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www.promexico.gob.mx
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- The main avocado producer and exporter.
- The world’s leading exporter of organic coffee.
- The world’s main supplier of papaya and mango.
- Mexico exported close to 22 billion dollars in agrifood products in 2011.

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As trends in consumer habits become more generalized throughout the world, the global agri-food industry faces new challenges. An increasing number of consumers from different countries are becoming more responsible and careful about what they eat. They now search for food that is produced and processed without harmful substances and prefer fresh products that comply with international quality and safety standards.

Mexico has responded to these demands and has gone beyond by leveraging them to remain an important player in the global agri-food industry. The country’s climate diversity enables it to produce foods that are in high demand in international markets year-round, positioning Mexico as a competitive food producer. Now, with its trade openness strategy and infrastructure, it has earned its place as a leading food exporter.

Mexico has adapted to the challenges of today’s global food industry, by incorporating international quality, health and safety standards and exercising constant innovation to gain new spaces in the world’s most demanding markets. This issue of Negocios showcases several success stories of Mexican agri-food businesses that are forging a path into international trade, with products that evidence the country’s food diversity and the sector’s new strategies to gain a strong and healthy global position.

Welcome to Negocios!
Carlos Guzmán Bofill
CEO
ProMéxico
AUTOMOTIVE

Audi’s New Plant in Mexico

More than a dozen locations were looked at, compared and evaluated. Now the decision has been made: Audi will build its new plant on the American continent in San José Chiapa, in the state of Puebla.

The new plant marks a major milestone in the growth required in Audi’s strategy for 2020. Site conditions, logistics links, infrastructure, highly-skilled employees and living quality were the decisive criteria for the choice of location.

Audi’s first factory in the Americas aims to take advantage of low labor costs and an exemption from import duties in some regions to help it reach its target of selling 1 million cars in the US by 2018.

The automaker will build the successor to its current Audi Q5 SUV model at its Mexican plant, with a planned annual output of 150,000 units.

The construction of the new plant will start in 2013 and the facility is expected to start production in 2016. The new Puebla plant will strengthen VW’s operations in the central Mexican state, where Europe’s biggest carmaker already makes the Jetta compact sedan - its best-selling US model – and the new Beetle.

www.audi.com

FOOD

The Flavor of Innovation

McCormick will invest 800,000 usd in its fifth Technical Innovation Center worldwide, which will be located in the company’s plant in Cuautitlán, Estado de México.

The center will help develop new flavors for industrial clients, such as restaurants and snack and meat producers in Mexico and Latin America.

www.mccormick.com

ENERGY

MHI Awarded Contract by CFE

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd. (MHI), alongside Mitsubishi Corporation, has received a full turnkey order from Mexico’s Federal Electricity Commission (CFE) to build a 50-megawatt (MW) geothermal power generation plant at its Los Azufres III power station. The power plant is slated for completion in December 2014.

The Los Azufres III power station will be located in Michoacán and MHI will be responsible for engineering, manufacture, procurement and installation of major components, including the steam turbine and balance of plant (BOP), as well as civil engineering work.

Mexico ranks fourth in the world in terms of geothermal resources, and MHI has delivered five geothermal power plants to the Los Azufres power station and six units to the Cerro Prieto power station.

www.mhi.co.jp

Illuminant Business Strategy

With an investment of 28 million usd, Koito Manufacturing Co. Ltd. will establish a new production base in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, in order to acquire new business for automotive lighting equipment in the country.

With its new facility, Koito expects to better respond to the automobile market in Mexico and to raise productivity including supplemental production with its US subsidiary North American Lighting Inc. (NAL), which is expanding its production.

The new plant will have a production capacity of 1 million headlamps and 1 million signal lamps for four-wheel vehicles per year, and is scheduled to begin operations on November 2012.

www.koito.co.jp
IBM Opens Smarter Data Center in Mexico

IBM has opened a 30-million USD, 600-square meter Smarter Data Center (SDC) in Guadalajara, Jalisco. The new building, located in IBM’s technological campus, is IBM’s first SDC in Latin America, though its fourth data center in Mexico.

The SDC is part of a new generation of data centers designed to provide companies access to services such as predictive analytics and real time monitoring of operating performance, which can help reduce costs and energy savings.

The SDC comprises the largest chunk of a 70 million USD investment planned for IBM in Mexico in 2012. Other projects include new infrastructure for offering services, manufacturing projects and the expansion of operations into new cities.

The SDC will form part of IBM’s global data center network. Services offered from the new facility will include infrastructure as a service, hosting, virtualization of business applications, scalable cloud projects, business continuity and disaster recovery services, and outsourcing of IT services.

www.ibm.com

AUTOMOTIVE

A New Player in the Field

The market of single cylinder motorcycles for commercial fleets and recreational purposes in Mexico will have a new player upon closing 2012. Bajaj, the world’s fourth manufacturer of motorcycles, opened its first subassembly plant in Mexico, managed by Grupo Autofín, with an initial investment of 1.5 million USD.

The company estimates it will sell 7,500 units annually in the Mexican market - which is widely dominated by Italika, a Chinese-Korean brand which accounts for 60% of the market.
LOGISTICS

Growing Toward's Mexico's Seas

Wan Hai Lines has launched a new shipping line to the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, Mexico. The new service began operations with the Cape Negro vessel that arrived for the first time at said port on July 31, 2012. The Taiwanese firm has been providing commercial sea services for 47 years and is ranked 21st among the world’s top shipping lines. Wan Hai Lines recently opened a weekly service connecting Taiwan, China and Hong Kong with Mexico and the main ports in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The company currently operates in 40 countries and offers over 150 services. At the close of 2011 the company’s fleet had 87 vessels with a 194,593 TEU capacity.

The port of Lázaro Cárdenas offers 22 commercial sea services by 11 shipping lines that call at its facilities, connecting Asia to the western hemisphere. This ranks it as one of the leading ports in Latin America with state-of-the-art infrastructure to serve these vessels.

www.wanhai.com
www.puertolazarocardenas.com.mx

SECOND HOMES

World-class Residential Development for Seniors

Retirement is just a retreat from working activities and not the end of a person’s productive life. With this in mind, Mansiones Cruz del Mar presents a residential tourist development designed and customized to meet the needs and desires of older adults, based on the American Disability Association’s (ADA) criteria.

The complex has 39 apartments located in an exclusive zone of one of Mexico’s cleanest and most beautiful beach destinations, Huatulco, in the state of Oaxaca, the first sustainable tourist community certified by EarthCheck Gold in 2010.

Each unit is specially adapted – door size, handle design, switch height and other finishes that ensure the comfort of residents. The complex is equipped with spa, wellness center, community hall, chapel, reading room and even a small movie theater where residents can enjoy activities that promote communication and a sense of community.

Mansiones Cruz del Mar is a one-of-a-kind project in this Oaxaca paradise, which could become an important foreign-retiree community akin to San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato or Ajijic in Jalisco.

www.cruzdelmar.com.mx

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Undoubtedly, Mexico’s agricultural sector represents countless opportunities for the global private sector, which cannot be ignored. Mexico has many competitive advantages, such as its population size (112 million), its sizable domestic market and its strategic location between the largest consumer market in the world—the US—and the rest of Latin America.

The country is one of the largest suppliers of fruits and vegetables to the US market. It also has important trade agreements with Chile, Colombia, Japan and Peru, and its participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) may soon be consolidated.

Mexico has an important natural resource that is fundamental for agriculture—the sun. Furthermore, the floating exchange rate is a plus for the agribusiness sector as are government-sponsored marketing programs and contract agriculture in the case of corn, barley and other crops. An untapped treasure of idle agricultural land can also be found, particularly in Mexico’s southern tropical areas.

However, in order for Mexico’s agribusiness sector to reach its full potential, some challenges must be faced. For instance, those related to promoting a more productive use of the land. There are certain farmers’ organizations that need to adopt a more market-oriented approach and introduce available technologies into their production processes to improve their productivity.

The inefficient use and scarcity of water in certain regions also needs to be tackled in order to prevent production losses. Additionally, the production of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) has to be addressed to improve productivity in the countryside and strengthen Mexico’s food security.

Despite these challenges, the opportunities for this sector in Mexico are overwhelming. The country is a leading manufacturer of numerous products. In Sinaloa, there is modern and export-oriented vegetable production and corn yields are among the highest in the world. Pork production thrives in the southern region of Sonora. Livestock producers in Veracruz, Chiapas and Yucatán are internationally competitive and the Mexican poultry industry is exemplary in the modernization of its production processes. Greenhouse projects are booming in states like Jalisco, Sinaloa, Querétaro, Zacatecas and Guanajuato. The wine industry is developing quickly in Baja California and Querétaro. As luck would have it, the list of success stories is long.

The Mexican agriculture sector has mostly grown in leaps and bounds, be it as a result of an influx of financial resources, such as the Dama Building Program in the northeast part of Mexico, the expansion of agricultural financing exploded by the development of FIRA (Trust Funds Instituted for Agriculture by the Central Bank) or the so-called green revolution, among others.

Today, the project established between the Mexican government and the World Economic Forum (WEF), known as “A New Vision for Mexican Agriculture” is a reason to be optimistic. This project was initiated by 26 global firms and Mexican agribusiness companies and will focus on improving sustainability and productivity related to five priority commodities: grains (corn, sorghum and wheat); faba, coffee and cocoa; fruits and vegetables; and oilseeds (sunflower, soy, palm and cotton).

There are particular areas that should be highlighted as key opportunities for this sector in Mexico. Projects that require high intensity and a highly-qualified workforce should consider production in Mexico. Greenhouse, innovative packaging and food convenience projects are also areas with room for growth. Production in tropical areas, in the case of fruits and vegetables, can take advantage of idle land utilization and establish a competitive edge. With respect to agricultural services and inputs there is demand for bio-fertilizer projects and innovative technical services.

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During the G20 summit hosted by Mexico, the issue of food security became a central topic of discussion. It was agreed that the country can play an important role in ensuring global food security in the future by increasing its own capacity for productivity. Mexico can be transformed into an agricultural powerhouse. All that is needed is a creative vision, the willingness to embrace change, a holistic effort by all the participants towards modernization, and the recognition of the strategic importance of Mexican agriculture.

*Chairman of the Agribusiness and Food Industry Committee, American Chamber of Commerce, Mexico
Mexican Agribusiness Takes Root in Japan

The quality of Mexican food products wins recognition in one of the world’s most demanding markets: Japan.

BY R. ISAÍG ALCÁRD DE VEGA*

Mexican producers are committed to consumer health and customer satisfaction. Mexican firms possess cutting-edge technology and meet the strictest food quality and hygiene controls, including international standards and norms such as EurepGAP (Good Agricultural Practices), Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and the Japanese Agricultural Standard (JAS), as well as the regulations set out by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), among many others. Meanwhile, Mexican firms have the capacity to adapt their products to different markets. That is one of the reasons why Mexican products are world-renowned.

Mexican pork, fish and seafood have been served to Japanese consumers for over 30 years. Recently, the drinks and food that Mexico exports to Japan have diversified. An increasing number of Mexican food products with high added value are entering the Japanese market. They include agave syrup, avocado oil, fruit juices, frozen fruit and vegetables, ready-to-use meat products such as skewers, drinks like table wines, sparkling wines, 100% agave tequilas and handmade beers.

SuKarne (Grupo Viz), mainly dedicated to beef production, and Grupo Altex, a processor of frozen food and concentrates, have eliminated iodized salt from products in order to enter this demanding market, which bans the import of products containing iodine.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA), in 2011 Mexican agribusiness exports totaled 117 billion USD. In 2012, the figures up to February showed Mexican exports in the sector reached 1.85 billion USD. Exports to Japan in this sector were 430 million USD during 2011 and to February 2012 amounted to 37 million USD. Mexican products with a high share of Japanese imports include kabocha squash (75%), Persian lime (93%), avocado (90%) and Honeydew melon (74%). In addition, Mexico has positioned itself within the top five countries that provide beef and pork to Japan.

