



words and photos: Matt O'Donohue

## spanish rosa

Walking into the modest store tucked away in the corner of a Wembley food court, you'd be forgiven for not expecting a lot from Maria-Rosa Galisteo's 'Spanish Flavours'. But then Rosa would be the first to tell you just how wrong you are. According to Rosa, Spanish Flavours is the store that was bound by destiny to exist.

**ARRIVING IN SYDNEY** as a migrant from Spain with her husband and daughter in 1981 with the better part of nothing, it was not an easy road.

"What we had was one hand on the front, and one hand on the back," as her husband aptly put the situation. Benefactors of an assisted migration scheme between the Spanish and Australian governments they arrived to a hostel in Sydney with a few words of English between them and not a lot else.

After four years of working in kitchens and hotels in Sydney to bring money in, Rosa and her now expanded family of four made the decision to move to Perth, where the cost of living was cheaper and a better life could be made.

It was in Perth that Rosa first experienced what she describes as a deliberate series of events

that led her to open her shop. A recurring dream, a missed opportunity to gain a full time job as a factory worker, and an injury that prevented her taking on other work. Rosa had already been sourcing food for her friends and family, taking orders for Jamon and chorizo from Sydney to distribute amongst a growing collection of people, eager for a taste of home. But it soon became apparent that backyard operations weren't going to be enough to satisfy the demand, and so she opened her small store in Wembley in 2002.

"It was just a small deli for us," Rosa says. "Us" referring to the majority of the Latin community of Perth. Her network expanded and the demand for products grew. "It's very hard to leave everything you know," says Rosa.

"Food is a source of comfort that can help to ease feelings of home sickness. I just tried to



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give people a taste from home."Providing for Perth's Latin community however, is just one part of the calling for Rosa. She also feels a great duty to help people from all walks of life. She does so with her long time friend Tony Flurscheim in the form of the La Paloma Foundation; a privately funded project to address social issues and provide services to

the community. This is the main reason Rosa puts so much effort into the store. "If I can help one person, then I've made a difference," is how she views things. And help she does. Even a heart attack not long after opening the store could not keep her from her work.

The store is very much about Rosa. You can walk in not knowing anything about the place

and instantly feel at home. She'll guide you towards ingredients for paella, croquettes, empanadas, and tortillas, all with proud Spanish aplomb.

Although perhaps don't go in if you're in a hurry. Speedy sales are not the order of the day with Rosa, and if you're not careful you'll quickly be drawn in by her captivating gaze and cheeky conversation. Her witty banter and jokes are the perfect foil for her other special gift, which she describes as the ability to "read people". She doesn't try to explain where it comes from or what it means, but from time to time she will look into someone's eyes and get a distinct feeling about them, that she's then able to share with them. "One man called me a witch!" she laughs.

Witch or not, the appeal of Rosa's goods is obvious. With just a small group of customers in the early days, word slowly spread amongst the wider food-loving community. Restaurants soon began to pick up on the fact that Rosa was bringing the real deal to Perth. "Authenticity is important," says Rosa. "You can't call a sausage chorizo if it's not chorizo. Ham is not Jamon."It's this commitment to honest quality that sees Rosa's food on the menu at the best restaurants in Perth. Star Anise, Pata Negra, Cantina, Little Creatures, Duende, and Bouchard - just to name a few - are big fans of her chorizo. Along with Jamon, manchego cheese, quince paste, longaniza, bacalhau (salt cod), and a great many other products, her wares are sought out by devotees across the city.

Not one to rest on her laurels, the next phase of the Spanish Flavours journey will be a move to an expanded store with a deli and café combined, serving breakfast from Latin nations like Mexico, Colombia, and of course Spain. Rosa's famous churros will finally have their time to shine and you can be sure that the new store will encompass a love of food, people, and culture, in the way that only Rosa can. ✨

Spanish Flavours is in the Cambridge Forum International Food Court, Shop 17/ 350 Cambridge St, Wembley 08 9284 1313