

# Barcelona reveals tapas with a tale

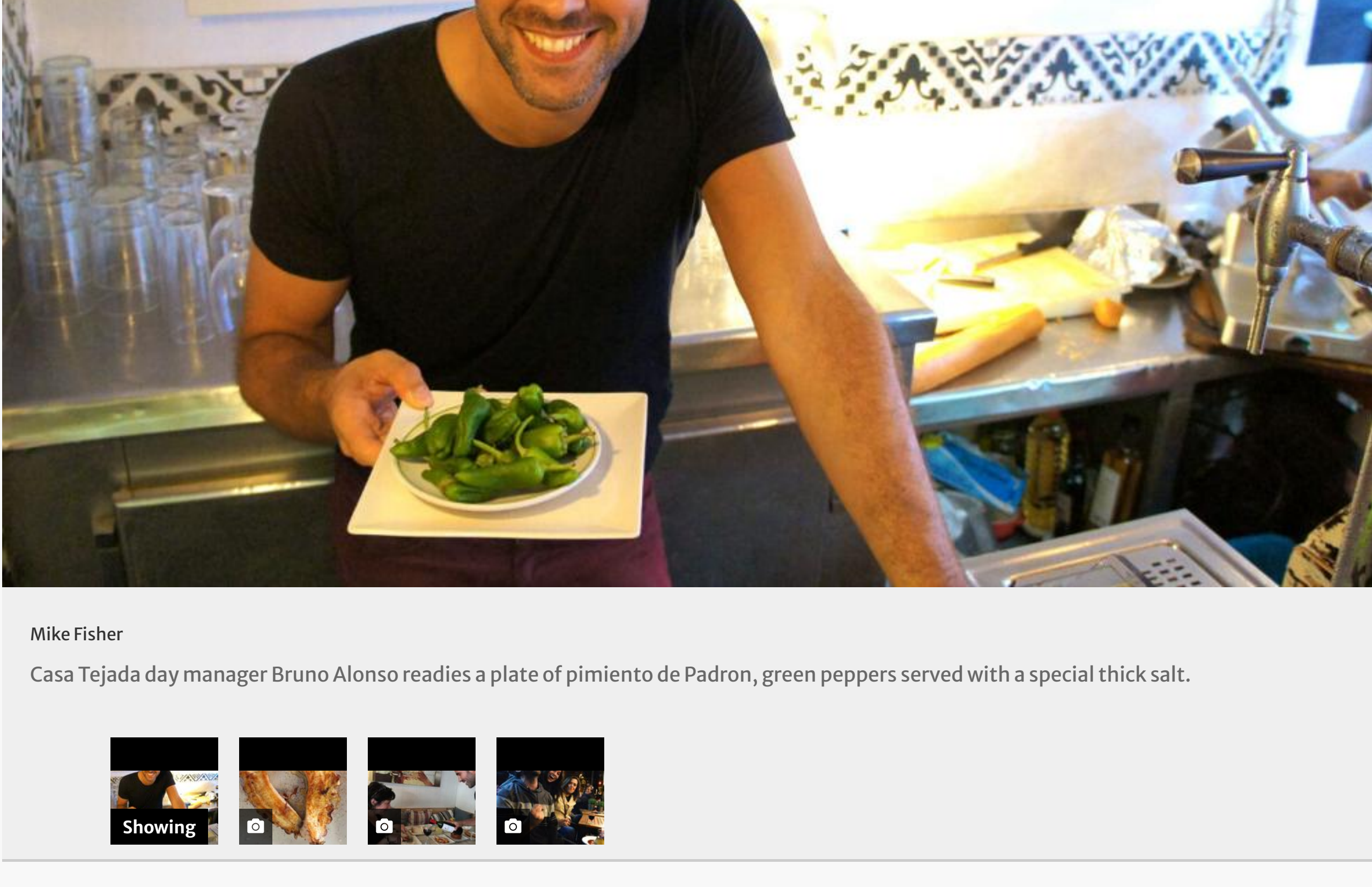
At Casa Tejada restaurant, its day manager Bruno Alonso reveals the philosophy behind the dishes that are made to share.

