-long multidisciplinary course that dabbles in all these areas, in addition to entrepreneurship and financial education. Children start with programming, then 3D design. They start mapping different car parts before 3D printing them. They then build electronic circuits to make that car move. Then comes the applied-sciences innovation module, in which the students are confronted with a problem that they have to solve. As García puts it: 'It's a learning process that teaches them that they won't get it right the first time. They develop resilience. They learn to not get frustrated and to learn how to fail.'

With this project, García is empowering a new generation to better equip themselves for the future so they can become actors of social change. 'Most of these social problems can be solved with technology,' García believes. 'And the solution can come from the citizens.' Her social responsibility initiative 'Digital Heroes' is a technological contest that Elemental organises in partnership with the municipalities of La Paz and El Alto, in which children and teens are asked to identify a problem in their communities and solve it by creating mobile applications. This also involves developing a business model to generate money for the apps to be sustainable.

Elemental and García's successes are an encouragement to move forward and reach more people. Soon, a new Elemental location will open in Santa Cruz and, if García has her way, in other Latin American countries. The school is also targeting adults by offering courses on how to use Facebook for marketing and how to sell products online. Technology and sciences are not and should not be restricted to a small (geeky) fringe of the population; it's a part of our everyday lives and deserving of more consideration and investment. But there's also more work to do inside the school: García laments that only 10% of the 120 students enrolled in Elemental are girls, but she is working on changing that, setting an example for a new generation.

COFFEE IN THE VEINS

TALKING COFFEE WITH MAURICIO DIEZ DE MEDINA, THE OWNER OF ROASTER COFFEE SHOP

TEXT: SOPHIA VAHDATI
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Over the past decade, the Bolivian coffee industry has transformed thanks to a dedicated group of influencers, one of whom is Mauricio Diez de Medina. From his time as a young man working in the financial industry, and now as an artisanal coffee roaster and owner of a high-quality coffee shop in the San Miguel neighbourhood of La Paz, Diez de Medina's journey has been a caffeine-fuelled rollercoaster ride, starting in the jungle.

In 1999, a group of Colombian entrepreneurs asked Diez de Medina for financial support with their new project, artisanal coffee production. He agreed and travelled with them to the Bolivian jungle to visit some coffee plantations. 'From the moment I witnessed the process, I fell in love,' says Diez de Medina, his piercing blue eyes glinting with enthusiasm. He was struck by the beauty of the laborious production process and the dedication of the farming families, most of whom had never even tasted their own coffee and were underpaid by the major coffee companies.

This experience ignited a passion and a drive in Diez de Medina. He brought with him a new resolve when he returned to La Paz: he would provide an alternative to the poor-quality coffee that was rife in Bolivia. He would spread the word that good coffee should not be solely for export, but for local consumption and enjoyment as well, and he would do all of this while respecting, supporting and cooperating with the coffee-farming families. Thus began his coffee-producing career. His company, Roaster, now sources and roasts coffee from various farms in the Yungas region of Bolivia, every bean selected with the highest standard of quality in mind.

'But it only takes a matter of seconds for a barista to turn a high-quality coffee bean into a terrible coffee,' Diez de Medina says, shaking his head. The Roaster team consider themselves pioneers of **barismo de altura**, but this was not a title easily won. When Roaster first opened its doors six years ago, the biggest challenge facing Diez de Medina and his team was consistent quality. If they wanted to spread the message that multinationals had deceived Latin Americans about the standards of quality they should expect in their coffee, then they had to deliver one perfect cup after another.

The road was long, but perhaps made more bearable by caffeine and a healthy dose of enthusiasm. When asked about his work-life balance, Diez de Medina simply smiles, his eyes lighting up as he explains that when you are truly passionate about something and are supported by like-minded people, work ceases to be work and becomes your life. He talks about hard times, such as the backlash from the industry when he decried its quality standards, but always with a confident smile. 'We have achieved our social objective,' he says, referring to the fact that artisanal coffee shops are now plentiful in La Paz and popping up all over Bolivia and Latin America in general. Through good practice, lobbying and barista coffee-culture courses, the Roaster team has been instrumental in redefining the standards of coffee produced and consumed within the continent.

It is refreshing to see that, in spite of an increase in competition in the market as well as being a purist at heart, Diez de Medina remains truly enamoured with the coffee industry. One of his dreams is to have a Bolivian win the World Barista Championship, and he excitedly tells me about his coffee laboratory, equipped with the latest technology and open to any barista that wants to train and practise for the championship. 'It can be available for them 24 hours a day,' Diez de Medina says.

I comment light-heartedly on how lucky he is to have made his career out of something he loves. Diez de Medina fixes me with a steely-eyed stare: 'Coffee has given me everything I have: a culture, a career. It has made me more human, it has allowed me to see the good and the bad of humanity, but most of all it has made me see how important it is to work around your passion.' It is this belief, that humans should live by their passions, all the while respecting one another, that has created the business that Roaster is today. It is a great environment in which to work and socialise; it supports small coffee farmers and it's a spokesperson for quality coffee in Bolivia. All in all, it is the realisation of Mauricio Diez de Medina's dream.