Mexico is one of the leading countries in food industry sales, meaning it meets a range of requirements, not only in terms of health certification but also packaging, freshness and safety. The agribusiness industry comprises 10 main export products (malt beer, fresh tomatoes, avocados, peppers, sugar, tequila, cattle products, unroasted coffee, baked goods and fresh raspberries), which have a total value of 5.6 billion USD. During the first half of 2012, these products were mainly exported to the US, Canada and Japan.

Trade with Japan is of utmost importance to Mexico. In 2011 alone, Japan was the second largest destination of Mexican processed food exports, which totaled 390 million USD. In terms of investment, from 2002 to 2011, Japan was the fourth largest investor in Mexico’s processed food industry, by investing 189.2 million USD.

Within the processed food subsector, sauce preparations were one of the most notable worldwide. These exports were mainly concentrated in Asia and specifically in Japan. The processed food industry is a priority sector in Mexico, representing 22.7% of manufacturing output and employing 815,229 people.

It is worth noting that through the Economic Partnership Agreement between Japan and Mexico, Mexican food and drinks can be imported to Japan with a preferential rate and, in some cases, the products are duty free. The agreement also covers the establishment of quotas on imports of several products.

In short, Mexican products are increasingly valued by consumers in the most demanding markets, and Japan can surely attest to that fact.

*Trade Commissioner at ProMéxico’s Representative Office in Tokyo, Japan.
The growth of Mexico’s food and agriculture sector has been largely determined by the country’s economic development model. Membership of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986 and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 rendered Mexico’s food and agriculture exports to the United States more competitive. This economic liberalization implied the elimination of multiple exchange and differentiated rates, quantitative trade restrictions and taxes on exports. In the absence of these controls on foreign trade, official prices and subsidies were eliminated and government intervention that had theretofore distorted relative prices was all but phased out. By removing the anti-agriculture bias in its macroeconomic policy, Mexico laid the foundations for a new rural development policy.

The transition from a closed economy, i.e. an economy in which prices are regulated throughout the entire production system, from producers to agribusiness and the final consumer, to a market economy that has been challenging for Mexico’s agriculture sector. However, there are opportunities to be had. Mexico has an enormous diversity and abundance of natural resources, which represent a major source of potential revenue and that can be utilized to meet increasing demand by the primary sector. Likewise, greater access to government funding has reactivated the agriculture sector with the population as a whole reaping the benefits.

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Boasting 197.8 million hectares of territory —16% of which is arable land, 61% pastureland and 23% forest and jungle— and 11,500 kilometers of coastline, Mexico not only has ideal conditions for a wide range of agricultural, livestock, forestry and fishing activities, but also enjoys an unparalleled geographical location, making investment in this sector highly appealing. Also, its weather conditions are as diverse as its soil systems —28.3% of the country is dry, 27.7% warm and 33.2% temperate —deserving the designation of a climate zone that is better balanced than any other in the world.

Aside from its undeniable social importance, the food and agriculture sector accounts for 10.9% of Mexico’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), divided among the primary sector (52.3%) and the food and beverage industry (47.7%). This economic sector is highly globalized, with multinationals investing in equipment and production processes, particularly in the food industry, and the larger Mexican companies purchasing new technologies on the international market, resulting in stronger ties with foreign suppliers.

According to figures from Mexico’s Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA), food and agriculture exports were valued at over 12.5 billion USD in the first half of 2012, which translates into an increase of 4.31% compared to the same period of 2011. Affordable production costs constitute yet another competitive edge, since they allow companies to stick to their strategies without sacrificing quality. Additionally, Mexico has the capacity to supply products like mangoes, strawberries and other berries all year round to markets where these are only available seasonally.

Mexico is also well positioned to meet growing demand for organic products. Not only is it the world’s leading exporter of organic coffee and a major exporter of similar crops but also, according to data furnished by ProMéxico, in 2011 Mexico was rated among the top 20 countries in the world in terms of sales of organic food products.

As a competitive manufacturer capable of supplying a wide range of products to global markets, Mexico’s food and agriculture sector has attracted substantial foreign direct investment and looks set to harvest the fruits of economic liberalization well into the future.

* Professor and researcher in the Political and Social Sciences Faculty, National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)
Chiapas-grown Organic Coffee Brews Expansion Plan

Chiapas is the world’s largest exporter of organic coffee, thanks to one pioneering organization that has been backing small producers for 20 years and that is now ready to conquer coffee lovers the world over.

by Omar Magaña

Photos courtesy of Café Biomaya

THE ORGANIC BOOM

Chiapas is the world’s leading exporter of organic coffee. The state produces some 274,800 sacks of beans a year, 180,000 of which end up on export markets.

Organic coffee is generally grown in mountainous areas, at medium-high (601 to 900 meters above sea level) and high elevations (over 901 meters above sea level). In Chiapas, which has 45,763 hectares of coffee plantations, the mixed farming system traditionally used by indigenous communities predominates. Basically, this means the coffee plants are grown alongside other crops that provide them with shade and that help prevent soil depletion.

Around 25,000 farmers, grouped into 23 organizations, are engaged in the production of organic coffee in Chiapas. According to the 2007–2012 Institutional Program of the Commission for the Development and Promotion of Chiapas Coffee compiled by the Indigenous Federation of Chiapas (FIECH), a federation that represents some 5,000 small coffee producers in Chiapas. The bulk of its 35,000 members –85%—belong to the Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Mame, Chuj and Zoque communities who farm mainly small plots of land of up to five hectares.

Yet ground, roasted coffee, its product with the greatest added value, has had to adjust to cost conditions imposed by international markets. “The studies we’ve conducted reveal that foreign customers prefer to purchase coffee beans, because it’s cheaper for them to grind it in situ,” says Flores Miguel.

FIECH has received state and federal financing for the production of organic fertilizer and the setting up of nurseries and processing plants, where the dry parchment coffee is cleaned and classified for storage. Trailers to transport the beans from community collection centers to the main storage facility in Chiapa de Corzo, a roasting plant and a savings and loans cooperative for farmers complete the infrastructure that has given farmers control of their livelihoods and enabled them to obtain a fair price for their coffee.

It is this same fair trade philosophy that has given FIECH a firm foothold on the global market for organic coffee, where the rich aroma of the Biomaya blend is attracting a new following of socially and environmentally conscious coffee lovers.

www.cafebiomaya.com.mx

Positioning Biomaya on foreign markets would imply a huge step forward in terms of consolidating the production of FIECH members –from those who harvest the beans in the Sierra Madre de Chiapas to those involved in distribution activities– under a fair trade mechanism that cuts out the intermediary.
Persian Lime, KEEPING MEXICAN TEQUILA AND BEER TART COMPANY

Tequila and beer are two Mexican products that are inconceivable without a twist of Persian lime, a combination that has served Inverafrut well on export markets.

Mexico is famous worldwide for its beer and tequila, but these flagship products go hand-in-hand with another emblematic Mexican product: the Persian lime. In restaurants, bars and hotels, it is virtually an unwritten rule that both be served with this green, acidic fruit.

“Tequila and beer are anchor products for the introduction of the Persian lime, which is a seedless variety. This has worked in our favor, not to mention differentiating us from competitors selling other types of lime,” says Luis Omar Urrutia, general manager of Inverafrut, a Mexican company that has been exporting Persian lime since 2007.

“Unlike key lime, which is sweet, Persian lime is acidic and seedless. It is widely used in cooking and cocktail-making in general,” says Urrutia.

Based in the state of Veracruz, one of Mexico’s major tropical fruit producing regions, Inverafrut began exporting Manila mango to Europe in 2002 and then Cayenne pineapple, Campeche watermelon and Maradol papaya to Spain, Switzerland and Germany in 2004. Today it exports exclusively Persian lime, mainly to the US, where there is demand all year round.

“We’re a small company, but with big plans. Of the 80 packaging companies operating in Veracruz, we are among the 15 handling the highest volumes. Our growth prospects are extremely solid compared to some of our competitors. In the medium term, I am confident we can expand the company to the point where we are handling some 1,000 tons a week,” says Urrutia.

Inverafrut currently exports 400 tons of Persian lime a week in 40-, 10- and 1-pound presentations under the Alekein, Vivex and Cami Limes brand names, while its annual exports are valued at approximately 1.9 million USD.

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Inverafrut already sells its product directly in the US via a retail distributor in McAllen, Texas, but expects to obtain Prima certification that will enable it to retail Persian lime on the US market as a whole.

“This is definitely a dream come true and not a long-term one, but one we are actually living thanks to alliances with foreign companies and the popularity of Persian lime on the various markets we export to.”

Mexico produces 1.9 million tons of lime a year, making it the world’s second-largest producer and largest exporter, while the US is the world’s largest importer. Inverafrut has twisted this logic to its advantage, supplying the US market with tart Persian lime all year round.

“In 2012, we have registered considerable growth, but over the coming years we plan to double our installed capacity. In the medium term, say, five years from now, we are aiming for a 100% increase in exports.”

Something Inverafrut plans to achieve by expanding its distribution network to supermarket chains and wholesalers in the US, and promoting direct sales to the final consumer.

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HEALTH, IN THE SIGHTS OF TANGIBLE NOUS

One of this Mexican company’s most recent hits is a drink that helps the human body recover from a hangover.

BY MARÍA SÁIL
PHOTO COURTESY OF TANGIBLE NOUS

Research and development of new technologies in food production are Tangible Nous’ growth pillars, a Mexican company that will launch a drink to lessen the effects of alcohol in the liver by October 2012.

According to Aniceto González Rodríguez, director of the San Luis Potosí-based company, this producer’s main concern is to ensure its formulae are healthy for consumers.

Therefore, Tangible Nous is 100% focused on research, development, technology and innovation in foodstuffs. “This area allows us to have products that were once unimaginable. We will be launching a drink to facilitate digestion, lessen the effects of alcohol and prevent hangovers. We also offer low-calorie candy and are currently working on fats with low saturated oil to serve as fillings for chocolates,” says González.

Tangible Nous was founded in 1998. It now employs 80 people and has a catalog of over 42 products and a clientele of more than 250. The company currently sells its products in Mexico and exports to Central and South America and, eventually, South Africa. Its working premises are distributed throughout three facilities in San Luis Potosí, one of which is on the campus of the Tecnológico de Monterrey (ITESM), serving as a liaison office with the academic sector.

To develop the technologies used in the creation of its products, Tangible Nous works together with different government offices, private businesses and universities of academic excellence.

Its products are used as supplies for chocolate, cheese and meat, as well as other agri-food products. “It has a physical and chemical function, controlling water activity, forming a matrix of fats so that these don’t rise to the surface, making the product thermally resistant and, finally, providing very specific solutions for each client. We now have between 8 and 10 products that will be focused directly on the consumer,” says González.

Tangible Nous operates through two subsidiaries: Panadina, responsible for research processes, and Gourmetec, in charge of bringing the products to market.

Panadina, which means ‘dynamic world,’ was founded in the 1990s. “Things were going well for us then but we didn’t do research, and if you don’t investigate you run the risk of being obsolete in a short space of time. Then I founded Panadina and I linked up with different research groups to become specialized in what we now do,” González explains.

With a set of different technologies, the company thus started to create products that were not of a generic nature or measured by quantity.

To get out of that circle, we had to invent and develop products that performed very different functions. That’s why we created Gourmetec, whose mission is to bring development and innovation directly to the consumer. For example, we made a vegetable-based steak, with zero cholesterol, zero fat and half the calories of meat,” González adds.

A few weeks ago Gourmetec unveiled Extender, an egg substitute. Five kilos of Extender is the equivalent of 700 eggs—approximately 40 kilos of liquid egg. The product has the properties of an egg: the same flavor, color, density and texture, but is free of cholesterol and fat and has 70% less calories. It doesn’t need refrigerating, is easy to prepare and, instead of expiring after 30 days, it has a shelf life of up to one year.

“We want to offer the domestic and international markets products that are identical to those they are consuming, so that instead of feeling that their habits are changing, people think that it is only the presentation of what they are eating that is changing. The idea is that they know that its content is different and that the product isn’t only healthy, but it can also be enjoyed. Food should always be enjoyed and, above all, it should be nourishing,” González explains.