By Mike Fisher Special to the Star

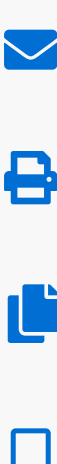
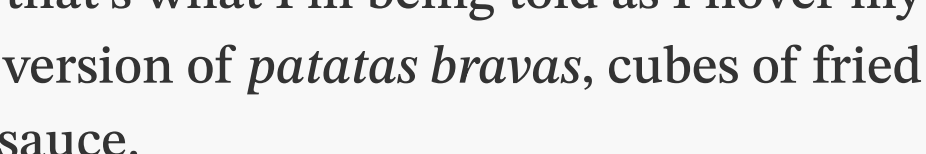
Wednesday, January 18, 2017 3 min to read



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Mike Fisher  
Casa Tejada day manager Bruno Alonso reads a plate of pimiento de Padron, green peppers served with a special thick salt.



BARCELONA, SPAIN-It's not just potatoes slathered in a spicy sauce that's on my plate. It's a philosophy.

At least, that's what I'm being told as I hover my fork over Casa Tejada's fragrant version of *patatas bravas*, cubes of fried potatoes served with a piquant sauce.

You can find the tasty staple in countless tapas bars in Spain. What makes family-owned Casa Tejada different is Bruno Alonso, 37, who served as guitarist for the defunct but briefly famous Barcelona-based rock band Don Johnsons. He's now the day manager, bartender and voice of three generations of tapas servers at Casa Tejada.

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"Tapas, it is not just a way to eat, it is a social thing," he explains, pouring a glass of red wine to complement the *pa amb tomaquet*, toasted bread covered in olive oil and tomato with a bit of salt and garlic. "You eat different kinds of small dishes, have a drink, talk with people at your table, at the bar, at the table next to you. This is the way."

Served hot or cold, the snacks are rooted in a culture that feeds on conversation as much as it does food. Here, I don't need to speak Spanish. Cuisine is the common language. Bite-sized tapas, easily enjoyed and shared while swapping stories with friends, strangers or friendly waiters, are the punctuation.

"To make tapas, there are some rules," says Alonso, who returns from the bar to my table with a plate of octopus. It's cooked on the same grill the restaurant has had since his grandfather and uncle opened it more than 50 years ago.

"The main ingredient must be good. You must spend money for a good, fresh octopus at the market. The chef (Francisco Marín) needs to know the perfect grill point. Then, you need quality olive oil, red pepper and sea salt."

I take a bite and it's a succulent moment. The cosy restaurant opens fully onto the street. I listen to the motor scooters and small cars and bustling pedestrians. Barcelona's liveliness sharpens the appetite.

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It's early afternoon. I've arrived on a tip from the concierge at the modern Melia Barcelona Sarria hotel, which I love because it's in the Les Corts district — part business district, part residential neighbourhood and not touristy. The hotel is easy walking distance to shopping, restaurants and parks by way of the palm-lined Avinguda Diagonal, a wide avenue that slices through the city from west to east.

The main attraction in the district is FC Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium, where soccer fans converge. Football, or soccer, as we know it, is another important piece in Casa Tejada's past. Alonso lays the story out as he pours more wine alongside a plate of *pimiento de Padron*, green peppers served with a special thick salt.

Alonso's uncle, Justo Tejada, was a football star who played for Barcelona and Real Madrid. When the restaurant opened in 1964, it drew customers with Tejada's star power and the food smarts of Bruno's grandfather, Ramon Alonso.

"Casa Tejada was the most popular tapas restaurant in all of Barcelona for 35 years or so," says Bruno. "Now all the action is on the centre, the Placa de Catalunya (Barcelona's busiest square) and the beach area, for the many tourists. The old restaurants like Casa Tejada are closing and disappearing."

When Bruno's father, Ramon, who'd been running the restaurant, fell ill a few years ago, it faced ruin. Bruno's rock band was disintegrating beneath the weight of a bad economy. He and his younger brother, Marcel, stepped up to the plate, so to speak, and swiftly learned how to run the joint.

"We had to learn a lot very fast," says Bruno. "For us, it was a romantic thing, to run our father's restaurant that has been here so long."

This is the other primary ingredient that informs Bruno's tapas philosophy, as well as Casa Tejada, Barcelona and all of Spain — the importance of the family, la familia. His father, he tells me, has recovered enough to shop this morning at the huge Mercat de Sant Antoni (a market) for the octopus I devoured.

These days, Bruno isn't playing in a high-flying rock band, but he is surrounded by the lilt of conversation over tapas, a music he orchestrates as he pours wine, tells stories, sets plates on tables and side-steps customers coming in from the street.