For more information:
Address: San Miguel, Rene Moreno E 20, La Paz. Tel. +591 2147234
http://www.roasterboutique.com/

MATILDE CASAZOLA

THE VOICE OF BOLIVIA'S POETIC SONG

TEXT: ADRIANA L. MURILLO ARGANDOÑA
TRANSLATION: NIAMH ELAIN
PHOTO: ADRIANA L. MURILLO ARGANDOÑA

Upon opening the green gate of a house in the centre of Sucre, I was overcome by a sense of tranquillity when I saw the kind face of Matilde Casazola. Throughout my life, I've read her poetry and heard her songs, with their remarkable lyrics and beautiful melodies; this is a woman whom I've admired for a long time. She invited me to come into her living room, where even the walls and the furniture seemed to emanate an artistic charm.

Born in the city of Sucre in 1943, Matilde Casazola's life has always seemed bound to art. Her grandfather was the writer and doctor Jaime Mendoza, who left a legacy of investigative work on mining and rubber workers in Bolivia. Matilde's sister, Gabriela, was her playmate as a child, and they would write and recite poetic pieces together. Her mother, Tula Mendoza, was a poet and composer from Potosí and her father, Juan Casazola, was a language teacher. Matilde's family strengthened her artistic spirit, encouraging her musical and poetic inclinations. 'Ever since I was a little girl I've always loved poetry. I grew up in a very open-minded household. We all loved music and art. Poetry has always been present in my life, since the very beginning,' she notes.

Matilde started writing at the age of eight, mainly about nature and her surroundings. During her teenage years, she took music classes in the Escuela Nacional de Maestros de Sucre, where she started learning the piano. Ultimately, however, the guitar was her instrument of choice, and she had classical guitar lessons and private music classes with Spanish musician Pedro García Ripoll.

Patient and serene, she tells me about the experiences that have shaped her life. 'In my nomadic years,' she says, 'I met an Argentinian artist whom I married and we travelled to different places together.' While travelling with her husband, Matilde would put on puppet shows and it was through this that she started writing. Initially, she would only share her poems and songs with her closest friends, but she soon realised her lyrics and melodies needed to shared more publicly. 'Composing and writing stopped being a hobby and became a passion for me. Later, it became a way of life,' she says.

Her first poetry book was published in 1967, a time when she and her husband Alexis Antíguez were in exile. Alexis was suspected of having ties with Che Guevara's guerrilla group, so they spent many years in Argentina. 'During that time I was finding my voice as an artist and developing my writing,' she says. After returning to Bolivia in 1974, Matilde began giving guitar lessons and doing recitals in La Paz, nurturing what would later become the legendary voice of Bolivian poetic song.

'I've always loved simplicity. I like performing on small stages, singing songs about life and everyday themes,' Matilde says, in a modest and sincere tone of voice. Staying true to herself, she started to play more intimate concerts and to compose songs known for their strong poetic message. Thus she gained a legion of fans who fell in love with her style of songwriting and performing. I myself found her songs to be a comfort when I was far from home, living away from Bolivia. I would sing one song in particular from the bottom of my heart, 'De Regreso' ('The Return'): *'From afar I return./ I already have you in my sight./ I'm already gazing at the silhouettes of my mountains in your infinite horizon./ From afar, from those horizons that I'm escaping,/ today I'm returning to your infinite horizon Pachamama, Pachamama…'*

Countless Bolivian artists have interpreted 'De Regreso' as well as many other songs of Matilde's. Singers such as: Luis Rico, Emma Junaro, Nery Gonzáles, Victoria Sur, Mayra Gonzáles, Willy Claure, Cubayande, Sonia Pol, Gustavo Orihuela, and Gitte Palson-Juan Carlos Cordero, among others. Her lyrics and melodies carry with them the spirit and energy of a woman who creates from the heart.

'My poetic works have often come to me in the darkness of sleepless nights, that is to say they've sprung from my conscious as well as my subconscious thought, and more or less in an onerous state. Melodies arise in my mind; they enchant me, and I try to memorise them. The majority of these melodies come with a poetic idea, too, so trying to decipher them and put them on paper is an interesting adventure,' she says.

As Matilde reads from Volumes I and II of her autobiography I'm touched and struck-dumb by her subtle voice. Her readings are full of meaningful pauses and fitting rhythms. Volume I includes poems such as, 'Siguen los caminos', which speak of her travels in the years between 1970 and 1973. These writings are full of honesty. Although one can sense a social message in her work, Matilde clarifies that the meanings in her poetry tend to represent something more human. Beauty is an important element for her. 'Life has a marvelous side to it,' she says. 'And it's down to us to make it more heartfelt, more beautiful.'

