

This Chef Is Convinced One Cuisine Will Be the Next Big Thing in Fast-Casual Dining: 'I'm Betting My Career'



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Michel Falcon didn't always embrace his Peruvian roots. As a kid in Canada, he was embarrassed to bring home-cooked meals to school. "I was the only Peruvian kid," he recalls. "I'd bring arroz con pollo in a Tupperware, and the kid next to me with a ham and cheese sandwich would make fun of it. I just wanted to fit in."

That feeling stuck with him – until it transformed into fuel. Now, as the founder of Brasa Peruvian Kitchen, Falcon is on a mission to put Peruvian cuisine on the fast-casual map.

“I’m betting my career that Peruvian food is going to have its time under the sun next,” he tells Shawn Walchef, host of the *Restaurant Influencers* podcast.

But for Falcon, this journey is about more than just food. It’s personal.

Falcon’s connection to hospitality runs deep. His father, a seasoned restaurant operator, once took over a restaurant in Vancouver, unknowingly inheriting the previous owner’s debt. The financial burden forced him to file for bankruptcy.

“It was the first time I ever saw my father cry,” Falcon remembers. “At 16, I didn’t fully understand. But now, I can only imagine the defeat he must have felt.”

Instead of turning him away from the industry, the experience lit a fire under Falcon. “I know my father always wanted to bring Peruvian cuisine to North America. That’s exactly what I’m doing.”

Brasa Peruvian Kitchen isn’t a traditional Peruvian restaurant – it’s a modern, fast-casual concept built for a North American audience. But Falcon doesn’t just want people to try Peruvian food – he wants them to experience the culture itself.

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Why a restaurant launched a hotline

Call 1-844-GO-BRASA, and you won’t hear a typical restaurant voicemail. Instead, a real person answers, ready to discuss anything about Peru.

“We want to introduce millions of people to the flavors of Peru,” Falcon says, “but also to the culture, tourism, art and history. You can call from Texas, where we don’t have any

restaurants, and ask where the best Peruvian restaurant is. If you're going to Peru in three months, call us, email us. We'll send you a PDF of the best cafes and restaurants to go to. And in some cases, we'll even help you book the hard-to-get reservations."

Zappos, which is known for its legendary customer service, inspired the idea. Years before launching Brasa, Falcon visited the company's headquarters to study its customer-first approach. What he saw stuck with him.

"Zappos had people calling in asking where they could buy pizza in their city," he recalls. "A great, legendary customer experience is free marketing and free PR."

For Falcon, restaurants aren't just about serving food; they're about storytelling. That starts with the guest experience but begins with his team.

Many restaurant owners struggle with employee retention. Falcon's approach? Pay more.

Netflix's "talent density" model inspired this tactic – hiring fewer people but paying them better. "I wanted to see if it could work in restaurants," he says. "And it does. We list our pay in the subject line of job postings. Most restaurants bury it at the bottom because they're ashamed of how little they're offering. I'm proud of what we pay."

It's all part of Brasa's bigger mission: "To build a company the world needs more of – one where everyday people are empowered to make great money, achieve career growth and help close the income equality gap."

That mission is as much about people as it is about food. And for Falcon, it's about honoring his past while shaping the future.

"I used to be ashamed of my Peruvian background," he says.

“Now, I want to share it with the world.”

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