



## A TASTE OF PATAGONIA IN HOUSTON

By Daniel Krishock

**WHEN** it comes to the world’s most beautiful places, Argentina’s Patagonia region would surely be near the top of the list. The vast expanse of territory that covers 1,500 miles of Southern Argentina down to the harshly beautiful Tierra del Fuego is a land of mountains, deserts, plains, forests, and glaciers, where you can often travel for miles without seeing a soul. It also has its own distinct cuisine, as inspiring as the region itself – and you can sample it right here in Houston, Texas, thanks to Sebastián Abraham.

A native of the city of San Carlos de Bariloche, or simply Bariloche, in the Province of Neuquén, Sebastián is the founder and owner of the aptly named Patagonia Grill & Café. After arriving in the US at the age of 21, Sebastián gravitated toward a career as a radio and TV executive. Then, six years ago he reached a crossroads. His career had reached a point where if he wanted to continue advancing, he would need to move on to a bigger market, like New York or LA. Not wishing to leave Houston, he decided to make a career change and focus on something he has always loved: cooking. In 2014 he opened Patagonia Grill & Café.

For the uninitiated, Sebastián’s career move might seem more relaxing than working in the fast-paced media world, but it is anything but. The competition is fierce, first-rate quality control is essential, and the hours are very, very long. Sebastián compares starting out to “taking care of a little baby.”

After six years, he has learned a lot, but the challenges never go away and have grown exponentially with the Covid-19 crisis, which has forced many restaurants to shutter. Fortunately, he has managed to stay afloat, and he attributes that to three factors.

One was adjusting rapidly to the sudden downturn in business the virus brought.

Though he eventually had to let some employees go, he has maintained as many as he can, and they have responded by giving it their all. His “beautiful team,” he calls them. Another was beefing up his social media marketing. “My previous experience in media helped me there,” he says.

The third, and by far the most important though, was his loyal customer base, which he has developed paying attention to details large and small to consistently provide a quality experience for diners. He speaks with passion as he describes how many of his patron have continued coming for take-out or in-restaurant dining. On more than one occasion customers to show their appreciation have paid more than the meal costs, and in a few instances much more than the meal costs.

“I am so grateful to my customers for their support in this moment,” he states.

Of course, the thing he is most passionate about is cooking. As is the case for all Argentine cuisine, beef is the star at his restaurant, but it is prepared and cooked Patagonian-style. Sebastián says his cooking style has been greatly influenced by that of his fellow countryman and Michelin 3 Star chef, Francis Mallman.

Specialties include *Entraña* (skirt steak) and *Tira de Asado* (short ribs). Other customer favorites include a variety of *Empanadas* and one of the hallmarks of Patagonian cooking: trout. The Patagonian flair is enhanced by other offerings, which include lamb, quail, and venison.

Although business takes up a lot of his hours, family is still a priority for Sebastián. He and his wife, Patricia, are the parents of two young daughters. As for recreation, it should not come as a surprise that his favorite activity is one that is the favorite of many Patagonians. Skiing, naturally.