Like many writers, Matilde has admired other authors and composers such as Federico García Lorca, César Vallejo, Jaime Mendoza, Ricardo Jaimes Freyre, Pablo Neruda, Primo Castrillo, Julia Prilutzky and Jaime Saenz. 'Great authors influence the life of a writer,' she explains. 'As a writer, it's important to familiarise yourself with the life and works of other artists.'

Volume II of her autobiography features some of Matilde's illustrations from when the artist fought against and beat tuberculosis. During her illness, Matilde discovered that there was a poetic side to pain, and began to express this through drawing. And these simplistic yet powerful drawings complement the texts they accompany.

There were times, however, when Matilde did not write, sometimes for as long as two years. During one of those periods, her husband bought her a typewriter and, although Matilde did not know how to use it at first, it helped her to write again. 'After not being able to create for that long,' she remembers, 'I started to do it on the typewriter. Using a machine didn't disrupt my artistic energy. I remember using it to write a poem that flowed from me as though from ink onto paper.'

Matilde Casazola's lifelong career as an artist has made her a female icon of Bolivian culture. In 2016, she received the National Culture Award. Today, she is working on a new album of unreleased songs. 'I'm working from the inside,' she says. 'I'm preparing some 12 unedited songs. I'm reworking them for the guitar to make a new album. It's a project that takes time.' In the meantime, however, she is already thinking of putting together a third volume of her poetic work.

Thank you, Matilde, for your poetry.

GERMAN BEER LANDS IN BOLIVIA

BREWMASTER GUIDO MÜHR'S MOTTO:

'Cerveza alemana hecha en Bolivia'

TEXT: MATTHEW GRACE
PHOTO: COURTESY PROST

Formerly dominated by domestic brew behemoths Paceña and Huari, Bolivia is experiencing a beer renaissance as of late, with small craft **cervecerías** such as Saya, Niebla and Corsa springing up all over the landscape, from Sucre and Cochabamba to La Paz and Santa Cruz de la Sierra. And now there's another contender in the ring, one that's producing suds reminiscent of his homeland. Prost, the brand name of master beer-maker Guido Mühr's Sabores Bolivianos Alemanes company has, in two and a half years, catapulted itself into the Bolivian beer market with distribution to most of the country's major cities and their outlying areas. It's a labour of love for Mühr, 52, who studied beer-making in Munich and worked at the Holsten brewery in Hamburg before he responded to a mysterious ad in a local trade publication in 1992 that would dramatically alter the trajectory of his life. 'I read about an offer for a new brewing plant in South America,' Mühr says from his office at the Prost brewery on the outskirts of Santa Cruz. 'It said only 'South America.' I thought it was in Buenos Aires or Rio de Janeiro, but it was indeed in Santa Cruz de la Sierra.'

It's a labour of love for Mühr, who studied beer-making in Munich before he responded to a mysterious ad in a local trade publication that would dramatically alter the trajectory of his life.

Shortly thereafter, the then-27-year-old Mühr was on his way to Bolivia, a country he knew little about on a continent he had never visited. 'I knew no Spanish,' he recounts. And there was 'no Internet, and it was only phone calls and letters – written letters! It was quite different. It was very tropical... very, very different from Europe or from Germany. My first impression was "Oh my goodness!"'

But Mühr thrived in the tropical environment, working for Paceña for seven years before it was acquired by the Argentinian beer company Quilmes. In turn, Quilmes was purchased by the international beer conglomerate AmBev, which then offered Mühr the opportunity to manage two breweries and a Pepsi bottling plant in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 2008. So Mühr, who by this time had started a family with his Bolivian wife, packed his bags and headed east.

But Mühr was becoming dissatisfied with the corporate life. 'Every brewmaster in this life thinks about having his own brewery, making his own beer,' Mühr says. 'If you, for nearly 20 years, have to think only in terms of cost reductions and how to make the product cheaper every time, then you start to dream about doing your own business.'
And so Mühr filled his last Quilmes keg in 2012 and laid low for a year, formulating a business plan for his next endeavour. With an eye on Santa Cruz's explosive population growth, cheap labor and little-penetrated beer market, Mühr and his family returned in 2013. He immediately made contact with investors from local pubs and restaurants. Brewery construction started in 2014, in a near-deserted industrial part far north of the city, under less-than-ideal conditions. 'We weren't connected to electric energy until March 2015, so we nearly built the factory without it,' Mühr says, wincing, as he stands outside his factory in the intense tropical heat. 'We started brewing in June 2015 – three months later.'

It's a labour of love for Mühr, who studied beer-making in Munich before he responded to a mysterious ad in a local trade publication that would dramatically alter the trajectory of his life.

Prost's initial production run was only 1,000 litres per month, but in the last two and a half years it's now producing 35,000 to 40,000 litres monthly – still not enough for the company to break even financially. 'But that's OK,' Mühr says. 'We are increasing every year from between 25 and 50%. Fortunately, I have long-term-looking partners and not short-term, cash-bar-searching partners.' And there's a lot of room to grow: The brewery's maximum yearly capacity is 8 million litres. 'But if we reach that number,' Mühr says, laughing, 'I will be drinking caipirinhas **en la playa**.'