Tangible Nous started out as a business-to-business company, but with the passing of time and the development of its own technologies and applications, they decided to take their products directly to the consumer. “The global trend is to have healthier food and not to increase the number of indulgent products. Initially we distributed other products, but we slowly stopped that to focus on creating products that are identical to those they are consuming, so that instead of feeling that their habits are changing, people think that it is only the presentation of what they are eating that is changing. The idea is that they know that its content is different and that the product isn’t only healthy, but it can also be enjoyed. Food should always be enjoyed and, above all, it should be nourishing,” González explains.

Tangible Nous plans to diversify the products it offers and look for technological links to expand its market in the medium term. In the long term, it aims to consolidate itself as a company that is one of a kind, with research and technology, which is especially focused on highly nutritious and accessible products.

“We’re still expecting much, much more. We give a lot of thought to what we are doing and have seen how consumers have placed their trust in what we are creating, which shows a genuine liking and preference for our products,” González concludes.

www.panadina.com.mx
www.gourmetec.com.mx
Mattera Hardwood Flooring, registered in Mexico as Ingeniería de Madera de México, has its head office in Yucatán and belongs to Holding Ciclo Corporativo. Mattera is engaged in the production of high-value manufacturing of engineered wood flooring, with two plants in Mexico, one in the city of Lerma, Campeche, and the other in Uman, Yucatán.

Although the Campeche plant was acquired in 2010 and the Uman plant in late 2013, Mattera started full production in 2011, dedicating its first two years to renovating the facilities, purchasing machinery and developing the product.

The company has produced and exported over 200,000 square meters of flooring to date –approximately 90 shipping containers– mainly to the US, Canada and Australia. According to the company’s own estimations, it plans to export 100 containers by the end of 2012.

In the medium term, Mattera aims to gain ground in the US market with a strategy that favors segmentation as it uses its current product lines to focus on a different type of client: residential projects, architects, decorators, large department stores and corporate offices.

Furthermore, Mattera is looking to break new boundaries. “The closer we are, the more competitive we become. However, we also want to build a cluster of clients in Central and South America and we are actually starting to look into those markets that are full of opportunities,” concludes Vila.

www.mattera.mx

MAYAN WOOD FOR THE WORLD

With a young wood that grows in favorable conditions, Mattera Hardwood Flooring is a company that breaks boundaries with the promise of high quality for the export market.

Mattera Hardwood Flooring is a company that breaks boundaries with the promise of high quality for the export market.

## MAYAN MYSTIQUE

An additional and unique selling point for the company is the mystique that surrounds the Mayan region, so 2012 has been a year of free advertising for Mattera. The truth is that the buzz on the Mayas, the region’s exuberant vegetation, tourism and ideal business environment offer the perfect combination that Mattera’s potential clients are invited to discover the Mérida and Campeche plants.

“Clients try Yucatan cuisine, and seafood from Campeche, and leave enthralled by the region’s serenity and culture. I can safely say that 95% of our potential clients who come to visit us, have ended up placing an order,” Vila adds.

In these Mayan surroundings, Mattera also places a great deal of emphasis on its human capital and support for the local economy. The company generates more than 250 direct jobs, as well as a large number of indirect ones since it purchases most of its raw materials locally.

This is the case with Melina, a type of wood used in the center of flooring, which originates from a plantation located in Esquice, Campeche. This is also the case for tropical woods Tzalam and Machiche, which are only found in this region.

Mattera is about to launch both species in the foreign market based on their unique features that offer a competitive advantage. “Wood knows no nationality; it is really a matter of tastes, colors and shades. Yet something that is really pleasing about Tzalam is that it looks like the walnut species, which is the most expensive and the most preferred in the US. Tzalam is even called the Caribbean Walnut. On the other hand, Machiche has reddish hues and is a very hard, eye-catching wood. Both are very common in Mexico, and we are trying to make them better known in the US,” says Vila.

## STEPPING HARD

It is estimated that the wood flooring industry in the US will close 2012 with a value of around 1.5 billion USD, which is equal to more than 800 million square feet of flooring a year. According to industry estimates, out of this total, engineered wood flooring makes up 51% and solid wooden flooring makes up 49%. These figures are significant since engineered wood flooring comprised only 30% of the market, just 10 years ago.

Today the US imports around 50% of the engineered wood flooring and solid flooring that it consumes.

Vila says that, in 2011, the International Trade Commission of the US Senate imposed countervailing duties on Chinese products, opening the door for Mexican wood products to easily enter the US market.

“All of this has helped us make sure the US looks south of the border. We work out of a strategic location just 30 minutes from the Yucatan port of Progress with shipping connections to Florida and Houston, which gives us a competitive edge when compared with the six to eight weeks it takes to import from countries such as China,” adds Vila.

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LA MODERNA:
Traditional in Mexico,
Innovative in the US

This legendary pasta producer, founded in the city of Toluca, Estado de México, in 1920, has adapted perfectly to the changing times. It is a national leader and an enterprising explorer of new markets abroad. It takes no rest in its eagerness to grow and become a point of reference in the American market.

BY OMAR MAGAÑA
PHOTOS COURTESY OF LA MODERNA

La Moderna is an established institution within the pasta market in Mexico although it has also invested 25 years in consolidating its position in the foreign market, particularly in the US. So far, these efforts have yielded positive results.

Francisco Usobiaga, the company's director of foreign trade, remembers that in 1989, when La Moderna was taking its first steps in the world's markets, he usually sent out 12 trailers of pasta (the company's stellar product) and other wheat products every month. "At that time, we thought of abandoning exports because selling 12 trailers is a very small amount; it means sales of 300,000 usd a year. Today, we are exporting an average of 250 trailers a month,” says Usobiaga.

La Moderna's exports division, which accounts for between 15% and 20% of the company's gross revenue, has placed particular emphasis on the US, while still being present in smaller markets in the Americas such as the Caribbean islands, Central America and Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela and Colombia in South America.

Since the beginning of this export mission, company executives were aware of the enormous scope that awaited them in the US market among the population with Mexican origin who, despite being abroad, has remained loyal to the brands it is familiar with. Soon enough, these same company executives realized they would also have to gain ground in the non-Hispanic market among those who consume Italian style pasta.

“This is a brand of days gone by: It causes nostalgia among Mexicans who find themselves living abroad and that's why we thought about putting these products within their grasp,” says Esteban Abascal, exports manager of the company.

After the disappointments of its first forays, Grupo La Moderna consolidated its distribution networks to guarantee buyers that they could reach an Anglo-Saxon public that traditionally looks for European-style cuisine—such as spaghetti, rigatoni, penne rigate, fetucini, linguine and cut ziti—as well as the Hispanic market.

"I dare say we have captured almost 50% of the Hispanic market, but La Moderna has opportunities in other sectors, and that's what the 1 pound market was born out of with our Allegro and Anatina product lines,” Abascal explains.

Seven ounce (198 grams) packets of La Moderna and La Perla brands are thus aimed at Mexican and Hispanic consumers, whereas 1 pound (454 grams) packets of Allegro, Anatina and, to a certain extent, Giovanni Primo, are aimed at Anglo-Saxon consumers. Furthermore, the company has agreements with institutions that require large volumes of foodstuffs, and it sells 20 pound bags of its Giovanni Primo line to them.

"The 1 pound market has been a real challenge for La Moderna because it doesn't only compete with companies from the US but also with Italian and Turkish firms, who are masters in the art of making pasta,” says Abascal.

The creation of brands for the non-Hispanic market has led to the production of Italian pasta shapes, a task the head office has assigned to a plant it set up in the city of Mexicali, Baja California, in 2010. This production plant has the newest and most sophisticated machinery in the group.

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The most recent innovation thought up for this market niche is whole wheat pasta with a higher content of fiber and vitamins and lower sodium. This product is intended for a lesser consumption sector that La Moderna could not miss out on: "In the US, there is a significant trend towards healthy and balanced eating," says Abascal.

While during the 1980s it seemed difficult to stay alive in a competitive market such as the US, it is now difficult to escape from an inertia that demands more of the company, to the point that La Moderna has considered—and made public—the idea of setting up a plant in the US to supply consumers directly with what has been earned in the past quarter of a century. In January 2012, Gabriel Bello, the company’s director of finance, told the Mexican newspaper Excésior that La Moderna would invest 30 million usd in developing this production complex, which could begin operations in the first quarter of 2013.

The Mexicali plant would thus continue supplying the US’ west coast and the new American plant would supply the center and east coast, according to Abascal’s projections. The company’s other plants in Toluca, Estado de México; Guadalajara, Jalisco; Saltillo, Coahuila and Gómez Palacio, Durango, have enough installed capacity to attend to the domestic market and support the export market as demand for its products increases on other shores.

Although pasta is the company’s main business—closing 2011 with sales of 220,000 tons—other products are sold in both the domestic and US markets, such as flour, biscuits, instant soups and cooking dough, all prepared from the same raw material that La Moderna has been using since its creation. Mexican wheat.

"Having this kind of wheat and bringing it to homes in different parts of the world has been a feat for the company,” says Abascal, who concludes that La Moderna faces the challenge of achieving greater penetration throughout the continent before planning to explore other destinations such as Asia.

What is certain is that, so far, La Moderna is heading in the right direction to reach its objectives in the very near future.

www.lamoderna.com.mx

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Fruit and vegetable sales company eLuinni was founded on three clear ideas: doing business in creating partnerships; everyone involved in such a partnership must share the benefits equally; and international markets are within reach, you just have to develop the right strategies and offer products that generate surprise. Its General Director, Edgar Fuentes, has the ideas, experience and knowledge to navigate and move ahead in foreign trade.

“After 20 years of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), I arrived at the conclusion that, in foreign trade, any market is reachable; the problem is having a supplier base that ensures you have the provisions necessary and that you fulfill all requirements,” Fuentes says. With this conviction in mind, eLuinni started to break into the US and Europe – Germany and France being its main markets – with Individually Quick Frozen (IQF) Mexican agricultural produce and aseptic, pasteurized pulp fresh for up to 18 months.

“As there is real competition between trading companies selling IQF products, eLuinni has chosen to diversify. It exports strawberries to the US by taking advantage of the distribution channels used by its partner in the country, Los Kitos. Entry into the European market has been achieved with tropical fruits – in particular ataulfo mango – which has Mexican designation of origin and organoleptic qualities, giving it an advantage over India, which has the largest mango production in the world.

“We know that, to compete and stay in the market, we need innovative products,” Fuentes highlights. Ataulfo, making the difference

The markets are definitely out there, the question is how to significantly reach them.

Mexico has found its stellar product in ataulfo mango, seizing the opportunity to form a unique market niche. Ataulfo is an eminently Mexican variety that grows along the Pacific Coast – from Chiapas to Sinaloa – with features that differentiate it from varieties in India and other Asian countries – gold, thin peeled and pulp with a non-fibrous texture –, which have gained preference in demanding markets such as the US, where the fruit is known as the champagne mango.

As well as selling IQF ataulfo mango pulp, Edgar Fuentes has come up with a “pop” form for the product: whole frozen fruit with pit, as a popsicle. Once taken out of the freezer and eaten, it loses its frozen state until it takes its natural form: sweet, fresh, without bacteria-free, with a longer lifespan. As well as launching a new mango popsicle, eLuinni will start intensive pasteurized pulp production using ohmic heating in 2013. Italian machinery is already installed and testing will soon be carried out so that the company can provide supermarkets with pulp and pieces of fruit that have very similar characteristics to fresh fruit, but are bacteria-free, with a longer lifespan.

“The wealth of Mexican field produce is enormous. Historically, we have seen that the problem with growers is trade. eLuinni wants to work as a detonator for trade to stop being a problem for growers. We are a trader with our own brand, but we generate great benefit for the grower and everyone who participates in the company. We also make sure there are not many intermediaries in the distribution network so that everyone involved can benefit,” concludes Edgar Fuentes.

ELUINNI APPLIES ITS KNOW-HOW TO IDENTIFY MARKETS THAT CAN ENTER WITH A WIDE-RANGING PROPOSITION, WHETHER WITH FRESH OR IQF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES, INNOVATIVE PULP PROCESSES OR SUB-PRODUCTS – FOR EXAMPLE, A FROZEN ATAULFO MANGO POPSICLE THAT WILL SOON BE IN CIRCULATION.
Mexican Vanilla FOR AMERICAN HOMES

In November 2012, the company Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ will begin to distribute a kit with three presentations of top-quality Mexican vanilla in the US.