It's not a glamorous show, but for a slice of your time, Casa Tejada is worth your while. If there's no one else for you to talk with while you enjoy your tapas, Bruno might share a few delicious tales.

Mike Fisher's trip to Spain was partially hosted by Regent Seven Seas Cruises and Melia Hotels International.

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## When you go

Get there: Air Canada (aircanada.com) is one of many major carriers that fly from Toronto to Barcelona.

Eat here: Casa Tejada is at C/Tenor Vina 3 in Barcelona. Plates of tapas for two will likely cost \$20 to \$40 before wine. Details: casatejadabcn.com (in Spanish only).

Stay here: The Melia Barcelona Sarria hotel (melia.com) is a pleasant 15-minute walk to Casa Tejada, and close to shopping and sightseeing.

Do your research: barcelonaturisme.com, spain.info

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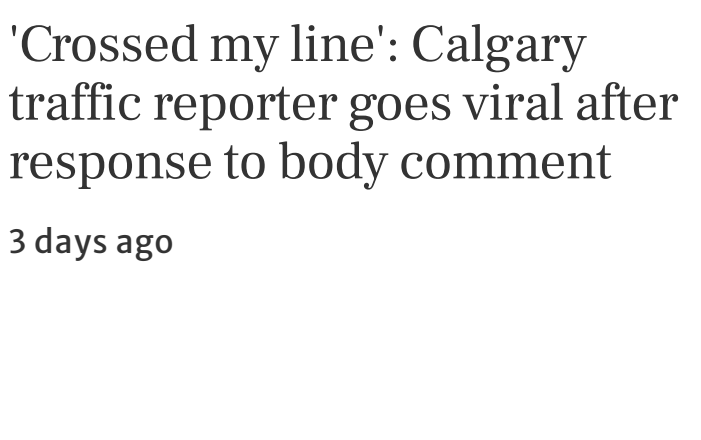
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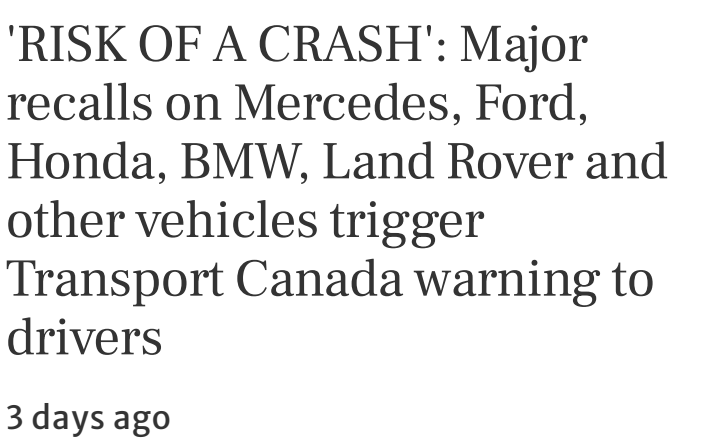
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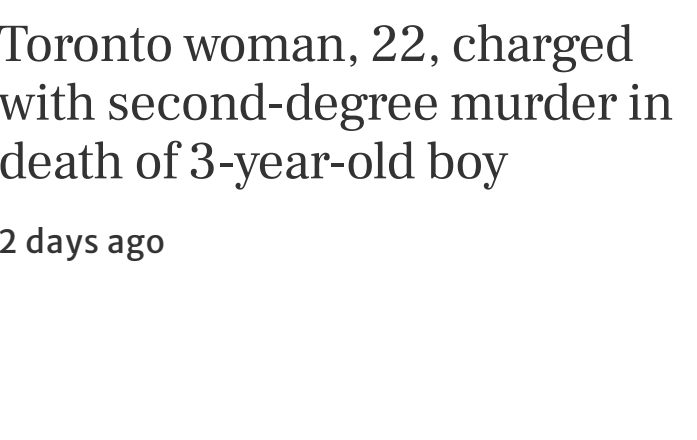
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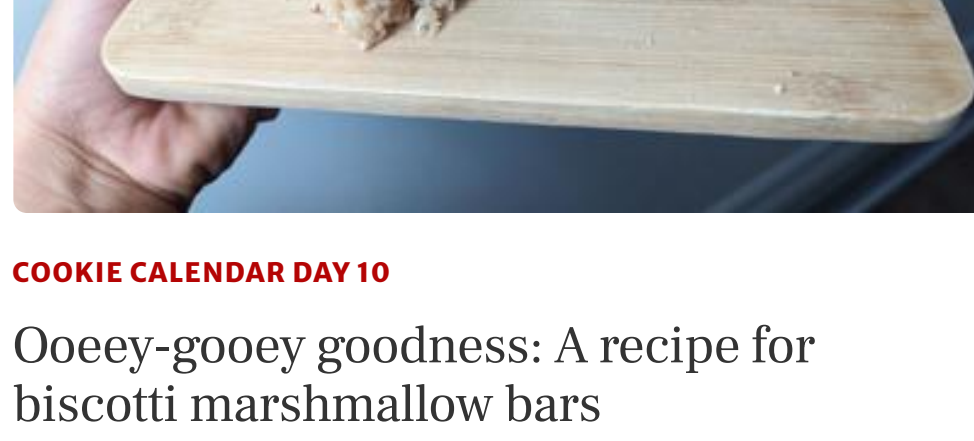
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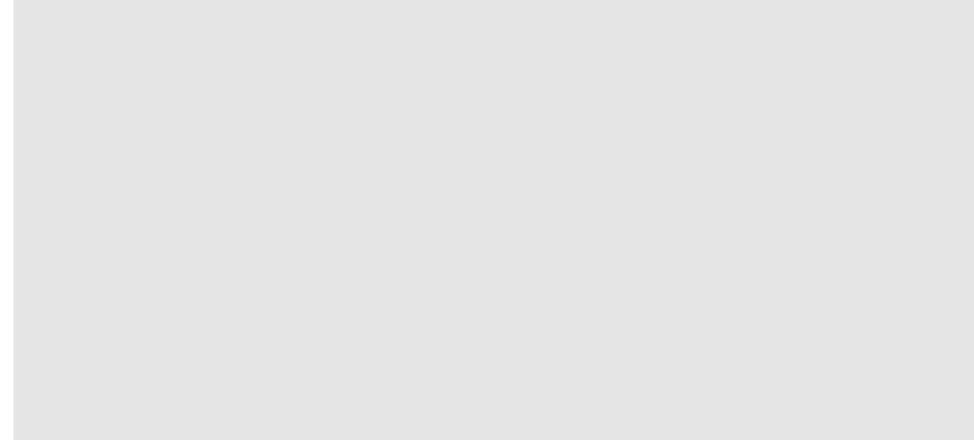
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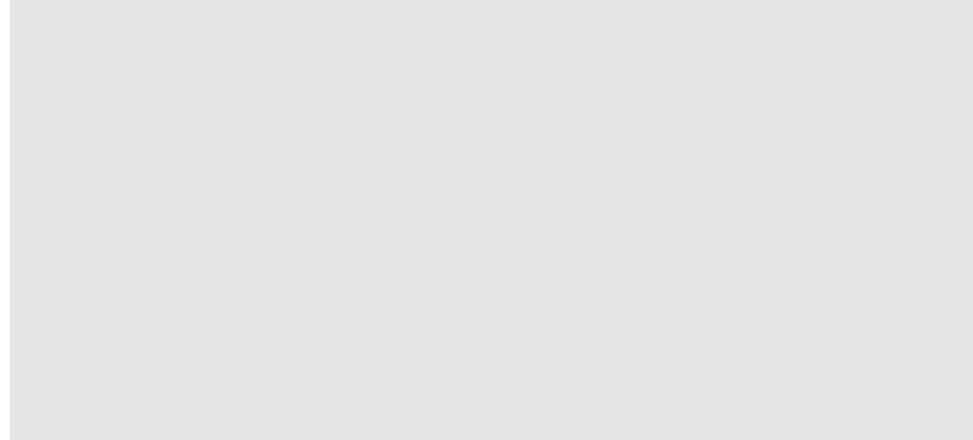
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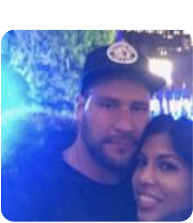
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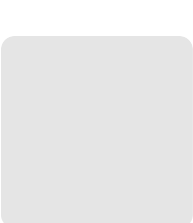
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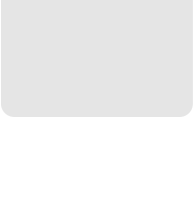
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