The Prost brand boasts five lines currently in production – its signature premium lager (just about a perfect beer for the infernal **cruceño** climate), a Weiss (wheat), a dunkel, a quinoa beer and a winter and a summer ale. Mühr plans to keep the distribution strictly in-country, with the exception of the quinoa beer, which he plans on making available in Peru. He's also busy brewing a new line, an IPA, which will be available later this year.

Prost is a small business, with only 12 full-time employees staff, and the distribution and sales are outsourced to trusted partners, allowing Mühr to concentrate on what he really loves: brewing good beer. 'Every brewmaster at least dreams of having his own brewery, big or small, but to do this-' he says, gesturing at his brewery, 'that's always been my dream.'

But even with this achievement, Mühr, who is tall and gangly with dark black hair and a face faintly lined from living under the tropical sun for years, is also thinking ahead. 'I wanted to [start the Prost brewery], and I want to [run it] for the next 10, 15 years,' he says. And he's also looking beyond Bolivia, into other markets – but he's keeping his lips sealed about that plan, at least for now. He does reveal one thing, though, as he stands proudly in front of his brewery: 'This should only be one of several projects,' he says, smiling.

EJTI STIH, PAINTING IN BLOOD

A TENDENTIOUS EXHIBITION FROM THE CRUCEÑA ARTIST LOOKS AT ABORTION

TEXT: MATTHEW GRACE
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

The red-tinged brick Santa Cruz Cathedral towers above the city's central square, the Plaza Principal 24 de Septiembre. Beneath the oppressive sun, **cruceños** sit on park benches underneath palm-tree canopies, sipping **cafés con leche** as dusk slowly creeps over the city. Nearby, the sculpture garden of the Galería Manaza slowly fills with people as the hot, humid day gradually turns into night. Inside the gallery, blood-red and gold paint throbs on the studio's walls. Sinister clergy and nuns are depicted hovering over piles of babies' bodies. A young women gazes down at gallery goers with her face frozen in a rictus of immense sorrow. A blindfolded figure of Justice uses a long knife to slice at a bloody umbilical cord from which a newborn child swings like a pendulum. A devilish angel scoffs at a black plastic garbage bag ominously crammed full of... what? Does the viewer even want to know?

Welcome to *Rojo y Oro*, a new exhibition by the Slovenian-born artist, Ejti Stih. Born in communist Yugoslavia in 1957 and a resident of Santa Cruz since 1983, Stih explains how she conceived of her exhibition. A few years back, she says, 'There was a case of a girl who was 11 years old, and she was raped by her stepfather. It was a public case, and her mother was on television, with a bag on her head [to hide her identity]. She was asking for the abortion. There were newspapers and the church and social workers and everybody was commenting on it on the television – and it was so terrible because nobody asked the girl what she thought.' The court ruled that the girl had to carry her baby to term. A year later, the baby died. 'It was a difficult case,' Stih says. 'I am also a mother, I also have a daughter, and I was deeply moved.'

In response to the media spectacle surrounding this case, Stih created Homenaje a la niña violada, a painting depicting a young girl, naked and vulnerable, surrounded by the violently abstracted figures of politicians, clergy and the public. The girl cowers at the bottom of the frame, trying to shield herself from the frothing masses. 'This painting was hanging in our house for years,' Stih says, 'and these stories go on every day.' Then, late last year, as lawmakers started to consider a new penal code that would allow abortion in a few special circumstances (which ultimately failed to pass in the Bolivian legislature), Stih decided to return to the subject.

'When I was thinking about making this exhibition,' Stih says, 'I remember that I was with two friends at a dinner and I said that I was thinking about this abortion series, and they said, "Don't! Don't!"' Stih laughs. 'I mean, I don't care! [Abortion is] a question of social health. Women sometimes have to do it – there's no other choice. And they will do it.'

It's a difficult exhibition to view, full of sorrow and the suffering of women who must deal with unwanted pregnancy or the danger of a clandestine abortion – and the indifference of the church and the state to this suffering. 'In poor countries, poor people, poor women suffer most,' Stih says. 'There's a lot of suffering in vain.' As the exhibition's title suggests, the paintings are primarily in a deep, thick red and a shimmering gold. 'This gold has to do with ancient, old, religious paintings,' Stih says. 'Gold is a colour that doesn't define space, because when it's gold it might be far away or near – it represents eternity.'

Stih studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia. After graduating from the academy, she followed some Bolivian friends of Croatian descent to Bolivia, where she's lived ever since. She's exhibited her work throughout Europe, Central and South America, and the United States. Although she primarily focuses now on painting, she's also created lithography and ceramic pieces.