Vanilla is perhaps one of the most recognizable aromas worldwide. Mexico is the designation of origin of the vanilla pod and the country’s harvests are listed as the best in the world. In November 2012, Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ will distribute a pack that includes three presentation forms –pod, powder and extract– of the plant in the US, ready to be used in the preparation of countless dishes.

Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ started out activities in July 2010, and from that day on it has grown at an incredible pace. Its headquarter is in Apatzingán de Guerrero, Puebla, from where the company produces and sells products containing vanilla and raspberry. Agrorgánicos has business connections with a number of companies in Mexico City, the Bajío region and, particularly, Cancún. Just two years on from its beginnings, the firm’s sales average 30,000 USD a month, all under fair trade guidelines and counting restaurants, chefs, bakers, confectioners and gourmet stores among its clients.

According to General Manager Bertín Pintle Zepeda, the company’s strength lies in the quality of its vanilla, its stellar product. “In 2007, we began conducting field research on vanilla, the product’s characteristics and the market and production methods. Today, we prepare vanilla powder and extract. We conducted studies in the US to get to know consumers’ needs and, as a result, packs with three presentations of our vanilla will be on sale in November 2012, one as powder, one as extract, and the other as whole pods,” says Pintle Zepeda.

One of the main challenges faced by Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ is that imitation vanilla is available in the American market at a much lower price and, although of lower quality, consumers are used to consuming it.

“We’ll try to promote a change of culture. We want people to be encouraged to buy quality vanilla that, despite higher cost, increases product quality substantially. We are inviting people to use natural vanilla, to try natural vanilla. That’s where the idea of making our products accessible to those who cook at home comes from,” explains Pintle Zepeda.

The founder of Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ thinks that one of the prime advantages that Mexico offers the agri-food industry is its variety of climates, which allows for the growth of plants such as vanilla and avocado and cacao trees.

Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ rapidly developed into an export industry. “The idea arose when I realized that the vast majority of entrepreneurs I knew in Mexico were involved in imports. They find it very easy to bring products and sell them in Mexico. I felt the need to do something different. I made a decision and went for exports and, once I had seen that exportable products were few and far between, I realized that there was a real need for agricultural products as well,” says Pintle Zepeda.

Research was initially carried out, mainly in Germany and the US –countries where Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ currently exports to–, which allowed the company to identify a significant niche for products such as Mexican vanilla.

“The firm started selling the product without any add-one, or rather, with no added value. The results weren’t encouraging at first because the product had to be sold at a very low price, which didn’t bring extra money in for it. As we went on, the needs of the market became evident. We changed our product substantially, which stopped being a bulk product and became a retail product, with added value and, of course, competitive price and quality,” says Pintle Zepeda.

Zepeda explains that the niche in the market was focused on industry, on large consumers, overlooking the final consumer. “This was the big change that was made, as well as selling to industry; our product’s key strength is that it is of excellent quality. The volume of vanilla production in Mexico might be lower than in places like Madagascar, where it is produced in huge quantities, but its quality in those places isn’t better than Mexican vanilla. In fact, it doesn’t even come close. By making the most of the quality that exists in Mexico, we’ve gotten closer to the niche where quality is in high demand. We’re talking about restaurant owners, chefs, bakers, confectioners and the gourmet store sector,” Pintle Zepeda says.

Fair trade is also of prime importance in the development of the company. “Something that we’ve focused on is the economic situation of the grower. We analyzed why they stop production and realized that it’s because they get hit by crushing prices. These prices aren’t fair. As far as we’re concerned, it isn’t about seeing how much you can squeeze out of your counterpart, in this case the grower. We want to guarantee that all produce is sold. Actually, one of the situations that demotivates growers is when they have their produce but no one is buying it,” Pintle Zepeda explains.

Artificial vanilla costs about 20% of the value of natural vanilla. One piece of good news for Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ and vanilla producers in Mexico is that official regulation was passed in July 2012 for vanilla extract labeling in the country. “This benefits us since people can now decide whether they want artificial or natural vanilla. Before this regulation was passed, you would find artificial vanilla and natural vanilla extract sold as if they were the same thing, when it isn’t the case. Now we realize that people don’t know which to buy because they don’t know the difference. But we do; natural vanilla just offers better taste, it also yields more,” Pintle Zepeda explains.

Although Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ is focused on exports, this new regulation opens a window of opportunity for the company to gain ground in the domestic market as well. “At the moment we aren’t conducting studies for the launch of a similar product to the one we will be distributing in the US. But perhaps soon we will be,” concludes Pintle Zepeda.

The founder of Agrorgánicos Tropicales PZ thinks that one of the prime advantages that Mexico offers the agri-food industry is its variety of climates, which allows for the growth of plants such as vanilla and avocado and cacao trees.

By María Apolín PROTECH archive

www.agrorganicosistropicalespz.com
Syngenta maintains its focus on Mexico, a country that has everything to gain in food security and with which the company shares a longstanding relationship of support, trust and opportunities.

For the last 80 years, Swiss company Syngenta has been offering technology, innovation and solutions to Mexican agriculture. The firm is the main supplier of materials to Mexican agriculture, excluding fertilizers, and as a testament to its leadership, its manufacturing site in San Luis Potosí was awarded a Prime for Excellence by the Ministry of Labor (STPS) for its standards in security, environment and health.

The interest and confidence that Mexico inspires in Syngenta has led the company to establish a new Experimental Center in Culiacán, Sinaloa – an area which contended with countries such as Israel, Brazil, Spain and South Africa to become the center's base, where world-class technology is imported so that Mexico can export high-quality agricultural products.

Pablo Casabianca, Corporate Affairs Manager for Syngenta remarks, “Mexico has gained an international reputation as one of the finest producers of chili peppers and tomatoes, among many other products. We have seed technology and crop management for greenhouse and open field production that we use in Mexican agriculture to help them sell their products to international markets such as Europe, Japan, Russia and the US. As the first link in the food chain, Syngenta promotes the export of high-value-added products.”

Due to Mexico’s potential on production and sustainability, Syngenta performed a global “Crop Demonstration Day” event (Demo Day) in Mexico City to present its products and integrated solutions per each crop. Key stakeholders, international customers, media and government representatives interested in productive, sustainable and economic development attended the event held in August 2012. All these actions refer to the company’s commitment to use sustainable methods with Mexican farmers.

**GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND LOCAL ACTIONS**

Agriculture is facing significant challenges on a global scale. For example, Casabianca indicates that food security is a priority on the agenda of most of the world’s countries. This is because after four decades of food price stability, at the end of 2010, a structural problem was exposed: the world’s population is growing at an average rate of 2.5% per year, whilst food production registers an annual growth of only 1%

In this context for Mexico, “sustainability must involve technology that allows for the conservation of scarce resources, such as water and soil, and that is accessible to small Mexican farmers to help them overcome the socioeconomic level they find themselves in,” states Casabianca.

Mexico has ample productive land, the challenge lies in incorporating similar technology to that used in other countries into national agricultural production. This is exactly the area into which Syngenta is looking to expand. Applying technology involves a monitoring and assessment process, where a huge potential for development is found. Syngenta is interested in developing public-private alliances in Mexico for crops such as maize, sorghum and soy. Casabianca adds, “Mexico is lucky to have the advantage of being home to the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), which is dedicated to improving wheat and maize varieties.”

In addition to this, Mexico has significant advantages in comparison to other Latin American countries. It has a longstanding agricultural tradition, large stretches of flat, unused land and a growing domestic market.

The future of the Mexican agricultural industry will depend on the level of technology applied over the next five years. With that in mind, the wager for business in Mexico is clear: innovation is the key factor to implement in their business model. As such, Syngenta offers two tools for the country’s agricultural future: genetically-modified products and training for small producers.

“There are 2 million Mexican farmers who believe in us. We have helped Mexico produce food for the last 80 years,” Casabianca points out. He believes that the country is ready for new ideas and has the capacity to produce high-quality food.

Casabianca is more than certain that Mexican farmland is fertile for investment. “I believe in Mexico, Syngenta believes in Mexico; it has an excellent reputation and yields high results, we are proud to be supporting small farmers in the areas of development and nutrition, we want to contribute to a vision of the country where agriculture is a top priority. We are here to offer solutions and support and to form alliances, and we will do everything in our power to accelerate this development,” he concludes.

*www.syngenta.com.mx*
With international quality standards, this company from Jalisco, in western Mexico, provides tailor-made solutions for its clients.

Sesajal: The Seed Balm that is Spreading across the World

By Sandra Doblas

Photos courtesy of Sesajal

Innovation, continuous improvement and product exports are in the DNA of Sesajal, a supplier of oil seeds and oils, that, with 23 years of experience in the market, has reached the palate of thousands of people on four continents.

But it hasn’t just gotten a hold of the world’s palate; it also has a foothold in domestic and foreign industries with manufacturers of cosmetic and personal care products.

With a level of quality that allows it to sell Mexican sesame oil to Japan— one of the leading sesame producers in the world— the company that was founded in Guadalajara, Jalisco, continues to forge new paths in the global food industry.

“We have become stronger due to our ability to tailor our products to our clients,” says Pedro de Jesús Toledo López, the company’s export manager.

He explains that these tailor-made solutions range from innovative packaging systems that reduce shipping costs for export merchandise to the design of new articles. “We get a hold of the products that customers are asking for and our research team matches them, the only difference being that ours are more competitively priced,” says Toledo López.

These customized solutions have taken 60% of Sesajal’s industrial harvest to the market, has reached the palate of thousands of people on four continents.

In many cases, company products are prized for their health and nutrition content, such as ground chia, flaxseed and agave syrup. Other consumers choose certain products for their organic origins, such as chia, flaxseed, chickpea flour, tahini and toasted sesame oil, while others tease their taste buds with cooked chickpeas and beans. A few moments spent browsing through the catalog on Sesajal’s website will open your eyes to its vast range of available merchandise.

This Mexican company, which started out with 13 employees in 1989, today has more than 400 direct employees and nearly 2,000 indirect workers. It exports 60% of its total production, which stands at 800 tons of oil per month, in addition to a similar quantity of seeds (although the installed production capacity allows higher productivity), resulting in an annual growth of 25% in its exports.

Sesame oil spearheads the company’s sales abroad. This tiny seed and the other oil products won the company the Jalisco Export Prize in 2011. Sesame oil spearheads the company’s sales abroad. This tiny seed and the other oil products.
ALPERA: TIME TO EXPORT

After positioning itself as one of the leading companies in the livestock sector in the North Pacific region of Mexico, Alpera has set the goal of trading abroad. And it is full steam ahead.

Grupo Alpera got itself into shape for the big moment; its transition from a regional producer and marketer of livestock products to an export business. In late 2011 it sent its first 50 tons of poultry products to Benin, one of the four African countries it plans to supply, mainly with chicken meat. The other countries are Togo, Ghana and D.R. Congo.

At the same time, Grupo Alpera is consolidating trade links with Asian countries where the National Service for Food Health, Safety and Quality (SENASAICA) is authorized to import chicken meat of Mexican origin. These are Japan, Hong Kong and Vietnam.

“It is hard work but we have gradually gained recognition,” says César Pérez Ochoa who, together with his brother Alfonso, runs an organization that for over 46 years has strengthened its market share in meat products and eggs, predominantly in southern Sinaloa and in the states of Nayarit and Jalisco.

The company that Alfonso Pérez Ramírez started in Tepic, Nayarit, grew through the acquisition of farms for breeding and fattening cattle, developing their own plant for foodstuffs and an artificial insemination lab, building a facility for processing birds and setting up outlets under its own El Granjero brand.

Grupo Alpera now manages the breeding, fattening and marketing of chicken, pork and cattle as well as eggs. It operates the Cora incubator which processes fertile eggs and has its own transport fleet for perishable foods and grains.

OVERSEAS MARKETS

Thanks to its manufacturing infrastructure and capacity for sustained production—in the poultry area alone, Grupo Alpera can process 2,000 chickens per hour and store 80 tons of meat, with a workforce of around 150 people—conquering new markets abroad was almost a natural step.

