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'Jema' Restaurant: Brazilian Chef Franco Sampogna Talks Working With Real Life 'Joy', More [EXCLUSIVE]

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By **Maria G. Valdez** Oct 18 2016, 05:08PM EDT



Young Chef Franco Sampogna, born in Brazil, is taking over the kitchen at Jema, a new restaurant in Long Island owned by Joy Mangano. He spoke to Latin Times about his heritage, food, and working with the real life "Joy." Bryan Ozegovich

We've all either seen or heard about the movie "[Joy](#)," semi-fictional and inspirational portrayal about a divorced mother of three played by Jennifer Lawrence who became an overnight success when she invented the Miracle Mop and many other products after that. Besides being a successful entrepreneur, real life **Joy Mangano** is also a restaurateur and her latest venture is "Jema" located in Huntington, Long Island. Mangano teamed up with the young and talented **Chef Franco Sampogna** to offer diners globally inspired dishes with fresh locally sourced produce, including seafood, meat and vegetables; with a focus on seasonality, sustainability and provenance.

"My natural curiosity has allowed me to immerse myself in a diverse wealth of cultures – Italy, Brazil, France, and now America", stated [Chef Franco Sampogna](#). "Jema will be introducing a world view while sourcing locally and sustainably." Sampogna was born in Brazil and grew up in a multicultural environment thanks to his Italian heritage. At the age of 17, he moved to Nice where he learned the basics of cooking at Villefranche-sur-Mer in the Alps at the restaurant La Mère Germaine. He then

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spent four years in the kitchens of top Michelin Star winning chefs including **Alain Ducasse, Fabrice Vullin and Guy Savoy** before moving to the United States to help launch Jema.

"With the help of Chef Sempogna, our goal is to showcase the North Shore's local farmers, artisans and purveyors. We hope that Jema will become an unforgettable culinary destination," added Joy Mangano. Latin Times had the opportunity to speak with Chef Sempogna, and this is what he told us about his heritage, short but significant career, and moving to the United States for a unique opportunity to lead his own kitchen.

Latin Times: How does your multicultural upbringing and heritage influence your cooking?

Franco Sempogna: *I'm able to fuse the ingredients and techniques from my travels and my upbringing in Brazil to influence my culinary point of view. I enjoy being able to fuse these different cultures and regional ingredients to express myself through my cuisine.*

LT: What are your favorite ingredients to cook with?

FS: *I don't have a particular favorite ingredient per se, but what I do love is cooking with a wide variety of ingredients every day and being able to change things up each day like I do at the restaurant. I also love cooking according to what's in season – I particularly like working with truffles during the winter and fresh, beautiful tomatoes during the summer months. It is all about the product!*

LT: You've worked with renowned international chefs, what has been the lesson that's stuck with you the most?

FS: *Most importantly, I learned to treat every single product we use in the kitchen with respect. Behind each ingredient, there is an artisan and that artisan needs to be treated with the utmost respect.*

LT: What has been the biggest challenge in your culinary career so far?

FS: *Opening Jema has been a difficult journey so far. I have had to adapt to American culture on a whole and learn about the American dining experience on the fly.*

LT: What experiences do you take with you after working in Michelin Star restaurants?

FS: *It's been an honor of a lifetime to have worked for and learned the ins and outs of restaurant life from some of the greatest chefs in the world. From them I've learned that a successful Chef must possess the following qualities: Rigor, discipline and the understanding that you can always do better.*

LT: How did you end up working with Joy Mangano?

FS: *I met TV personality and inventor Joy Mangano while I was cooking on a private yacht. Three years after meeting Mangano, I received a call from her that made my dream of coming to America a reality and I enthusiastically accepted her offer to come open Jema in Huntington, with my hand picked team, in September.*

LT: What was your inspiration while creating Jema's menu?

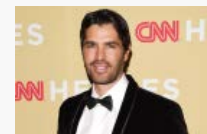
FS: *I opted to go towards a globally inspired menu to reflect my Italian heritage, growing up in Brazil and my experience in France. As I mentioned previously, one of the most important lessons I learned from my time working in the kitchens with Alain Ducasse, Fabrice Vullin and Guy Savoy is to respect products. I am delighted to work with top Long Island farmers who have top quality products and exceptional produce that's akin to the produce I used overseas enabling me to best represent my culinary point of view for all of Huntington to experience.*

LT: Did you know who Joy Mangano was before working with her?

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FS: *Of course, I have long admired her tenacity and business savvy.*

LT: **What has been the most rewarding experience from working with Ms. Mangano?**

FS: *It's amazing to be able to get a first-hand perspective of what it takes to run a successful business, and there aren't better examples than Joy Mangano.*

LT: **How would you define Jema's menu and what's your favorite dish from it?**

FS: *We are looking to achieve the perfect combination of simple yet elegant cuisine, which for me has been quite a challenge. On our menu at any given point includes around 5 starters, 5 main and 4 desserts that rotate seasonally.*

I love each and every dish I put on the menu, so it is impossible for me to pick just one. I have been working on them for a long time with the intention of ensuring that each dish is unique from another, and most importantly that they are delicious.

LT: **What would you want people reactions to be after they experience Jema?**

FS: *I want people to come into Jema and be happy with the whole experience. Of course, I hope they love the food, but I also want them to feel welcomed by the decor and be treated to top-notch hospitality .*

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Maria G. Valdez

Born and raised Dominican living in New York (do not confuse with Dominican-York), who claims to be Sofia Vergara's long lost daughter and who has an unhealthy obsession with JLo. Associate Editor of Latin Times, overseeing the editorial operation and content strategy of the website. Trained journalist and musical theater performer with solid entertainment instincts. Experience covering human interest stories and social and large scale events with focus on Latino entertainment. Maria began her career in

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