Photo: Matthew Grace

In contrast to her current exhibition, which can be gloomy, Stih is quick to laugh when speaking about herself and her artwork. She glad-hands admirers warmly; several times when speaking about her work in the gallery she is interrupted by women, some in tears, who tell her how affecting her artwork is. Stih is quick to chat them, and to offer a hug.

Steven and Kenyon Hall, two Bolivian-Americans visiting from Washington, DC, said they were moved by the exhibition. 'If anything, it definitely makes us question ourselves and what we think, and hopefully people come in can see and think for themselves,' Kenyon says. 'Especially, I hate to say it, men – they come in here they see and think about how this could be their mum or sister.' 'When we first walked in, I think the first emotion that I felt was, I felt a little uncomfortable, and I think that's great,' Steven said. 'It sparks conversation.'

'Women sometimes have to [get an abortion] – there's no other choice. And they will do it.'
—Ejti Stih

But Stih's oeuvre isn't all ponderous and weighty. Some of her past paintings are quite light. Her **Nuevos Evos** series, created back in the early days of Bolivian President Evo Morales's first term, is a lighthearted look at the politician in which he's depicted in many different traditional costumes from around the country. But even in these whimsical-looking pieces, there's a deeper political message. 'When Evo started to be the president, it was very difficult,' Stih says. 'It was a big confrontation between this **Media Luna**, the eastern part of Bolivia, and the rest of the country. It was politically very unstable. So I was thinking that I came so many kilometres – thousands of kilometres – away from Europe, away from Yugoslavia. I came so far and now this situation is the same because it was the war in Yugoslavia,' in which the country splintered, something that was being threatened by the *Media Luna* in Bolivia in 2008. 'Everything happened because the country split. So I said, "It can't be! It can't happen! This can't happen to me again!"' She created the *Nuevos Evos* series to humanise the new president. 'I found it so nice, nice to the people, a nice present,' she says. 'That's why I made the series.'

The power and pain apparent in *Rojo y Oro*, though, don't make for a nice present, something that Stih acknowledges. 'Who can have this in their house? Look at this painting! It's impossible!' she says, laughing. 'I always make a joke. I create [other] paintings that combine with the sofa. Paintings that combine with the sofa have to have the proper colour for the living room, and the theme shouldn't be as tough as this [to sell].' Stih gestures at the morose paintings on the gallery's walls. 'So this will stay in my depository, and the others will help me live,' she says. 'That's how I survive.'

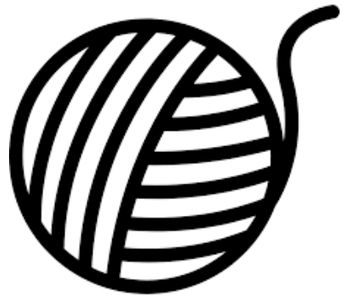
BOLIVIAN COUTURE

A YOUNG DESIGNER IS FINDING SUCCESS IN THE COUNTRY, AND ON THE HOLLYWOOD RED CARPET

TEXT: MATTHEW GRACE
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

In the Equipetrol district of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, nestled amongst apartment towers and chic restaurants and cafés, Weise Atelier sits surrounded by adobe walls on a quiet side street. No sign indicates the presence of one of Bolivia's premier fashion lines in the sprawling, steamy capital of the Santa Cruz department, but after entering through the iron gate and into the refreshingly cool interior, a visitor is greeted by a small woman in a crisp white shirt and dark slacks, ready to work and to chat, with a welcoming smile on her face and an infectious laugh.

Ericka Suárez Weise, 32, is the head of her eponymous 'prêt-à-couture' clothing line and the scion of a notable **cruceña** fashion design family. Her grandmother is a seamstress who fabricated clothes for a circle of traditional families in Santa Cruz when the metropolis was still only a village surrounded by jungle, and her mother, also named Ericka, is a designer who introduced modern women's fashion to the city in the early 1980s. 'I grew up in the atelier,' Suárez Weise says, 'under the table actually.' After studying fashion and textile design at University of Palermo in Buenos Aires in the early 2000s and living and working in the Argentine capital for a few years, she moved back to Santa Cruz in 2010, starting her own line in June 2011 in her mother's studio.



'When I came back [to Santa Cruz], there were no young Bolivian designers' brands,' Suárez Weise says. 'It was just haute-couture designers, and the only other option was to buy Argentinian or Brazilian clothes. There were no young people making their own brands or fashion lines.' Working out of her mother's atelier, she quickly designed her first collection, which was an immediate success. In 2012, she was named Designer of the Year by Bolivia Moda, the country's foremost fashion-industry show.

Recently, Suárez Weise moved into a new atelier. 'I was working in the same building as my mother and grandmother for eight years,' she says. 'I decided to move because I needed a bit more space. And actually, I needed this young spirit [of the new atelier] for my customers.' The two-story building where she now works has dark wood floors and a small showroom in front with mannequins clothed in her latest creations. Her upstairs office features a small, organised desk. Bookshelves are filled in with fashion and art books, and her personal studio

downstairs has dozens of illustrations and photographs pinned to the wall and scattered about the work surface. In two outbuildings, her staff work on her latest creations, busily sewing, cutting and fabricating the newest Weise creations.

