



Sofrito

Phillippe Diederich

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"In this entertaining debut novel, Frank Delgado tries to save his failing restaurant by returning to Cuba, his dead father's homeland, to get ahold of a top-secret chicken recipe. But there is more than delicious chicken at stake here. Food is the road home—geographically, emotionally, metaphorically. Peppered with cooking advice from chefs, ordinary folks, and celebrities including Fidel Castro himself (an advocate of pork), Phillippe Diederich's *Sofrito* is a love letter to the deepest recesses of nostalgia's heart." —**Cristina Garcia**, author of *Dreaming in Cuban* and *King of Cuba*

Frank Delgado is no thief. He co-owns a failing Cuban restaurant in Manhattan's Upper East Side. The restaurant, like Frank, is rudderless. Lost. He decides he'll save the restaurant by traveling to Cuba to steal the legendary chicken recipe from the famed El Ajillo restaurant in Havana. The recipe is a state secret, so prized that no cook knows the whole recipe. But Frank's rationale is ironclad—Fidel stole the secret from his family, so he will steal it back. He will triumphantly bring that recipe back to Manhattan and turn his fortunes around.

Frank has no interest in Cuba. His parents fled after the Revolution. His dead father spent his life erasing all traces of Cuba from his heart with barbecues, television, lawn mowing and alcohol. So Frank is not prepared for the real Cuba. Sure, he gets beat up and almost killed, the secret service threatens him, but in the midst of the chaos, he falls in love with a prostitute and the city, and he unwraps the heroic story of his parents' life. Cuba begins to bind Frank together, the way a good sofrito binds the flavors of a Cuban dish.

Phillippe Diederich is a Haitian American writer and photojournalist raised in Mexico City and Miami, Florida. The dictator Papa Doc kicked his parents out of Haiti in the 1960s. Phillippe grew up listening to stories of nostalgia, revolution, and exile. His friends were the sons and daughters of parents who had fled oppressive regimes throughout Latin America.

Sofrito Details

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Author : Phillippe Diederich

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From Reader Review Sofrito for online ebook

Jamie Canaves says

Think Pretty Woman mixed with Chef and some Cuban politics.

Kathy says

I have been fascinated with Cuba since college, back in the 70's. I would read about it here and there but since we spend a week there I am fanatical about reading everything I can get my hands on.

What I really liked about this book were the sights, smells and sounds of Havana. I liked picturing where they were.

I also adored that Cuba was presented as the new/old, loved/hated and Communist/Yearning to be more free country that it has evolved into.

I was able to have the suspension of disbelief that all the intrigue was about a recipe, a recipe so evocative it can save a business or even a life. The ending was what really sold this metaphor to me.

My issues with the book were love at first sight reaction to the prostitute with a heart of gold and the lack of richness of vocabulary in the dialogue. I have obviously never been a Cuban man in a conversation with other Cuban men but if coño is really used that often, I don't need that level of realism. Mix it up!

I would drop the whole romance thread or minimize its importance. It's borrowed from too many stock Hollywood movies. I liked the compassion for why young women take this route but let's not elevate it. Deal?

If you love Cuba, you will want to add this to your have read collection. If you like international food adventures, you will enjoy it. It's a balance view of Cuba with good food and a sappy romance.

Rita Ciresi says

In the penultimate chapter of Sofrito, debut author Phillippe Diederich quotes Guillermo Cabrera Infante: "Cuba is all about food. And food is nothing more than a metaphor for nostalgia." Sofrito is a comic and bittersweet look at Frank Delgado, the son of Cuban exiles, who travels to Havana in search of a top-secret recipe that he hopes will save his failing restaurant in New York City. Along the way, he encounters a host of crazy characters, finds love, and discovers his sense of self. This contemporary picaresque, named a novel of note by the Los Angeles Times, pleases on many different levels.

Barbara says

Following Frank Delgado on his journey to find a secret chicken recipe is an enjoyable mad caper. The absurdity of his mission is fun and entertaining. It will leave you craving spicy chicken.

Veronica Cervera says

I'm Cuban, and I felt the places and the flavors reading this wonderful novel.

Emily says

I made the mistake of reading another reader's review before I was finished and it totally tainted this book for me. That reviewer described *Sofrito* as "Pretty Woman mixed with Chef and some Cuban politics," which is EXACTLY what it is. I found Frank and Marisol's relationship unrealistic and rushed (I don't know if anyone can fall in love with someone in two days), the characters were all very similar (the word "coño" was used SO OFTEN in the dialogue, it was driving me batty.) A high point was the descriptive language used to transport the reader to the streets of Havana: they were evocative and very well done.