To put the plan into action, the Grupo Alpera managers had to develop a plant capable of achieving Standard Federal Inspection (TIF) certification granted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA) to establishments setting up as abattoirs, processing, packaging and refrigeration plants and processors of animal by-products that guarantee the safety and quality demanded by the domestic market and, to a greater extent, the foreign market.

“The international market demands traceability, safety and for the plant to be a disease-free area. That is what we started to work on” states César Pérez. “There was a quota for chicken exports to Japan and we realized that Nayarit met the requirements and had the international approval for us to be able to export. The first thing was to have a TIF standard plant, then the health standards, then JAS (Japanese Agricultural Standard) and all the critical control processes,” he adds.

With the foremost issue resolved when Grupo Alpera received TIF certification in April 2007, the company had to continue promoting their products in the markets they wanted to reach. So the directors took part in trade missions run by SAGARPA, ASIRCA (Support Services for Agricultural Marketing) and ProMéxico to promote the sector overseas.

MEXICAN CHICKEN IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

Grupo Alpera has worked hard to break into the market, especially in Japan, a market so demanding that a company that manages to establish itself there holds the key to other economies with similarly rigorous safety and quality standards.

According to the company’s reports, it invested 13 million pesos (about 1 million USD) to gain entry to Japan in 2011. In March 2012, having achieved its first exports to Vietnam and to African countries, it participated in the Foodex trade fair for processed products, held in Japan, to present the upper end of its range of chicken meat by-products.

“We have done a great deal of work with ProMéxico. At that time we invited a colleague who is now working with us to join the project. She moved to Japan, did a market analysis and was constantly sending us information about consumer behavior,” says César Pérez.

Pérez considers that quality, care and consistency are basic requirements for engaging in foreign trade and conquering new markets. He has had to work hard and with dedication since deciding to export part of the company’s output but he has also been careful in terms of health standards, which are always imperative.

“One of the advantages we have is that once a bird’s cycle is complete, we send it to a TIF process. We do not engage in backyard processes nor are these birds eaten in communities where other practices might prevail,” says César Pérez.

Alpera also has a Clean Industry certificate from the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (PROFEPA). The challenge for the livestock producer is just beginning, and the tenacity and perseverance that have always characterized it are key to its future success.
Nopalitos
Enchilados

HEAD FOR THE HIGHWAY

Agropex, a major nopal producer from the state of Sonora, has created a wonder snack and Nopal Bros., its trading partner in the US, wants to turn it into a star in one of the largest and most competitive markets in the world.

BY OMAR MAGANSA

PHOTO: COURTESY OF AGROPEx

Nopalitos Enchilados

It was the flavor of the Nopalitos, more specifically the sensation they create in the mouth, which convinced the jurors responsible for selecting the 40 nominees for the prize list at the trade fair. It was its somewhat chewy and dry texture and its slightly spicy flavor that caught the attention of the participants who gave the final verdict on the judges selection.

Óscar Torres is more than convinced that he has a product on his hands that could turn any market on its head. Tasting it, he claims, is a real experience. “All that is needed is to attract consumers’ attention and persuade them to try it, so they will tell their friends about the sensations aroused by the snack’s unique flavor. The consumer is the best PR for this type of product; word of mouth promotion has much more penetration than any TV commercial.”

Torres knows that from experience. He works in this field because he was captivated by the flavor of the chili-enhanced cactus produced by his partner Agropex in Hermosillo, Sonora.

In early 2011, Torres tried out the snack and it was the best experience he had tried so far. He decided to manage to get registered in time thanks to said institution.

WHAT WE REALIZED IS THAT IN THE US PEOPLE TRY THINGS OUT FIRST, THAT’S WHY WE LAUNCH THE INDUSTRY’S LITTLE PARISH, AND IF IT WORKS, IT WILL BE THE ONE TO DISTRIBUTE Nopal Bros. TO NEXT FAVORITE PLACE WHERE Nopalitos is sold at weekends. He set up a table and display and offered tastings to win over his first buyers.

“Direct marketing prospered but Nopal Bros. needed a site that would give it the right projection to place it inside the industry. The Sweets & Snacks Expo 2012 was the right place. To get it, the brand took advantage of ProMéxico’s opportunities for commercial partnerships and it managed to get registered in time thanks to said institution. Nopalitos won an award for the most innovative product in the savory snacks category of the Sweets & Snacks Expo 2012, held in Chicago in May.

The significance of Nopal Bros. participation in the most important meeting of the snack industry in the US is now crystal clear. From then on anyone who initially doubted the chances of success of a snack produced from a species of cactus has had their eyes opened to the product.

Nopal Bros. wants to ride the positive wave that has built up so far, while fully aware it is only building the foundations of its business and that there will be periods of adjustment to both the pricing and the package size. The idea is to consolidate because, as Torres envisages, Mexico can produce and export not only cactus snacks but an enormous number of products, including cosmetics and derivatives for food, and he wants to be the one to distribute them throughout the US.

www.botanasaludable.com

Switched on to the fun brand—whose logo sports three cactuses with Mexican sombreros—since it won an award for the most innovative product in the savory snacks category of the Sweets & Snacks Expo 2012, held in Chicago in May.

This trade fair brings together the industry’s key players. Nopalitos’ Dried Snacks shared the winner’s podium with the products of Hammond’s Candies, W. Krugly Jr., Jolly Belly Candies Co., Mars Chocolate North America and Ferrero USA. Torres hopes that “this award will underpin and boost the entry of the product into the US market, where it is already beginning to be known and enjoyed, opening up excellent opportunities for growth in sales in the snack segments.”

“The organizers were very pleased to see a small business win, they were very happy, as were we,” states Torres.

It was necessary to adapt the brand to the market and to describe the new snack on the packaging in English. With the product in hand, the next thing was to promote it and for that Torres visited the stores of Hispanic families and the meat markets where barbacoa is sold at weekends. He set up a table and display and offered tastings to win over his first buyers.

What we realized is that in the US people try things out first, that’s why we launched the individual size pack and how we got people to try Nopalitos at an affordable price,” he reveals.

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The Onions that Carried a Company into New Territories

Quality and strategy have been vital to the success of Agrodry, a company that has taken Mexican farm produce to various markets across the world.

BY SANDRA ROLALOJIS
PHOTOS COURTESY OF AGRODRY

Mexican onions have spearheaded a Mexican company’s entry into other parts of the world: Agrodry. The freshness of its Mexican fruit and vegetables has carried it across oceans. It employs natural desiccation to process foods and herbs, markets organic produce and produces avocado oil, one of the purest and most beneficial for human health.

Experience has been crucial for the company based in San Luis Potosí, in north central Mexico. The current head of exports, Ramón Martínez Cardona, represents the third generation of a family that has dedicated itself to the desiccation and commercialization of farm produce and other foods; although the Agrodry brand was only registered in 2001.

In a little over a decade, the company has learned that experience in just a few weeks. Agrodry not only succeeded in sourcing top quality produce, which it achieved by heading out into the fields, but also it learned about export procedures and packaging techniques. That year they sent five containers of fresh onions to Europe.

The customer was satisfied and the following year it placed an even larger order. Between one order and the next Ramón Martínez Cardona did everything but relax. His visionary attitude drove him to find out about the market for fresh produce in Europe and to travel to Italy, Spain, Germany and France to discover new opportunities. “The market was very interesting,” he recalls. Agrodry’s onions were even more so: the company’s second shipment to Europe was for 100 containers.

On that trip, Ramón Martínez also learned that the European markets welcomed other produce from Mexican fields. The company currently exports 85% of its annual inventory of fresh produce, including limes, lemons, grapefruits, mangoes, avocados, pineapples and carrots. “We have fresh fruit and vegetables throughout the year,” boasts Martínez, who now handles the dispatch of about 4,000 tons of onions and about 1,000 tons of avocados, among other activities.

Two figures worth noting are that when the firm began in 2003, it employed 15 people, while today it employs 600 directly and generates another 100 indirect jobs.

While searching for suppliers for producing dried onions in 2004, he received a telephone call from a European company that had visited the Agrodry website and was looking for fresh onions. “The quantities that the company required were large and we had no experience with perishable produce,” recalls Martínez.

Given the urgency of this request, they built their experience in just a few weeks. Agrodry not only succeeded in sourcing top quality produce, which it achieved by heading out into the fields, but also it learned about export procedures and packaging techniques. That year they sent five containers of fresh onions to Europe.

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Thanks to Agrodry, the produce remains delicious even when it is not fresh. Twenty percent of the dried produce processed by the Mexican company is sold abroad: garlic, celery, beet, broccoli, onions, cilantro, spinach, nopal, parsley, red pepper, green pepper, carrots, and three varieties of chili – pasilla, habanero and jalapeño.

In addition, under the Ponagua brand, the company has created a desiccated hot sauce without preservatives for consumption anywhere in the world, with a very Mexican flavor. It also produces Bonolio avocado oil with healthy fatty acids and antioxidants, which can be used in cooking and as an ingredient in cosmetics and dermatological products.

Taking the opposite route to most Mexican exporters, Agrodry first conquered the demanding European market and then, three years ago, entered the US and Canada, which have become its main buyers. Why do end consumers prefer Mexican produce? Ramón Martínez Cardona’s has got the answer: “First because of its quality and also because of its geographic location, with a climatic diversity that is not found anywhere else. This allows Mexico to grow delicious and fresh produce almost year-round: avocados and grapefruits in the central state of Michoacán; limes in Veracruz, on the Gulf of Mexico; mangoes on the Mexican Pacific coast; more limes and grapefruits in Yucatán in the south of the country; and onions—which made the company famous—in Tamaulipas, Morelos and Guanajuato.”

Mexico’s climate and farm produce are undoubtedly a great success. So too is Agrodry.
TEKITOMA: The Brand that Proves there is Strength in Unity

Created in 2010 thanks to the efforts of thousands of tomato producers, this brand has become a guarantee of flavor, quality and hygiene in many countries.

In Mexico, tomato is not only an ancestral product and a basic ingredient in local cuisine but also a strategic one. After maize, wheat and sorghum, it contributes the largest amount of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generates thousands of jobs in rural areas. In Mexico, tomato is not only an ancestral product and a basic ingredient in local cuisine but also a strategic one. After maize, wheat and sorghum, it contributes the largest amount of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generates thousands of jobs in rural areas.

The brand’s name, Tekitoma, comes from a word in the language of Sonora’s indigenous people, tekipanua, which means “men and women working.” Since 2010, Tekitoma has gathered thousands of men and women to produce tomatoes and other vegetables such as cucumbers and peppers.

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Lisa Hammond, a Tekitoma Brand Manager, says this in her role, “We currently coordinate around 100 firms who produce different varieties of tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers. These companies represent over 1,000 greenhouse growers. Then there are the producers from different social sectors such as the owners of communal lands, indigenous peoples and small landowners,” Cázares explains.

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Tekitoma has become a guarantee of flavor, quality and hygiene in many countries. The only secrets of success, as Cázares confesses, are unity among producers and a combination of alliances and ongoing training offered by the research centers of several Mexican universities and the federal government.

“For over five years, the Ministry of Economy (SE), through ProMéxico, has assisted us with training, market studies and strategies and international trade fair visits. All we have done –and it has proved very fruitful– is to work the soil, get organized and present well-defined projects,” explains Cázares.

Recently –if we can use the term for a project that only began in 2010– Tekitoma has added a further value to its production: exports of tomatoes –saladette, bolo and gourmet– for the haute cuisine industry.

Finally, ASPHINS has other strategic projects in the pipeline, such as a plan for organic production of tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers, and for culinary and medicinal herbs.

Several members of the group recently traveled to Hong Kong to present their best calling card: superb quality tomatoes. Yes: after a mere two years, the Tekitoma brand is breaking ground in the Asian and European markets.
Negocios ProMéxico

Bestground: Bestowing Health with 100% Mexican Products

BASED IN WESTERN MEXICO, THIS COMPANY SELLS ORGANIC PRODUCTS DERIVED FROM AGAVE, CHIA AND HONEY, WHOSE HEALTH BENEFITS HAVE BEEN SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN.