Suárez Weise is staking a middle ground between haute couture and prêt-à-porter. Her brand is a 'middle moment,' she says, 'because it's an accessible couture for people who cannot afford a US$100,000 piece, a Chanel. I have my "prêt-à-couture" brand, which works with the same artisanal ways of making couture, but in an accessible product.' Her price point – US$200 to US$2,000 per creation, depending on materials – is certainly out of financial reach of the average Bolivian woman, but it's accessible, even economical, to the *cruceña* high society that covets her designs. And even in La Paz, with its vastly different climate and fashion aesthetic, her line is making inroads. 'The indigenous high society is starting to buy couture,' Suárez says, 'starting to feel comfortable going to a designer and asking for a wedding dress or a custom design.'

But now Suárez Weise is gaining recognition far beyond the narrow confines of the Bolivian fashion world – in fact, Hollywood has been taking notice. For the last two years at the Screen Actors Guild Awards, which is part of the seasonal run-up to the Oscars, Orange Is the New Black star Selenis Leyva sported dresses by Suárez Weise. In 2017, Leyva wore an elegant black gown with a ruffled train on the red carpet, and earlier this year the actress wore another Suárez Weise creation, one from her 2018 'Habitat' collection, which was inspired by the orchid flower.

Suárez Weise's collaboration with Leyva was serendipitous. 'It's a story of a friend of a friend. A friend introduced me to [Leyva's] stylist... And he looked at my work and he said, "I want to work with your brand." I was like, "Oh my God!"' she says, breaking into a laugh.

With Hollywood's spotlight shining on her brand from afar, Suárez Weise now finds herself in the enviable position of being able to extend her reach into other even larger markets. In New York City, she'll soon be represented by a collective of emerging designers, and stylists in Los Angeles have expressed interest in her creations for their actress clients. 'I work long distance now,' Suárez Weise says. 'I have stylists there that I work with who can do the alterations.'

'My "prêt-à-couture" brand works with the same artisanal ways of making couture, but in an accessible product.'
—Ericka Suárez Weise

But she's not resting on her laurels, far from it. Besides influences as disparate as Dutch designer Iris van Herpen, who utilises 3D printing in her creations with strong nods to nature and fantasy, and stalwarts Chanel and Dior, Suárez Weise also looks close to home to guide her artistry. In 2016, inspired by a visit to Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni, Suárez Weise released her 'Salt & Sky' fall/winter collection. With lace that mimics the crystalline structure of the salt flats, gradual colour variations that symbolises the rising of the sun and feminine silhouettes under gossamer capes slightly reminiscent of **cholita** shawls, the collection exemplified an ultra-modern interpretation of one of Bolivia's signature natural beauties. And last year, her fall/winter collection was heavily inspired by the late *cruceño* painter Herminio Pedraza. Suárez Weise used Pedraza's characteristic, colourful depictions of women to inform her elegant 'Halo' collection. Rich, vibrant violet gowns worn off the shoulder paid homage to the master painter who died in 2006.

Now busy working in her atelier for a forthcoming collection, Suárez Weise is drawing inspiration from the indigenous Mojeños people from Bolivia's Beni department, who perform the traditional **machetero** dance with large headdresses made of the plumes of tropical birds. Translating this style into women's fashion is painstaking work, but the results are stunning, and they'll soon be on the runway for the world to see – and perhaps, soon, we'll be treated to the sight of a Hollywood actress wearing an Amazonian-headdress-inspired creation on the red carpet.

But for now, don't look for a Weise gown at any boutique on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, or King's Road in London. Her creations are not made for mass consumption. 'I don't want to have a huge brand now,' she says. 'I know I can't – I know my limitations with production. I cannot go to Fashion Week and produce 10,000 pieces – no, this is not my situation. I am working with unique pieces, I am hoping we can reproduce 10 or 20 pieces. I have artisanal methods. It requires a lot of time, human time.'

THE UNIVERSE OF PLANTS

SEBASTIAN QUIROGA'S GOURMET MEAT-FREE MISSION

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

On the corner of Calles Potosí and Colón in the bustling, chaotic centre of La Paz, tucked between two chicken restaurants, almost out of sight, stands the gourmet vegan boîte Ali Pacha and newly opened café-bar Umawi. Here I find head chef and founder Sebastian Quiroga. As I sit down, he presents me with an espresso shot placed on a floppy-disk coaster. As everything else here, the coffee is 100% Bolivian; the taste and the presentation reflect the overall quality of the experience.

