

# Taste of home

## San Anselmo

**Preface**  
Renowned Chilean novelist Isabel Allende enjoys dishes that ignite her imagination.

Writer  
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Photographer  
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“If I had to choose my last meal, what would I want? Kindness. Who cares what you eat? As for whom I’d have with me, well I hope a lover. Friends and family, they’re boring, I know them so well; but a new lover – that would be great. The food at Insalata’s reminds me of the places I have lived: the clams of Chile and the fattoush salad of mint, coriander and cheese of Lebanon, where I lived as a child.

I like to go to restaurants because I hate washing dishes. There are lots of high-end places around here that I could have chosen for my last meal – especially in San Francisco – but this is where I feel at home. Insalata’s is a 15-minute drive from my house and I often eat here. I know everyone and I even have my own special wine glasses. Sometimes I arrive exhausted after a long day and I’m just taken care of.

I worked as a journalist until the coup in Chile on 11 September, 1973. President Salvador Allende – my father’s first cousin – died on that day and a regime of repression and terror began immediately. Thousands of Chileans were killed or disappeared; others fled the country. I was the last member of the Allende family to leave the country because I didn’t think the dictatorship would last. But eventually I also fled, with my then-husband and two children. I went into exile in Venezuela.

In 1981 I got a phone call saying that my grandfather was dying in Chile but I couldn’t return due to the dictatorship, so I started writing a sort of spiritual letter. He died and never got to read it but I kept writing and I knew from the first couple of pages that it wasn’t a normal letter.

## Profile

Chilean author Isabel Allende was born in Lima in 1942 and returned to her native country a few years later after a stint in Lebanon. She was exiled in 1973 following the coup that killed President Salvador Allende. After separating from her Chilean husband, Allende moved to the US in 1988. Her debut novel *The House of the Spirits* was published in 1982; thus far her 21 books have sold more than 65 million copies worldwide.

## Venue

Opened in San Anselmo in 1996, Insalata’s serves Mediterranean food overseen by founder Heidi Krahling and head chef Taylor Carnes. [insalatas.com](#)

## Menu

**To start**  
*Cataplana*: clam, chorizo and tomato sauté; lamb kofta; fattoush salad.

**Main**  
Duck breast, bulgur pilaf, sautéed leeks, chutney.

**To finish**  
Banoffee tart.

**To drink:**  
Non vintage Campo Viejo tempranillo wine, tap water.

## Recipe

**Fattoush side salad**  
*Serves 6*

**Ingredients**  
2 pitta breads

**For vinaigrette**  
70ml oil (three parts grapeseed, one part olive oil)  
1 tsp garlic, minced  
55ml extra virgin oil  
Splash of lemon juice  
¾ tsp cumin seeds, toasted and ground  
Salt and ground pepper

**For salad**  
3 hearts of Romaine lettuce, torn  
150g crumbled feta  
150g vine-ripened tomatoes, halved  
150g diced cucumber  
65g pitted Kalamata olives  
50g thinly sliced red onion  
65g chopped coriander  
65g finely chopped mint

### The method

- 1 Trim pitta, keeping its form, and cut into six triangles. Bake at 180C for 12 minutes.
- 2 Warm oil and garlic until fragrant in frying pan.
- 3 Whisk all vinaigrette ingredients in bowl.
- 4 Combine salad ingredients and baked pitta in bowl. Add vinaigrette to taste. Toss, plate and serve.



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Although it was based on his life, my family and my country, it was fictionalised. By the end of the year I had 500 pages, all of them filthy because I was working in the kitchen. I didn’t know if it was a memoir or a novel but an agent in Spain was interested: *The House of the Spirits* was published there in 1982. A month later at the Frankfurt book fair every European country bought it. My life changed completely.

I love experimenting with food. I can’t follow a recipe, just as I can’t follow a preordained script when I am writing; I have to improvise. It was in that same Venezuelan kitchen that I used to cook for my then-teenage children. I cooked mostly Chilean dishes like *charquicán*, a peasant stew of potatoes, pumpkin, meat and vegetables.

I like the ceremony of food. My 95-year-old mother is a fantastic cook and wrote recipe books. After my daughter died I had writer’s block for three years and to pull myself out of the mourning and the heaviness I wrote *Aphrodite*, which is about food and love. I’ve just finished a new novel called *The Japanese Lover*; it’s the story of an old woman in a retirement home who remembers her past.

I never thought I’d be successful; it happens to a few lucky ones. I love telling stories so when one book is finished I need to write another because I want to delve into a new story. It doesn’t tire me – it’s not work. It’s a lifestyle.” — (M)