BY SANDRA ROBLÁGUI FIREN COURTESY OF BESTGROUND

Tequila, the spirit Mexico is famous for, is obtained from the agave plant, but this versatile species of maguey is also used for producing syrup with proven health benefits. Bestground has turned an even healthier profit by exporting this agave syrup, and also chia seeds and honey – native from Mexico – all over the world.

Convinced of the health benefits found in certain Mexican food products, in early 2007, three partners decided to pool their knowledge. The result was Bestground, a Guadalajara-based company that was initially set up to export Mexican products from various sectors but that almost immediately began concentrating its sales efforts on two organic products derived from the agave plant: agave syrup and agave inulin, says Bestground Marketing and Business Development Director, Ricardo Olivera.

In a world where chronic diseases like diabetes are on the rise, agave syrup provides a healthier alternative to conventional sweeteners. The reason of its success is simple: agave syrup has a low glycemic index, which means the sugars from this plant are absorbed gradually by the human body without putting stress on the pancreas. Inulin (oligosaccharides), another product derived from the agave plant, is particularly prized by the food industry, where it is used to enrich products like dairy and energy bars, among others, providing prebiotic fiber and extra texture. Agave inulin is a prebiotic product that reaches the intestine unaltered and stimulates the growth of intestinal flora and the digestive system. It also boosts the immune system and aids calcium absorption, which is why it is considered one of the most promising foods for the present and future.

But don’t only take Bestground’s word for it. These claims are backed by solid scientific research by the University of Guadalajara (UdeG) and the Technological University of Nayarit (UTNAY), two of the country’s most respected universities.

Thus, armed with that knowledge and with a solid management structure in place, Bestground made its first business transaction for 40,000 usd with a group of American entrepreneurs in early 2009. By the end of that same year, its exports were valued at 7 million usd.

Shortly afterwards, the company began exporting the seeds of the chia plant, which is native to Southern Mexico. In this case, the seeds are available in two presentations: conventional or with organic certification. Today, Bestground accounts for one third of Mexico’s chia production. Commonly used to enrich shakes, salads and desserts, or in energy bars, scientists assure chia has the highest omega-3 content of any plant in the world.

Every month Bestground exports 1,800 tons of agave syrup and agave inulin – which account for 80% of its total sales in terms of weight – and around 600 tons of chia a year – a huge amount considering the tiny seed’s low weight. The honey business is quite new to this firm but started out with an ambitious operation in Mérida, Yucatán, which will allow trading 300 tons in 2012. International labs like SGS, Silliker, GI Labs and Medallion Labs audit all processes and products in order to provide quality assurance. As a reference, Bestground’s agave syrup and agave inulin products have organic certification for the European, North American, South American and Asian markets (also for the Kosher and Halal ones).

In just five years, the company has built up a portfolio of clients in the US, Canada, Brazil, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Russia, the Netherlands, Germany, France and Japan and its reputation continues to grow. For instance, sales in 2011 reached over 42 million usd.

Why do you think it all happened so fast? “Quality and unmatchable value,” replies Olivera, adding that the company employs around 3,500 people, both directly and indirectly, including organic farmers who work either independently or who belong to cooperatives.

These same farmers are Bestground’s mainstay. “We began as a distribution company but it wasn’t until we went and worked in the fields, got the farmers involved and invested in the processes firsthand that the business really took off,” says Olivera, adding that one of the most valuable lessons the company learned in its first two years of operations is that it is essential to create a “win-win situation” for all involved farmers, processors, traders, distributors and final customers. That philosophy has yielded results for Bestground, which already has organic certification and the first and only fair trade certification for agave syrup.

A diet of agave syrup, agave inulin, chia and honey – among many other ingredients – has made for a healthy and happy company. And it is under this same product orientation that Bestground will continue to promote an aggressive but sustainable business growth.

www.bestground.com.mx
Mexico's Agrifood Exports

Source: Agrifood and Fishery Information Service (SIAP) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA)
Mexico's PROCESSED FOOD INDUSTRY at a glance

- 2nd largest processed food supplier to the US
- 3rd largest processed food producer in the Americas

Main Products Exported 2011, million USD
- Cane sugar or sacarose: 1,212
- Roasted or decaffeinated coffee: 692
- Bread products: 644
- Chocolate: 606
- Candies without cocoa: 514
- Food preparations: 325
- Shrimp and prawns: 314
- Malt extract: 310
- Preserved fruits with added sugar or alcohol: 274
- Other frozen pork: 265

Exports (2011) 7.785 billion USD

PRODUCTION by niche (2010)
- 30% Bread products and tortillas
- 22% Meat processing
- 11% Dairy
- 9% Seeds and oils
- 9% Other food industries
- 8% Chocolates, candies and similar products
- 5% Fruit and vegetable preserves and prepared food
- 5% Dairy
- 1% Fish and seafood packaging

TOP 5 Destinations for Mexican processed food exports 2011, million USD
- United States: 5,554 (71.3%)
- Japan: 692 (9.0%)
- Round 390 (5.2%)
- Venezuela: 106 (1.4%)

Main investors in 2011
- United States: 5,554 (21.3%)
- Netherlands: 1,006 (3.9%)

155,723 economic units throughout the country, mainly in:
- Mexico City
- Jalisco
- Veracruz
- Oaxaca
- Puebla

Production, 2011: 119.7 billion USD

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (2002-2011): 21.72 billion USD

Average annual growth rate 2011-2020: 6.3%

The Lifestyle Briefs
- Mexico According To... Alondra de la Parra PAGE 52
- 48 Hours in... Guanajuato PAGE 54
- Interview Sandra Weil’s Hot Couture PAGE 66
- Feedback Women Seeds of Change PAGE 70

A Brief History of Talavera PAGE 72

Source: Global Insight, INEGI, Ministry of Economy, Global Trade Atlas.
GASTRONOMY

The Taste OF SINALOA

Famous for its unique and varied flavors, the cuisine of Sinaloa is an interesting fusion of local ingredients like squash, corn, chili, beans and seafood with the culinary traditions of the Spanish, French, Chinese and Italians, to name just a few of the nationalities that have settled down here over the centuries.

Así Sabe Sinaloa is the state’s first gastronomic festival and will take place on October 26-28, 2012 in Mazatlán, Sinaloa. The aim of the event is to give the state international exposure as an emerging food destination and create business opportunities in the tourism, agriculture, cattle-farming, fishing, food and cultural sectors by facilitating dialogue and forging ties between producers, distributors and consumers.

Often referred to as “the granary of Mexico,” Sinaloa has won numerous awards for its seafood and export-quality vegetables, which will be on display in special exhibition areas, along with a wide variety of other products and information on their production processes.

Así Sabe Sinaloa reflects a new culinary awareness, perhaps best exemplified by the fishing industry, which employs strict hygiene measures in the production of a sustainable product that is respectful of the environment and other species.

Activities will include conferences by world-famous chefs, tasting and sommelier sessions, the presentation of the “National Gastronomy Prize,” exhibitions of seafood and agricultural products, and guided tours of the region’s food plants, among others.

www.asisabesinaloa.com

ARCHITECTURE

BARRIO CAPITAL: A PUBLIC SKYSCRAPER
by Molcajete.
Urban Think Tank

As the first step of an urban acupuncture strategy, Barrio Capital: A Public Skyscraper in the heart of Mexico City taps into some of the city’s most pressing problems. Designed by Molcajete. Urban Think Tank, the project responds to several urban problems, such as the lack of public space per inhabitant, insufficient parking space, and, above all, the scarce interaction between people from different socio-economic levels who share a defined territory within the city.

Barrio Capital would be located in the Insurgentes Roundabout, a nodal point in the city, where two modes of public transportation (subway and Metrobus system) and the city’s largest vehicle circuit (Insurgentes Avenue) meet. The project aims to create a favorable atmosphere—through strategically designed spaces— for public, joint activities which stimulate visibility between different social groups.

The building’s structure is inspired by the reversibility of a city’s problems into possible solutions when seen from a new point of view. This insight was translated into intertwined Möbius strips which provide a 5-kilometer track that surrounds the entire building and provides the structural support to sustain the skyscraper’s paraboloid body.

The building’s architectural program contemplates 26 levels, which amount to a height of 330 meters. The first 12 levels will be destined to public parking, which will provide part of the money needed for the public facilities’ maintenance. The other 14 levels respond to a social-interaction-through-entertainment strategy. Some of these areas are: a multimedia center with books, music and videos available for everyone’s enjoyment; a public Sports Center which includes a Skate Park and Parkour Zone; a Golf range, open to everyone, more than 200 meters above ground level.

Between these levels, several public parks—with a height of more than 30 meters—will provide open green spaces many meters above ground. The cherry on the project’s top will be the Auditorium—with capacity for 2,500 visitors—where some of Mexico City’s public concerts can be held with a magnificent view of the Chapultepec Castle.

www.a-001.com
Mexico is in the full throes of a cultural boom and, in the world of classical music, no one better exemplifies that dynamism than orchestra conductor Alondra de la Parra, Cultural Ambassador of Tourism in Mexico, the first Mexican woman to conduct a symphonic orchestra in New York and the youngest member of the Grammy Awards Board.

De la Parra grew up surrounded by music. From the moment her parents started taking her to concerts, she knew her place was on stage. At age 7, she started playing the piano, progressing to the cello at 13, which was when she decided she wanted to be an orchestra conductor.

After studying music composition at the Center for Musical Studies and Research (CIEM) in Mexico, she went on to graduate from the Manhattan School of Music in New York with a Bachelor’s in Piano and then took a Master’s in Orchestral Conducting at the same school.

Known for her energetic, fluid style that invariably hits the mark, Alondra has conducted orchestras in the US, Canada, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Russia, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela and Singapore. In Mexico, she has conducted in Aguascalientes, Jalisco – where she is artistic director of the state philharmonic orchestra –, Sinaloa and Jalapa. She has also conducted the Symphonic Orchestra from Estadio de México and the National Symphonic Orchestra at the Fine Arts Palace in Mexico City.

Her debut album, Mi Alma Mexicana (2010), entered the top ten on the US Billboard Classical Chart and rose to the top of the classical music charts in Mexico, where it went platinum.

In 2004, at the age of 23, de la Parra founded the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas to promote emerging regional talent and composers. So popular is the orchestra that it is frequently on tour, bringing the music of the Americas to international audiences.

- What is your favorite place in Mexico to relax?
- The beach. Mexico has so many beautiful beaches that I try to go whenever I get the chance.

- Which place in Mexico inspires you?
- Oaxaca. It’s a magical place full of history, art, culture, music, delicious food and age-old traditions. There’s nowhere like it in the world.

- What is your favorite Mexican dish?
- Chiles en nogada [poblano chilies filled with chopped or ground meat, aromatics, fruits and spices, and topped with a walnut-based cream sauce and pomegranate seeds].

- Which Mexican restaurant would you recommend?
- Dulce Patria. It’s a great place for authentic Mexican food but it’s also modern and innovative.

- Are any of your favorite fashion designers Mexican?
- Two: Alejandro Carlín and Christian Cota.

- Is there any city or place in Mexico you haven’t been to and that’s on your “must visit” list?
- Campeche is one of the states in Mexico I’ve never been to and that I’d like to see. Now that you ask, I realize I’ve been lucky enough to have visited nearly every state in this wonderful country of mine. The only ones I’ve yet to visit are Campeche, Colima, Tamaulipas, Coahuila and Chihuahua.

- What do you miss about Mexico when you’re abroad?
- First and foremost, my family. Then I miss the food and weather.

- Where in Mexico have you always wanted to give a concert?
- Chichén Itzá, in the state of Yucatán.

- Is there any period in Mexican history you wish you’d lived in?
- I would have liked to live during the days of Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, José Revueltas, José Chávez Morado, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

- What do you love most about Mexico?
- I love the fact that it’s a country like no other, with boundless natural wealth and heavenly hideaways.
48 HOURS IN Guanajuato

This old mining city is famous for its underground passes and nooks and crannies that are the stuff of legends. Boasting a calendar jam-packed with cultural events, there’s no end to Guanajuato’s charms.