In 2012, Quiroga, born in La Paz, travelled to London to study at Le Cordon Bleu culinary school, where he received classical training in French cuisine. He then joined the team at Copenhagen's famed Restaurant Relae for a six-month internship. There, he was introduced to a new idea of cuisine, one which doesn't necessarily involve meat as the centerpiece of the dish. He then returned to Bolivia with a freshly formed idea of starting his own business. One and a half years later, Ali Pacha was born. Since then, the restaurant has received international recognition in three different categories at the 2017 World Luxury Restaurant Awards: South American Cuisine Global Winner, Best Cocktail Menu Continent Winner and Gourmet Vegan Cuisine Continent Winner.

Quiroga's concept is simple: give a flavourful, 100% Bolivian gourmet experience, without using any animal products. And this vision doesn't stop with the food and drinks; it also involves Ali Pacha's service, decor and design. Most of the objects in both the restaurant and the café-bar are secondhand, recycled items purchased locally that also carry cultural significance. Pointing to the electrical cables that decorate Ali Pacha's ceiling, Quiroga explains that it's all meant to reference the chaos of La Paz outside the door – albeit in a more organised way – and that the essence of the place is truly Bolivian in nature.

For Quiroga, the restaurant and café 'showcase what the country has to offer, which also happens to be vegan.' Everything

is plant-based, and everything comes from Bolivia, from the quinoa and potatoes native to the west of the country to exotic and less-known tropical fruits found in Bolivia's eastern jungles. Quiroga brings the entirety of the country together on the plate, carefully and creatively combining ingredients that would never have met elsewhere.

Ali Pacha means 'Universe of Plants' in Aymara. Veganism came as a surprise to Quiroga, something that he learned about during his time abroad and after watching the 2005 documentary *Earthlings*, which powerfully and brutally depicts the realities of the meat industry. 'I come from a family of meat-lovers. I used to go fishing and hunting when I was younger,' Quiroga recalls, still slightly surprised by how much he has changed. Alongside a growing vegan/vegetarian offering in La Paz, Quiroga wants to provide a high-quality cuisine in which flavour comes first. 'The priority is not necessarily to be healthy; it's to cook good food,' he says. 'Sometimes people walk in and they don't know that there is no meat, so I need to convince them to stay,' he adds.

'When that happened [when we first opened], I used to tell these people, "If you don't like it, you won't have to pay." But people have always paid.' The food, it seems, speaks for itself.

Opening the restaurant in the centre of La Paz wasn't an obvious or easy choice. In an area where fast-food options proliferate and buildings are falling apart, Quiroga saw potential and an opportunity to revitalise the old centre. Two years after opening, Quiroga's bet is paying off, with the addition of the new café-bar Umawi, which in Aymara means 'Let's drink!' Umawi offers a selection of the best Bolivian coffees and liquors, accompanied with a selection of sandwiches and snacks. Quiroga wants to see these ingredients shine in signature cocktails and by using modern coffee-making techniques. Undoubtedly, when visiting Ali Pacha and Umawi, Quiroga's passion for gastronomy and his country stands out and can be appreciated in the care and consideration put into each detail.

For more information:
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http://umawi.alipacha.com/

FROM PHARMACY TO PHARMACEUTICAL MANUFACTURER,

A FAMILY BUSINESS GOES BIG

TEXT: RODRIGO BARRENECHEA
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Back in the 1950s, La Paz was a small city where practically everyone knew each other. Nearly all the country's decisions – political, economic and social – took place in what is known today as the Club de La Paz, located on Avenida Camacho. There, the Bolivian elite of that time would meet, spend time together and hash out the country's future. Raúl Crespo Palza, one of the few Bolivian pharmacists of that era, opened a pharmacy nearby and named it El Indio. Located on Calle Colón near the Club de La Paz, it would later be renamed Farmacia Santa Cruz in honour of Crespo's **cruceña** wife, Neysa Vasquez.

Crisis provided an opportunity, and Raúl Crespo Palza opened a laboratory to manufacture his own pharmaceuticals.

For 15 years, the pharmacy, which also became an important meeting point, witnessed the country's political and economic crises: the 1952 National Revolution that would give rise to the first MNR government, followed by military governments, all of which would lead to the fall of the national economy in the 1980s. This is when the UDP political alliance, headed by Hernán Siles Suazo, took the reins of the Republic of Bolivia. Hyperinflation followed, and with an absence of foreign currency and a shortage of medicine, Farmacia Santa Cruz couldn't provide medical supplies to the citizenry. But the crisis provided an opportunity, and Crespo opened a laboratory to manufacture his own pharmaceuticals. His son, Raúl Crespo Vásquez, tells me that his father started out by grinding antibiotics and mixing syrups by hand in the absence of the necessary equipment.

Learning from his father's trevails, Crespo Jr. studied agronomic engineering and originally found work in the agricultural industry. He spent his days in the countryside, where he bred animals and founded a small jam factory. For legal reasons, and to be able to commercialise his products, he needed another factory in La Paz. His family owned property in the San Pedro neighbourhood on Calle Nicolás Acosta. He located his new factory there, and now it's the location of Laboratorios Crespal S.A.

