

A Food Stylist Hunts for Ideas and Pastries



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

In 2020, Mariana Velásquez had planned to go on a 12-day road trip through Colombia to photograph her new cookbook, “Colombiana.” Instead, she was met with a pandemic and the subsequent closing of Colombia’s borders. Like many other New Yorkers, the food stylist had to work out of her apartment or at nearby locations to finish the project on time. To evoke different regions of Colombia, she and her photography team experimented with color, lighting, flowers and textiles. The result was a book that was less about travel and more about sharing Colombian food and culture. Her native country approved: Photographs from the 2021 book have been used in a series of new Colombian stamps. In addition to her work for clients like Bon Appétit, Saveur and Williams-Sonoma, last year Ms. Velásquez founded Casa Velasquez, an entertaining line that includes aprons, linens and tableware. Born and raised in Bogotá, Ms. Velásquez, 42, recently moved to Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, with her husband, the journalist and producer Diego Senior, who’s also 42 and Colombian. *JULIA BOZZONE*

TRAY SERVICE Usually, we wake up about 7 or 7:30 a.m. Diego always wakes up first, and I hear him making coffee, and that’s when I end up rolling out of bed. He brings it up on a tray to the living room.

INSPIRATION YOU CAN FEEL What happened when we moved is that I discovered that I have all these amazing art books, photo books and books of interior design. I put them on the shelf and then I never looked at them again! Since we moved, because I took the dust off them, I make a point to have my coffee and open a new book every Sunday: to read parts of it and look at all the images and get inspiration from something that I can touch and feel.

QUIZ Diego and I do the New York Times quiz about news of the week. We answer it as a team. Sports questions always kill us — baseball, football we never know. We really take our time. We drink our coffee. Usually nothing else, maybe a piece of fruit.

PHONE-FREE For about a year, a year and a half, I’ve left my phone on my night stand all day. I just don’t have my phone on me. It’s a little scary at the end of the day to check it to see if there’s been a storm. But actually, always, it’s OK.

STROLL Around 9 a.m., we take a little walk, zigzagging through the streets to get to know and understand the avenues and discover the good coffee shops and the bookstores. As we walk, I’m thinking of the history of this place — people who lived here before, why did they come here in the 1800s? — and the amazing trees. It’s really impressive how European this neighborhood looks. I think it’s mostly because of the trees. We walk all the way to Tompkins Avenue and loop around.

POWER UP AND DREAM We have a second coffee and a croissant or scone at this great bakery called Saraghina. They have a ham-and-cheese croissant, which is perhaps the best I’ve ever had. I peek in at this vintage shop called IndigoStyle Vintage. The owner curates really beautiful clothing. Vintage shopping is kind of like a form of meditation. You’re in search of something, but it’s not specific. It’s kind of like a desire that doesn’t have to materialize.

SOUP, SALAD, FRIENDS Then we come home. Usually I go to the farmers’ market on Saturday, and I prep a stew or something easy — a one-pot meal — so that we can have it on Sunday. When it’s colder, I might make lentils with chorizo and serve it with rice, or a brothy short rib soup with winter greens, jalapeños and cilantro and serve it with crusty bread. In the spring, perhaps I’ll make a big pot of minestrone or soupe au pistou. And Sunday is just reheating and



making up a salad, something very crisp. We’ve been having friends over — small groups, like four to eight people.

LOCAL SPOTS We moved to this neighborhood in part because many friends have moved here. Near us there’s a bar that has incredible jazz and world music called Bar Lunático. They have shows every night. Ostido’s a coffee shop my neighborhood place. It’s a coffee shop during the day, and at night they have different guest chefs and pop-up events. It’s one of those places where you can spend all afternoon and into the evening, have coffee, pastries, and then a full dinner and natural wine, and it’s so, so good.

WARMTH We have our friends come over at 2:30 or 3 p.m. for a bite, and it’s really casual. We sit at the kitchen table. I set the Le Creuset pot on the counter. I put out a stack of plates and a tablecloth. Everybody comes. We have a little wine. Sometimes a friend will bring dessert, maybe a piece of cheese or a loaf of bread. Everybody brings their kids, and it’s just easy and delicious and it ends early, around 4 or 5 p.m. It’s very much how it used to be on Sunday afternoon at my grandparents’ home. Having people over gives the space warmth, you know? My grandmother Adela always said that spaces are energy and we fill them. So a big part of that feeling of making this house

ours lies in having friends come over and share the table.

THE WEEK AHEAD And then we clean up. I sit in my office, and I get organized to avoid the Sunday blues because as my great friend who’s a writer and film director says, “Every Sunday is the end of the world.” I plan my week: I go over my schedule. I look at the appointments I have, if I have a shoot, if I have a trip coming up. I check my phone to see that there’s nothing urgent, and I send a couple of emails that I know will be great for the person to have in their inbox on Monday morning. I don’t go on Instagram. I just don’t check.

IN THE MOOD FOR CLASSICS We usually watch a movie. We’ve been going through different lists — some old films and things we haven’t watched. Diego usually does that research. Recently, we watched “In the Mood for Love,” which I hadn’t seen in many, many years. It continues to be so enchanting and dreamy, and it transports me to Hong Kong.

SMOOTH SAILING We go to bed pretty early, 9:30 or 10 p.m. It’s important for me to get an early start on Monday. But it’s a really chill mood on Sunday night. For the most part, it’s pretty joyful and relaxed because things are out of my mind. I prepared for the week earlier. Sunday nights are easy, and I just feel grateful.

Sunday Routine readers can follow Mariana Velásquez on Instagram @marianavelasquez.