Meet & Eat: Delectable Diversity
By Kathryn Brockman

In many cultures the dining table is the heart of communications. Sitting down to break the proverbial bread together can be an effective way of learning about people's various assumptions and expectations. Often, the manner in which business is conducted, food prepared and wine produced is experienced differently — which is why Portland's Andina Restaurant and The Pearl Wine Shop are sowing the seeds of a culinary business-meeting revolution in the heart of the city's chic, warehouse-renovated Pearl District.

"Our mission," says Peruvian owner Doris Platt Rodriguez, "is to help customers understand Peru's diverse culture through its cuisine — to sit and enjoy, talk and discuss."
In its first two years, Andina has garnered national accolades and won a Restaurant of the Year 2005 award from *The Oregonian* for its innovative Peruvian fusion fare, called "novoandina," meaning "new from the Andes."

Andina Chef Jose Luis De Cossio De La Puente recently collaborated with Coque Ossio, one of Peru's top chefs, to extend the seasonal menu. The offerings reflect Peru's infinite varieties of fish and highly nutritious grains, potatoes, corns, fruits and hot peppers, some of which have been grown for more than 8,000 years and are gleaned from Peru's diverse bioregions and multicultural influences.

With its energetic culinary innovations based on the styles and flavors of Africa, China, France, Japan and Spain, Andina sizzles — and with the restaurant's evolution into a cultural center, it has awakened the reality of restaurant as business-culture facilitator. Built half a story above street level, Andina offers a lower-level retail wine shop, The Pearl, with a private dining room and below-ground courtyard seating for wine tastings.

The historic atrium setting is complemented by a Peruvian travel agency and a boutique.

Meeting planners will find hidden treasure at The Pearl Wine Shop. The unobtrusive, private meeting space in this vibrant locale fuses business meetings, daring cuisine and international wines into one winning package. Inside the intimate 280-square-foot room is a custom-designed rectory table of knotty alderwood surrounded by a fir mantel showcasing 21 individually spotlighted wines from seven worldwide regions.

With more than a decade of experience, Wine Director Ken Collura offers his expansive knowledge to help customers choose the perfect vino. "Wine doesn't need to be expensive, elite or difficult to understand," says Collura. "It should be an integral part of every evening's meal."

All 16 seats have laptop Internet access, with a drop-down screen, projector, DVD, VCR and cable available in-room. The chandelier features hand-blown glass, and the barrel-vaulted slate ceiling seals in a comforting sense of security, tucked away from the diners and bustling shoppers just outside.

"The room itself lures people in," says David Hughes, a repeat customer and pharmaceutical sales representative who hosts frequent meetings there. "It's specifically set up and equipped for small group dinners and discussions without interruptions."

For meeting planners, it couldn't be simpler. Partnering with Andina, The Pearl Wine Shop tenders an array of delectable options, from a three- to seven-course prix fixé, buffet (only available in the courtyard) and regular menu, to mix-and-match, gluten-free, vegetarian and sampler plates.

There's plenty of food for thought while digesting business: hot and spicy, sweet and cooling ceviches (raw seafood marinated in lime juice); succulent meats, such as grass-fed lamb; soups, stews, unusual grains, potatoes, cheeses, rare fruits and desserts made with imported Peruvian ingredients finessed with local products from Portland's fresh markets.

"We try to adapt to our customers' needs and tastes while offering them options," says Rodriguez. At Andina, tasty options satisfy the business meeting planner's needs.

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