



At deseo, Chef de Cuisine Roberto Madrid (white coat) serves tantalizing cuisine bursting with flavor.

TO YOUR HEART'S DESIRE

**BRIGHT LATIN FLAVORS
AWAIT AT DESEO**

BY STEPHANIE R. CONNER · PHOTOGRAPHY BY RACHEL OLSSON



As you descend the staircase to deseo, you aren't just leaving the main floor of The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa. You're escaping to the Southern Hemisphere — a place where fresh, exciting flavors, bold (though not necessarily hot) spices, and colorful, vibrant foods tantalize your taste buds.

Since it opened 13 years ago, deseo ("desire" in Spanish) has welcomed diners seeking adventures for their palates. And it's picked up a few awards along the way — including AAA's Four Diamond Rating and yearly recognition as one of "America's 100 Best Wine Restaurants" by *Wine Enthusiast*.

"It's very different than most places," says deseo's Chef de Cuisine Roberto Madrid. It's a place, he says, for people who, "like to explore different experiences and appreciate a unique experience."



NUEVO LATINO CUISINE

The cuisine at *deseo* — Nuevo Latino — combines traditional Latin American ingredients with a unique and contemporary culinary style. Madrid points out, though, that after more than a decade of doing this, it's not really *nuevo* anymore. Rather, he says, the cuisine is constantly evolving and growing.

"We try to be innovative," he says. "We keep moving the needle as we go."

Madrid, who was born in Northern Mexico, heads up a team of chefs from Colombia, Peru, Cuba, and Mexico. Their influence on a menu that includes a take on the Brazilian steakhouse experience, numerous ceviches, various *sofritos* (traditional aromatic sauces), and a number of creative entrées is clear.

A meal at *deseo* is not complete without ceviche, a traditional coastal Latin American dish — typically made with raw fish and other seafood marinated in citrus juices and spiced with chili peppers and other flavors. And at *deseo*, more than half a dozen ceviches lead the menu, offering tangy, fresh flavors with bursts of mild spice.

One signature dish not to be missed is The Millionaire Tacos, which combines lobster, ahi tuna, and Japanese hamachi served in handmade yucca root shells.

But capturing the essence of Latin cuisine goes beyond the preparation. For his seafood entrées, meat courses, soups, and salads, Madrid relies on traditional Latin ingredients, sourcing exotic spices and indigenous produce from specialty markets and trusted purveyors.

One of his favorites is an *aji amarillo* (yellow chili pepper). "It's so unique," Madrid says. This pepper adds sweetness and heat to dishes — and contributes a beautiful, distinctive yellow color as well. "People always want to know what the secret is."

Look for *queso anejo*, *queso fresco*, and *tetilla* cheeses; mangoes; pickled jalapeño; chimichurri; piquillo peppers; and chorizo on the menu as well. Mouth watering yet?

Well, here's one more thing you won't want to miss: the bread. Something you won't find just anywhere, *deseo's Pan de Bono* bread comes from a Colombian recipe — made with yucca flour, *queso fresco*, butter, honey, and sugar. For those with dietary restrictions, it's gluten-free. And for those with a love of food, it's simply glorious.

Of course, what better accompaniment is there for your fine feast than fine beverages? The restaurant's extensive South American wine list and creative cocktail menu offer the perfect complement to your evening meal.





A CHEF AT HOME

You'd think that after cooking all day for guests at *deseo*, Chef de Cuisine Roberto Madrid might just kick back and pick up takeout when at home. But the passionate chef enjoys cooking when he's off the clock too. Here's a look at his laid-back approach to food at home.

FRESH PROTEINS. "My cooking is very fresh," he says. "And I don't like to have a lot of leftovers." So, the chef purchases only fresh meat — and never freezes it.

SUPER SOUPS. "I love soups," Madrid says. One of his favorites is a *fideo* soup, which is a Mexican noodle soup. He toasts the pasta and uses his own homemade chicken stock to develop the richest flavors.

FRESH SALADS. Madrid always makes his own dressings, and keeps his salads light and fresh.

THE INSPIRATION

For Madrid, part of the fun of being a chef is creating new dishes and changing up the menu — though he's learned the hard way that some dishes simply can't be removed.

"The guests will tell you (when they have favorites)," he says with a smile. "So, some staples stay."

But Madrid and his team thrive on creativity, and they work to add new dishes to the *deseo* menu — and to refine those dishes — every year.

"Things don't happen perfectly the first time," he says. "We adjust. We readjust. Then, we present the dish to our guests and start getting their feedback." And they continually make small changes.

A lot of the inspiration for these new dishes comes from Madrid's travels.

"Last year, I went to Peru," he says. "They have more than 2,000 kinds of potatoes! I went to stores where they sell nothing but potatoes."

He also tried a variety of ceviches and tasted *tumbo* (a Peruvian fruit in the passion fruit family), and he was wowed by *choclo*, a large-kernel corn which, Madrid says, will end up on the *deseo* menu soon.

Then, in 2015, the chef ventured to Ensenada, Mexico.

"Out of the 100 best restaurants in the world, two are in Ensenada," he says. "I like to see what other chefs are doing — how they're handling products and new ideas."

THE PASSION

His travels are just one element of Madrid's passion — which is evident in the menu and in the way he pushes his team.

"Every year we learn something from the previous year. We always ask: How can we be better and smarter about the way we use the ingredients and present our meals?" he says. "We all have grown. You can see it in the evolution of this menu. You can see it in the presentation. You can see it in the application."

This passion and work ethic translate to an extremely knowledgeable group of chefs and servers.

"People come here and they see a lot of Spanish words on the menu," Madrid says. "And some people are intimidated by that. But there's a reason we have Spanish words on the menu: I want you to ask. We want to talk about our food."

If you like talking about food, you should consider where in the restaurant you dine. For a unique experience, grab a spot at *The Rail*. These, Madrid says, are the "best seats in the house."

With space for just 12 people, *The Rail* provides front-row seats to the open kitchen, giving guests a chance to watch the chefs at work, pick up a *Nuevo Latino* cooking tip, discuss their choices with informed staff, and maybe even snag a taste of something new.

But whether you sit at *The Rail* or in the dining room, one thing is certain: You'll find culinary adventure and a rich, robust menu that's unlike anything else in town. 🍷