Nit-pick: When Frank returns to NYC at the end of the book, he and his brothers completely remodel their restaurant to make it more "authentically Cuban." But the whole point of Frank going to Cuba in the first place was because the restaurant was so far in debt, it was about to go under. How did they get the money for a total overhaul of their restaurant?

Jovanka says

This book is literally delicious because of its culinary détails but also because of the Cuban accent of this beautiful story. I found myself in Cuba and good smell the beautiful odors of good Cuban food. An absolute must read for people that love to travel.

An American born Cuban travels to the island of his parents and discovers their true story and more...

Kenneth Iltz says

Sofrito tells the story of Frank Delgado, a Cuban-American who travels to Havana in search of a secret chicken recipe he hopes will save his failing restaurant in New York City. The recipe was created by one of his relatives before the revolution. The recipe is now "owned" by a Cuban restaurant run by the government of Cuba. Two chefs at the restaurant know only half of the recipe. He meets beautiful Marisol in Cuba. Does he make it back to New York with the recipe? Does he make it back with Marisol? No spoilers here. This is a fun book to read - especially now that we have opened the door to Cuba. John Kerry is in Cuba as I write this review. Enjoy!

Lorraine Ladish says

I read the advance review copy of this book, and find it an entertaining and fun read. I recommend it to foodies, to travelers, biculturals, multiculturals, lovers of Cuba. Full disclosure, the author is my husband but I try really hard to be as objective as possible when I read. As an editor I'm used to reading a lot. If something doesn't capture my attention in the first few pages, no matter who wrote it, I set it aside.

Claire says

This was a great read. Great characterization and a plot that made it a page turner. The author has painted the real picture of what the Havana of today and its inhabitants are like. I liked the fact that the pages are peppered with Spanish dialogue, but as a caveat, I believe it would be a challenging read for a person who doesn't speak Spanish because the author doesn't provide an inkling of translation to these phrases. If a reader has to be constantly reaching for the dictionary, this alone will break the flow of the novel and the reader may lose interest.

Dan Downing says

The reader blessed with a familiarity with Cuban and/or Cubanos will take a certain delight in this 'mystery for foodies,' while those new to the magic island will learn and quite possibly be bitten by an urge to visit. In any event, Diederich gives us an engaging story, a quest wrapped in a love affair in an exotic if confusing location peopled with diverse characters and quite possible inter-relations given the history of Cuba, the revolution, and the diaspora.

Recommended

PS: FWIW, I dedicate this review to an old friend of my daughter's who, together with her husband, owns and operates a local restaurant named 'Sofrito' which serves food alluring enough that they have opened 'Sofrito Two.'

Laura Carbonell says

I love this novel. It's like getting right into the heart of Cuba in a mystery that grabs you from the start. This book is a MUST! For those who love mystery, food, a good read... Go for it! Get lost in it and forget the world around you.

Kimberly Karalius says

Phillippe and I went to graduate school together for creative writing, and I got to see bits and pieces of SOFRITO in workshop. I loved the parts I read, but nothing beats being able to read the finished book. AND IT IS FANTASTIC.

This is a novel about the power and nostalgia that food brings to our lives. At the center is the mouth-watering chicken recipe that could save Frank and his family from having to shut down their restaurant, but Frank must travel to Cuba to steal the recipe - a dangerous task since the recipe is considered government property.

The danger Frank encounters once he gets to Cuba left me breathless, but it was tempered with surprising friendships, family secrets unearthed, lots of mojitos, and unexpected love.

Even though Frank hadn't been born in Cuba, both of his parents were from there, and it was wonderful and moving to see how Frank connected with Cuba on so many levels and experienced a kind of nostalgia despite never have been there before. So many great characters too: I loved Michi and Orlando and Marisol stole my heart as quickly as she did Frank's.

I can't wait to read more of Phillippe's work :D

Fernando says

My family left Cuba when I was 10 years old and because I don't have any relatives left in Cuba I have not been able to return. I long to see the house and the neighborhood where we lived and where I went to school in Old Havana and this wonderful book took me there. I'm a foodie so this made this story even more appealing. I was able to find a street map of Old Havana on the internet and I used it to follow Frank on his escapades thorough the old streets of this beautiful city. I just passed this book over to my sister and she is "devouring" it. One question we both have: Is there really a recipe for the chicken dish and if so, can we get it? And, Phillippe, any chance for a sequel? Would love to find out what happens with Frank and Marisol.

Thing Two says

I loved many parts of this book. I loved how it made me hungry for good Cuban food. I loved how it showed a different view of Cuba—one where Castro is both loved/hated simultaneously. But woven in this fantastic story about a stolen recipe, and the attempts to retrieve it, is a really cheesy "Pretty Woman" type of story. It's a shame, because the rest of the story rocked. This averages to a 3 ?? for me.