BY JIMENA SÁNCHEZ-GÁMEZ

Saturday

8:00 A.M.  What better place to wake up than at Quinta Las Acacias, a boutique hotel housed in an old mansion near La Olla dam? You’ll have to take a taxi to downtown Guanajuato but the trip is well worth it just to be able to soak in your own en-suite jacuzzi, take a stroll in the gardens and tuck into a breakfast that defies the imagination.

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T. +52 (473) 731 1517
www.quintalasacacias.com.mx

2:00 P.M.  Take a break from your ramble and stop by Ramillete street, a tiny path off Plaza de San Fernando. Full of cafés and with a relaxing fountain in the middle, this square is a great place to eat and cool off in the shade of its leafy trees. Not far off are Plaza de los Ángeles and Callejón del Beso –Guanajuato’s version of Lover’s Lane. On the way, look out for La Catrina, a candy store whose shelves are packed with all kinds of sugary treats.

La Catrina
Plaza de los Ángeles 74
T. +52 (473) 730 6089

7:00 P.M.  Evening and it is time to pay a visit to El Pípila, a statue of a miner who became a hero of Mexican Independence. The statue is right at the top of Cerro de San Miguel, so your best option is to take the cable car, which leaves from behind the Juárez Theater. From the viewpoint at the top, you can see the mines in the distance and the city zigzagging through the valley below.

8:30 P.M.  For dinner, Truco 7 is one of Guanajuato’s more traditional restaurants, with very affordable prices and an interesting handicrafts store next door. Try the enchiladas mineras and get a hold of what a Mexican dish should taste like.

Truco 7
Calle del Truco 7
T. +52 (473) 732 8374
www.hospederiadeltrucocom

6:00 P.M.  After visiting Guanajuato University and Templo de la Compañía (a church on Lazarraga de Retana), a visit to Plaza del Baratillo, with its flower stands and bronze fountain decorated with sad fish, is a must. If you cross the Ágora shopping mall, you’ll come to Allende and Jardín de la Unión, in the heart of the city. Casa Valadez, on the corner, is just the place for a cup of coffee as you admire the gardens, the view of the Juárez Theater and the locals milling around the bandstand. A snapshot of what life in Guanajuato is really like.

Casa Valadez
Jardín Unión 3
T. +52 (473) 732 0311
www.casavaladez.com

8:00 A.M.  La Alhóndiga de Granaditas is the best place to begin your tour of Guanajuato’s Historic Center. This plain looking building used to be a granary and is where the first battle in Mexico’s War of Independence took place. Today it serves as the Guanajuato Regional Museum, where you can see two murals by José Chávez Morado and a fine collection of Pre-Columbian art.

Museo Regional de Guanajuato
Mendizábal 6
T. +52 (473) 732 1112

10:00 A.M.  La Alhóndiga de Granaditas is the best place to begin your tour of Guanajuato’s Historic Center. This plain looking building used to be a granary and is where the first battle in Mexico’s War of Independence took place. Today it serves as the Guanajuato Regional Museum, where you can see two murals by José Chávez Morado and a fine collection of Pre-Columbian art.
10:30 A.M.  
For 250 years, Guanajuato produced 30% of the world’s silver, so if you really want to get some insight into the history of this region, a visit to La Valenciana is in order. This famous mine lies just four kilometers from the city proper, on the Guanajuato-Dolores highway. While you’re there, take a few minutes to explore the Templo de San Cayetano, the church Antonio de Ordóñez had built in acknowledgement of the enormous wealth La Valenciana brought him.

1:00 P.M.  
Back in the Historic Center, another place worth visiting is the Diego Rivera Museum. This is the actual house where the artist was born and its original furniture. Also exhibited is a collection of 175 sketches and paintings by Rivera.

Museo Casa Diego Rivera  
Poniente 47  
T. +52 (473) 732 1597

3:00 P.M.  
For lunch, head back to Jardín de la Unión and take your pick of the restaurants in the square. Afterwards, ditch the map and lose yourself in the city’s winding streets, narrow alleyways and eerie tunnels.

5:00 P.M.  
Speaking of eerie, the Mummy Museum is a classic if you’re not easily spooked. The first mummified corpse was removed from the Santa Paula pantheon in the 19th century and ever since, the mummies have become a part of Guanajuato’s present.

Museo de las Momias de Guanajuato  
Explanada del Panteón Municipal S/N  
T. +52 (473) 732 0639  
www.momiasdeguanajuato.gob.mx

6:30 P.M.  
On Sopeña, east of the Juárez Theater, is La Casa del Quijote, a gallery showcasing a wide selection of Mexican handicrafts. For a unique souvenir, bring back home some traditional majolica ceramic or a piece of baroque jewelry handcrafted in gold and silver with animal motifs.

La Casa del Quijote  
Sopeña 17  
T. +52 (473) 732 8226

8:00 P.M.  
Dinner at Jardín de los Milagros, Chef Bricio Domínguez’s signature restaurant, is the perfect sendoff. The sapodilla plum trees of the old San Javier hacienda make a fitting complement to a menu whose colors change with the seasons and Bricio’s fancy. And as you say goodbye, the flavors of the Mediterranean, vanguard molecular cuisine and ingredients that hark back to Mexico’s Pre-Columbian past linger nostalgically on the palate.

Jardín de los Milagros  
Calle Alhóndiga 80  
T. +52 (473) 732 9366

8:30 A.M.  
Breakfast at the restaurant of Hotel Villa María Cristina is a delicious way to start the day. This elegant hotel has high ceilings, a chimney and balconies overlooking the street. Before you leave, go up to the terrace for a spectacular view of Cerro de la Bufa.

Hotel Villa María Cristina  
Paseo de la Presa de la Olla 76  
T. +52 (473) 731 2182  
www.villamaricristina.net

Sunday

8:30 A.M.  
Breakfast at the restaurant of Hotel Villa María Cristina is a delicious way to start the day. This elegant hotel has high ceilings, a chimney and balconies overlooking the street. Before you leave, go up to the terrace for a spectacular view of Cerro de la Bufa.

Hotel Villa María Cristina  
Paseo de la Presa de la Olla 76  
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Jardín de los Milagros  
Calle Alhóndiga 80  
T. +52 (473) 732 9366
MEXICAN STANDARD BEARERS

10 Reasons to be Proud

FROM OLYMPIC MEDALISTS TO TALENTED PERSONALITIES, MEXICO HAS, AT THE VERY LEAST, TEN REASONS TO BE PROUD. THIS ARTICLE PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE MEXICANS RESPONSIBLE FOR POSITIONING THE COUNTRY’S NAME WAY UP HIGH IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPHERE.

BY EMILIA BENAVENTE

PHOTOS: ARCHIVE

Mexico’s international standing is the reflection of what many Mexicans are achieving on the global arena, with the country taking some of the credit whenever they succeed. This article is dedicated to the scientists, architects, athletes, social activists and other personalities who work tirelessly to raise the Mexican flag higher.

MMX

Since the ancient world and as the millennium progressed, architecture grew more ostentatious, taxing whole regions’ natural resources to the point of depletion.

MMX is a research studio that attempts to rebalance the ecological scales by exploring relationships between the environment, possible interventions and the content of the latter, under the premise that these three factors act as a whole and cannot be approached separately.

Founded in 2009 by Jorge Arvizu, Ignacio del Rio, Emmanuel Ramirez and Diego Ricalde, MMX’s focus on design processes for territories of different scales –from product design and installations to architecture and planning– has earned the firm recognition at home and abroad. This year, MMX won the Architectural League Prize for Young Architects+Designers, one of the most prestigious architecture awards in the US.

Mexico can lay claim to at least two of the world’s most prestigious scientific institutions: the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), which produce scientists on a par with those educated in developed countries.

A graduate of the UNAM, Navarro González is a researcher at his alma mater’s Nuclear Sciences Institute currently involved in the search for life on Mars, which is part of a NASA mission.

Acting as a scientific consultant, Navarro interprets the results sent back to Earth by Curiosity, a roving robot the size of an SUV that collects samples of organic compounds from Mars and that is equipped with a state-of-the-art lab: the Sample Analysis at Mars (SAM) instrument suite.

As a recipient of the Alexander von Humboldt Medal, awarded to Navarro González by the European Geosciences Union for outstanding achievements in the discovery of Mars-like soils in the Atacama Desert in northern Chile, and the TWAS Prize in Earth Sciences, awarded by the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World, there’s no Mexican better suited for the job.

Susana López Charretón

The under-five mortality rate is a development indicator that has gradually declined worldwide since the 1970s as a result of advances in science, nonetheless the rotavirus disease is still the second leading cause of death among children, claiming 450,000 lives per year.

Another major contributor to the eradication of the disease is Susana López Charretón, a Mexican scientist whose work was acknowledged this year by L’Oréal and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Since 1986, López Charretón has conducted valuable research into rotavirus disease at the Biotechnology Institute of the UNAM.

The third Mexican scientist to receive the L’Oréal-UNESCO “For Women in Science” Award, this is but another in a long list of accolades that include the 1994 National Science Award, the 2001 UNESCO Carlos J. Finlay Prize in Microbiology and the 2004 UNAM Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Medal.
Gracia Studio

Founded by Mexican architects Jorge and Javier Gracia in San Diego, California, in 2005, Gracia Studio’s philosophy is to build homes that deserve to be lived in, a premise that has resulted in a great deal of research into construction materials that are both functional and aesthetic.

The Endémico Resguardo Silvestre Hotel, one of their most famous creations that won the 2012 Travel+Leisure Awards in the “Best Small Hotel” category, amply illustrates the fruits of the firm’s research. “Luxury camping” is the underlying concept of this boutique hotel, which boasts a swimming pool, winery and restaurant. Its 20 finely-appointed cabins are spread over 400,000 square meters of rugged Baja wine country and are built on stilts to reduce environmental impact. Guests can relax on their own private terrace knowing that not a single rock of the mountainous landscape of Valle de Guadalupe was disturbed in the making of this small but unique hotel.

Miquel Adrià

Architecture is one of the fields that best represent Mexico abroad. From the great pyramids of Mesoamerica and the monumental buildings of New Spain to the functionalism of Mario Pani and the modernism of 1980 Pritzker prizewinner Luis Barragán, Mexico has a long-standing and varied tradition of avant-garde architecture, which has been carried on by Miquel Adrià.

Born in Catalonia, Spain, but Mexican by choice, Adrià is the founder of Arquitectura, the first specialized architecture journal published in Mexico. More than a magazine, the project has come to be a vehicle for the promotion of architecture via congresses, awards and even a postgraduate course at the Iberoamerican University (ULA).

This year, Adrià was appointed curator of the Mexican Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale. This is the first time Mexico has had its very own permanent pavilion at the Biennale, which showcases The Collectivity of Cultural Space/Culture Under Construction, an exhibition that brings together 13 projects by acclaimed contemporary Mexican architects such as Teodoro González de León, Enrique Norten, Alberto Kalach, Bernardo Gómez-Pimienta, Mauro Ciappa and Tatiana Bilbao.

Cuauhtémoc Medina

Cuauhtémoc Medina is a Mexican art critic, historian and curator. Appointed the first associate curator of Latin American Art Collections by London’s Tate Gallery, a post he held from 2002 to 2008, Medina served as director of the 7th International Symposium on Contemporary Art Theory in Mexico, is a founding member of Teratoma—a group of curators, critics and anthropologists—and author of Ojo Breve, an art criticism column he writes for the Mexican daily Reforma.

This year, he will be acting as curator of the itinerant European biennial Manifesta 9, one of the world’s most prestigious contemporary art events to take place in Limburg, Belgium, from June 2 to September 30.
Michel Franco

The Mexican film *Después de Lucía* (*After Lucía*) won over the jury of the “Un Certain Regard” section of this year’s Cannes Film Festival and it is precisely his “subjective view” of life that has brought writer-director Michel Franco international fame. A view Franco shares with the spectator through his films. Like his first feature, *Daniel y Ana* (*Daniel and Ana*), which made its debut at Cannes in 2009, the harsh realism of *After Lucía* is pared down to the bare essentials. A gripping story from a director who understands that sometimes greater depth of emotion lies in what is left unsaid.

Espolea

HIV/AIDS constitutes one of the greatest public health threats to modern society, with 34 million carriers worldwide, most of whom live in developing countries. Although researchers have developed a drug cocktail that extends HIV/AIDS’s patients life expectancy and helps improve their quality of life, education remains the best weapon against the disease.

