

LATINO LEADERS

The National Magazine of the Successful Hispanic American

**Rudy
Mulder**

Building the
Latino future



**Moctesuma
Esparza**

Producing change
in Hollywood



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Padilla**

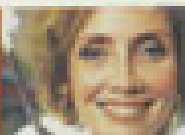
Young gun on the
LA City Council



Gloria Molina

The outspoken star of Latino
politics shines in California





Edda Martinez
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"I don't believe in coincidences," she says. "The ad wasn't even in the classifieds." She applied and was accepted. "I thought, 'What am I doing here?'" she remembers. "But I loved it. I ended up teaching for four years."

While there, her ability to sculpt and mold forms with cake drew the attention of her friends, who asked her to make cakes for special occasions. Before long, she was selling about twenty cakes a week out of her own kitchen. "I put my love into it. I didn't even notice time passing while I was working," she says. "Sometimes I would work until two or three in the morning making cakes, thousands of cakes." She expanded the kitchen into the basement and "sin querer queriendo, I had my business."

Rising fortunes

This unplanned business lasted for fifteen years, in which time her recipes became ever richer and her designs more elaborate. "I never said no to requests," says Edda. These requests have included a foot for a podiatrist, a shoe for a shoe manufacturer, and a cake to celebrate Emilio Estefan's recent Grammy award.

Her business grew gradually, but it almost came crashing to an end when, in 1991, an inspector arrived to tell her she could not continue working out of her house. Edda does not recall the specific complaint, which she says was lodged by the competition, but she clearly remembers her devastation. "I cried," she says. "I thought this was the end." Opening a formal business, she felt, was beyond her.

Her family was quick to rally around. "They had less fear than me. I realized that fear is part of the insecurity that paralyzes many people. Often, people end up doing nothing because of fear." With her family's support and a newfound strength, she turned the obstacle into a catalyst for the next step in her growth. "It was the point that everybody gets to in their lives," she says. "Either I triumph, or I stay here and don't do anything."

She triumphed. In early 1992, she reopened in a South Florida shop front, and within a few months sales had increased forty percent. Since then, two more stores have been



Sharing my intimacy

"He asked, 'What would you like as a wedding present,'" and I said I want a better mixer than the one I have. [After the wedding, I started opening the presents, and my husband said, 'What do you want that for? Let's see how many times in your life you use that.' Know how many mixers I've burned out since then?"]



Edda and Eduardo Martinez with children Carlos and Isay

Biography

- 1947 Born in Havana
- 1960 Family flees to Miami
- 1966 Marries Eduardo Martinez in New York and returns with him to Miami



Cake Design by Edda was founded in 1992 after a municipal inspector told Edda Martinez she could not sell cakes out of her kitchen. The company now has three locations in Miami and sells 600 cakes a week, from off the shelf to one of a kind. Their signature cake is Vanilla Rum, although many styles and flavors are available, all using natural ingredients.

"All my ideas, I translate into cakes."

opened with sales increasing about twenty-five percent annually. Today, Cake Designs by Edda has almost seventy employees and sells some 600 cakes a week.

The numbers are provided by Edda's son Carlos, one-time delivery boy ("We called him the President of Deliveries," jokes Edda), who studied marketing at the University of Miami and returned to take charge of business development. He is not the only family member to work at Cake Designs by Edda. Edda's daughter manages one shop and her daughter-in-law another. Even her husband took early retirement to help out. All this assistance leaves time for Edda to indulge in the creative side. "What I like most is making new designs," she says enthusiastically. "All my ideas, I translate into cakes."

No shortcuts

Meanwhile, she has to ensure that quality is maintained even as the business continues to grow. No fan of Betty Crocker, Edda shudders at the thought of cutting costs for the sake of

profit. "Many times people say to me, 'Hey, you could make more money if you used margarine,' and I say, 'No, I make the cakes with butter.' I don't want to imitate original ingredients. Maybe I save a few cents, but people would say, 'Hey, this isn't the same!' People prefer to pay a little bit more, but know they have quality."