It took six months for Crespo Jr. to become completely involved in the pharmaceutical laboratory. Farmacia Santa Cruz, then still led by Crespo Sr., made sure the family was fed and helped finance the new laboratory. Eventually, Crespo Jr. took over its administration and management. Laboratorios Crespal's initial production run included Sorojchi altitude-sickness pills, which most visitors to the city will be familiar with, and the Carmelinda cosmetic-product line. Through the years, the company has kept growing with new products regularly launched.

Laboratorios Crespal's Sorojchi-pill formulation, which combats the symptoms of **males de altura**, dates from the 1960s and is the product of a rather atypical partnership with the then US Consulate. The US Peace Corps, an American volunteer program providing social work in Bolivia and elsewhere around the world, requested that Crespal Sr. formulate a remedy for altitude sickness, which was adversely affecting the organisation's Bolivian staff. Crespo Sr., who died in 1996, began experimenting and conducted clinical studies until he formulated the product we know today.

Strong demand for the Sorojchi pills was immediate, especially from tourists, and pharmacies in other high-altitude tourist destinations soon began to order the product. Exportation to Peru began after a young man named Armando, from Puno, started bulk-purchasing the medicine to sell in Peru in order to finance his university studies. Crespo Jr. realised that there was demand in the neighbouring country and started to distribute them to Cuzco, where they were particularly popular with tourists who hiked the Inca Trail. Laboratorios Crespal now has a branch in Peru, and plans to export its products to Ecuador and Mexico.

The Sorojchi pill dates from the 1960s and is the product of a rather atypical partnership with the then US Consulate.

Laboratorios Crespal's Sorojchi pills are also becoming well-known outside of South America. In 2016, the company received a call from the government of Tibet, inquiring about the distribution of the altitude-sickness pills in its capital, Lhasa. There have even been two heads of the Catholic Church who have taken the Sorojchi pill: Pope John Paul II, when he visited La Paz in 1988, and Pope Francis in 2015. Sorojchi pills are advertised as the most effective product to alleviate the symptoms of altitude sickness for tourists in extremely high-altitude cities such as La Paz and Cuzco.

Laboratorios Crespal, all the while, keeps growing. In 2014, it opened at modern pharmaceutical plant in El Alto. For the past 30 years, Crespo Jr. has been managing it, and it is listed on the Bolivian Stock Exchange. But all these changes do not mean that the company ceases to be deeply rooted in paceño traditionalism with a family legacy that embodies everything that is Bolivian.

AMAUTA	Andean wise man
APUS AND ACHACHILAS	Superior beings embodied by the mountains
BARISMO DE ALTURA	High-altitude coffee
CAFÉ CON LECHE	Coffee with milk
CARNAVALITO	The musical composition which accompanies the lively, collective and typical Andean dance of the same name
CERVECERÍA(S)	Beer breweries
CHAQUEÑO/A(S)	Of the Chaco province
CHARANGO	A 10-string traditional Andean instrument
CHOLITA	A traditionally dressed indigenous woman of Aymara or Quechua descent
CRIADOS DIGITALES	Digital natives
CRIOLLO	A musical style that contemporised traditional Bolivian music with a fusion of quena, charango and guitar
CRUCEÑO/A(S)	Of Santa Cruz
EN LA PLAYA	On the beach
GUITARRA MUYU-MUYU	A double-sided guitar created by Ernesto Cavour and popularised by Franz Valverde
HELADERO	The ice cream man
HUAYNITO OR HUAYNO	A genre of popular Andean music and dance originally from the Bolivian highlands
K'OA	A local aromatic herb
LOS YUNGAS	Province of La Paz
MACHETERO	Dancers perform a mystical warrior dance, comes from San Ignacio de Moxos del Beni in Bolivia
MALES DE ALTURA	Altitude sickness
MAMA PHAXSI	Mother Moon
MEDIA LUNA	Literally, 'half-moon', often referring to the eastern provinces of Bolivia
MIRADOR	Lookout point
MUSEO DE INSTRUMENTOS MUSICALES DE BOLIVIA	Museum of Bolivian musical instruments
PACHAMAMA	Mother Earth
QUENISTA	A musician who plays the quena, an indigenous South American flute
QUIRQUIÑA	A local aromatic herb
TARIJEÑO/A(S)	Of Tarija
TEATRO DEL CHARANGO	A musical theatre in La Paz that promotes traditional Bolivian music and musical groups
VIHUELA	A five- or six-stringed guitar-like instrument
ZAMPOÑA	Traditional Andean pan flute
ZONA SUR	Area in the south of La Paz

LA NACIONALIZACIÓN DA RESULTADOS

CAMPO CAIGUA PRODUCIRÁ 40 MILLONES

DE PIES CÚBICOS DÍAS DE GAS

- **60 millones de pies cúbicos día de gas en dos nuevas áreas hidrocarburíferas**
- **Entre el 1985 al 2005 la renta petrolera fue de 4.500 millones de dólares**
- **En 12 años de Gobierno fue de 35.000 millones de dólares**