One group of volunteers that declared war on the disease is Espolea, winner of this year’s United Nations (UN) Red Ribbon Award for HIV/AIDS prevention. Advocates of “fair, inclusive societies whose young people can express themselves, make decisions, exercise their rights and do their bit to change the world,” Yunes Flores Tamayo, Yahir Zavaleta and Aram Barra are also active in the areas of gender relations, drug policy and damage reduction, proving that young people are the country’s most valuable resource when it comes to making a difference.

Okurrenzzia

This firm lends equal importance to every design element, from the intended function, aesthetic features and user experience of a product to the materials and technologies in its manufacture. The end result is an entirely new object that blends in with the world to perfection, a product that relates to people, a creation in the true sense of the word, one that leaves an impression of eternal existence.

One example will suffice: Circulight, a circular energy-saving lamp whose origin may have never been questioned. That’s right. Circulight is Mexican designed, engineered and made by Okurrenzzia.
Mexican Medal-winners at the 2012 Olympics in London

Until the 2012 Olympic Games in London, Mexico had never won a medal in archery. Aída Román and Mariana Avitia changed history winning silver and bronze respectively and allowing Mexico to tick off not one but two boxes on its medal table. Román had previously hit the mark at the 2007 Pan-American Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where she won the silver medal, and at the 2010 Central American and Caribbean Games in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, where she bagged seven golds and one silver.

Conversely, Mexico has a history of Olympic victories in diving. Germán Sánchez and Iván García returned from the London Games with the silver medal on the synchronized 10 m platform after executing a seemingly impossible dive. Teamwork has paid off for these young athletes, who have garnered two gold medals since 2010.

Mexico’s female athletes also excelled in the sport, with Paola Espinosa and Alejandra Orozco winning silver on the synchronized 10 m platform and Laura Sánchez leaping to bronze on the individual 3 m springboard. After winning gold at the 2008 Games in Beijing, China, María del Rosario Espinosa was presented with a bronze medal in Tae Kwon Do at this year’s games.

But the highlight was indisputably the Mexican soccer team, which won a well-earned gold.

It seems Mexico has learned from past experience and put its resources to the best possible use, achieving tangible results. And the more medals athletes bring home in international competitions, the more young people are motivated to participate in sports on a competitive level in a bid to emulate their Olympic heroes.
Sandra Weil was born in Peru and studied Haute Couture and Fashion in Barcelona before finally settling in cosmopolitan Mexico City, a strategic location that she uses as a platform to develop her brand.

Weil acquired a love for sewing in her grandmother’s workshop. Her unique creations are a perfect fusion of tradition and vanguard.

Sandra Weil Couture was founded in 2008 and through a ProMéxico initiative in 2011, the brand was selected for international representation. And although her haute couture and ready-to-wear lines are already available in the US and Asia, her main goal is to reach the rest of the world.

—When did you know that you wanted to work in fashion?
While I was studying Visual Arts in Lima, alongside my grandmother—who had a sewing workshop—I designed and made a dress for a wedding. I discovered that fashion was the perfect way for me to express my thoughts and feelings and that it also blended several of my interests: design, direct contact and experimentation with different materials, traditional craftsmanship, geometry and anatomy.

The satisfaction of “dressing” others was so great that I am still doing it today.

—Where did you study?
I completed a degree in Visual Arts in Lima, Peru. When I finished, I went to Barcelona and specialized in Fashion and Haute Couture.

—How would you define your brand? Classic, but unconventional. It is a sophisticated, avant-garde brand, with clean lines but with a twist that is reflected in the use of contrasting materials against the skin, like cashmere wool in evening wear. I always pay attention to details and finishes.

—How do you adapt haute couture to the world of modern women?
By maintaining all of the luxury, personalized attention and dedication that distinguish haute couture, while remaining aware of the hassles that rules the lives of modern women today.

—Which materials do you most like to work with?
I like working with natural fibers, especially silk. I also love experimenting with new materials. For example, this season I incorporated genuine leather in the 2012 winter collection and it turned out so well that I will also be including it in the next 2013 summer collection.

—What is the biggest challenge that you have faced as a designer?
Incorporating haute couture quality into a ready-to-wear line and being able to maintain competitive prices while producing in Mexico, without compromising my vision as a designer. That is reflected in the attention to detail and the high quality sewing in the garments.

—Which designers do you most admire?
I admire the elegance and exquisite craftsmanship of Christian Dior and Cristóbal Balenciaga, the style of Balmain and the originality and fantasy of Alexander McQueen. I am also a fan of Brazilian fashion and patterns; I love Gloria Coelho and Osklen. From Mexico, I admire Julia y Renata because they have a very authentic, fresh and modern style, which they have maintained over the years.

—How do you see the fashion industry in Mexico?
I believe that it is in a process of formalization. Talent overflows in Mexico and Latin America, both at the creative and the productive level. In fact, we have exceptional traditional craftsmanship in Mexico.

—I see tremendous potential and I think that it is only a matter of time before internationalization occurs. The challenge is to achieve it without ceasing to look inward, to avoid compromising our essence as designers.

—How did Melt Management decide to represent you outside of Mexico?
That was a ProMéxico initiative to support five Mexican designers so that Melt Management could represent and sell their brands in the US. The Director of Melt Management visited Mexico at
“I have always considered Mexico to be a country that offers a great deal of possibilities. It is a very interesting market and a great platform for developing and expanding the brand. I really like Mexico.”

“I have always considered Mexico to be a country that offers a great deal of possibilities. It is a very interesting market and a great platform for developing and expanding the brand. I really like Mexico.”

the end of 2011 to select the brands that she would bring to her showrooms in New York and Los Angeles. That’s how I was chosen to participate.

—What came out of that initiative?
In January 2012, I sent the Fall-Winter collection and the results were extremely good. I have just sent the following Spring-Summer collection for 2013 and am very excited about it. My brand is already being sold in boutiques in the US and Asia. Starting in September, it will also be available through shopbop.com.

—What does that recognition mean to you?
The recognition makes me very proud because my brand was selected from a pool of some of the best designers in Mexico –the fact that I was included in that group was already something that I could be proud of. It also gave my company the possibility to rise to another level and, above all, to internationalize.

—Why did you decide to establish your company in Mexico?
I have always considered Mexico to be a country that offers a great deal of possibilities. It is a very interesting market and a great platform for developing and expanding the brand. I really like Mexico.

—Can you describe your work experience in Mexico?
It’s been very challenging. Just as this country is full of opportunities – and diversity in all aspects – it is also difficult. However, working with Mexican employees is definitely one of my brand’s goals. I truly value the talent and dedication of my team, which is 100% Mexican.

—You have lived in Lima, Barcelona and now Mexico City is the place you call home. How do you feel living here?
It has been an important change after having lived in smaller cities such as Barcelona and Lima but I’ve been adapting over time. Honestly, I love Mexico City. Living in this immense, cosmopolitan and vibrant city has influenced my life and my work. It is a source of inspiration and an important motivation to constantly remain at the forefront.”

Negocios ProMéxico | The Lifestyle

Negocios ProMéxico | The Lifestyle
They are women, they never finished school and they were born into conditions of extreme poverty. By all standards, the deck is stacked against them but these Mexican women decided to take fate into their own hands. Today, they are involved in a variety of projects under the community program run by Children International (ChI).

ChI was founded in 1936 and is present in 11 countries in America, Asia and Africa. The organization came to Mexico in 2005 and currently runs a child sponsorship program that benefits 12,000 children in the metropolitan area of Guadalajara, Jalisco, where it has opened five centers in disadvantaged districts: Panamá del Codi and Villa de Guadalupe in Zapopan, Santa Paula and Nueva Santa María in Tonalá and Chulavista in Tlajomulco.

"How much do the parents of the children we serve earn on average? Between 2,000 and 3,000 pesos a month," says Guadalupe Pérez, coordinator of the CHI center in Santa Paula, Tonalá. “Some families have no income or as little as 200 pesos a week. Most people here left school early and live in poverty. There is also a high incidence of domestic and sexual violence.”

ChI’s mission is to improve the quality of life of marginalized children through health and education programs but its strategists are aware that real, lasting change begins with their mothers. So, in 2009, the organization launched its Women, Strategy for Change program.

In Guadalajara, the implementation of the new program coincided with an “awakening” among a group of women in Santa Paula. A couple of years ago, some mothers started taking their kids to soccer practice on a dirt pitch. They weren’t clear about the rules of the sport; all they knew was that they didn’t want their kids being hurt by the streets.

When they saw how much their kids enjoyed the game, they sent out flyers inviting their neighbors’ children. It was around the same time that ChI launched its Game On! program in Mexico. A few weeks later, er, these self-taught coaches were giving physical fitness and refereeing matches in schools. Today, they and their teenage kids train some 400 boys and girls without receiving a penny in return.

“One day we said to ourselves, if we were able to implement an educational project, why not one to improve our economic situation?” recalls Pérez.

Before long, you had a group of women—one knew how to embroider, another how to emboss, another cross-stitch—sharing their knowledge with their neighbors. Soon, someone got a stall at the local street market and they started selling their handicrafts. Now they’re looking to lease business premises.

One step at a time is the philosophy of CHI. In 2011, some 400 women volunteered to help out with the organization’s work in the metropolitan area of Guadalajara. One hundred and fifty participated in workshops on reproductive health, gender equality, empowerment and the exercising of their rights and another 50 signed up for a total of six social and productive projects.

Up to that time, many of those women spent their days doing domestic chores. Today, they are involved in productive projects that enable them to contribute to their household economy and that of their community. Some started producing worm casting fertilizer and organic co-riander, corn, onions and radishes, mainly for self-consumption, while others started baking bread on weekdays and pastries on the weekends. Their baked goods literally sold like hotcakes and now they are focusing exclusively on the more profitable pastry business. One group is already making money from sales of its fomic flower arrangements and another offers courses and sells handicrafts. Five women set up a small seamstress business and are giving sewing lessons in local schools. Four more tend to backyard gardens using small-scale eco-friendly farming methods.

And the success stories keep on coming. In February 2012, ChI began mentoring a new generation of housewives and mothers and expects several of them to be participating in productive projects by 2014.

Up until July 2010, training for these projects was financed by Oxfam and then by the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL) until December 2011. In February 2012, Corporativa de Fundaciones took over the financing side and now keeps projects afloat through fundraising efforts, donations and sponsorships.

But it’s not just money that people give. The organization receives donations of materials for its productive projects, volunteers offer their time and knowledge, training women in areas like design and marketing, personal and community development and administrative skills, and facilitators follow up on existing projects.

The seeds are being planted and the game is on. Finally, Mexico’s underprivileged women and children are being given a shot at a better life.
Imitations of this delicate glazed ceramic are endangering a craft that dates back to Colonial Mexico.

By María José Esteve PHOTO ARCHIVE

Talavera is a type of glazed ceramic that has come to be associated with Mexico, although the actual glazing process was invented in China. The Moors first introduced ceramic to Spain and it was here that decorative techniques from Italy were incorporated into its manufacture. Later, following the discovery of America, the clergy requested that ceramicists be sent to New Spain to make tiles for their monasteries and convents. It was the fusion of the knowledge of these ceramicists and the work of native artisans that gave rise to the type of ceramic known as talavera.

What makes talavera pottery so special is that its manufacturing process has remained unchanged since the 16th century. It all begins with a natural, chemical-free mixture of white and black sand found in certain parts of the state of Puebla. Once the clay acquires the right consistency, the pieces are fashioned by hand on a potter’s wheel and left to dry for several days before being fired. Then a crackle glaze containing small quantities of tin and lead is applied.

The next step is the decoration of the pieces. Traditionally, only six colors—obtained from natural pigments—are used: blue (the main color), yellow, black, green, orange, and mauve. Finally, the pieces are fired a second and last time.

The process can take anything from three to six months, whereas other types of ceramic can be produced in as little as three to four days. During that time, there is always the danger of the pieces being broken or ruined before they are completed, which is why the ancient potters are said to have prayed to every saint under the sun. No doubt they still do. As the saying goes, “loaves put awry in the oven come out crooked,” so best take no chances.

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