They certainly do. Why else would *Martha Stewart Weddings* feature a full-page photo of one of her wedding cakes, a tribute that led to orders for her cakes from all over the country. Talk-show host Cristina Saralegui has long known about Edda. On the seventh anniversary special of her Univision program, she popped out of one of Edda's cakes, and this year, Edda herself was a guest on the program when the subject was "women who started businesses in their homes."

Such star treatment does not go to the head of the unassuming Martinez. Indeed, she says, it is rare that she has time to revel in how far she has come. Then she remembers a day some weeks before the interview when she was coming to the store, and saw her delivery trucks parked outside. "Normally, one truck is leaving just as another is coming in," she recounts. "But this time, there they were, all in a line. It's at times like this when you say, 'We've really grown.'"

"But I would have never imagined it." ■



1998 Opens second location

2000 Opens third location

1976 Teaches baking classes for Wilton Baking Products
Begins selling her own cakes

1991 Home business closed
down by inspector

1992 Reopens as Cake Designs
by Edda in South Miami

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President and Founder

Cake Designs by Edda
Miami, Florida

Baker, entrepreneur, and mother of three, Edda Martinez is still bemused by her success. "If someone had told me, when I was starting out in cooking classes, that I would have this business today, I would not have believed them," she says. This quiet modesty contrasts sharply with the lavish cakes that grace the shelves of her Miami boutique, Cake Designs by Edda. In the last ten years her extravagant towers of fondant, elegant pastels, and fanciful sculptures have won thousands of admiring customers, including the likes of Gloria Estefan and Hanson. Attention, now, is reaching a national scale. One of her cakes appeared in the pages of *Martha Stewart Weddings* and she herself on *The Cristina Show*.

The family mix

Edda Martinez was born in the tranquility of pre-revolution Havana in 1947. Her father was an accountant with a university teaching post and her mother a nationally recognized artist who had trained at the prestigious San Alejandro art college. Edda was drawn to cooking at a young age, but her first love was painting, and she dreamed of following in her mother's footsteps.

Dreams were postponed with the advent of the revolution. Edda recalls with a tinge of bitterness, "Havana was beautiful back then. We didn't want to move. We left everything behind, but we preferred doing that to staying." The family moved to Miami, where upheaval and penury were particularly hard on a young girl just entering adolescence. "We didn't have money for a psychologist," she says with an

infectious laugh suggesting the trauma was overcome.

Her childhood passion for cooking survived the flight into exile. On their first Christmas in the US her father told her she would receive only one present, so "choose what you really want."

"I chose a mixer," she recalls. "Everybody said 'You're dumb! Why didn't you choose a pair of shoes?' I said, 'No. I like to make cakes.'"

A year later, her father got a job at Georgia Tech, and the family relocated to Atlanta, a move that took Edda still further from her beloved Cuba. "I really wanted to go to college in Havana, and I knew I couldn't," she says sadly. "That really bothered me." Throughout her teenage years, she spent summers with an aunt in New York who encouraged her cooking. At nineteen, she married a young friend of the family, Eduardo Martinez, and the couple moved to Miami. Her two sons, Eduardo and Carlos, were born soon after, and artistic aspirations fell by the wayside as domestic life set in.

She continued, however, to delight in making cakes and, at twenty-nine, while pregnant with her daughter Suzy, she enrolled in classes with the baking products manufacturer, Wilton Cake. A company representative was impressed with her first efforts in the classroom and offered her a teaching position. Hesitating, she turned it down. "I'm a shy person," she admits.

Shyness gave way to necessity when hard economic times led her to look for work a few months later. Uncertain what she could do, she was flipping through the lifestyles section of the paper when she came across an ad for cooking instructors. It had been placed by the same Wilton representative.

She overcame
bureaucrats
and her
own fears.
Now she's
designing the
most beautiful
cakes in
Miami.