

BOSTON

COMING ATTRACTIONS EXPANSIONS

Peruvian Gem Celeste Will Get a Sibling in Cambridge

Celeste will outlast its previously announced five-year end mark, and La Royal is in the works in Huron Village

by [Rachel Leah Blumenthal](#) | [@blumie](#) | May 3, 2021, 7:05am EDT



The team behind La Royal stands in their space in Cambridge's Huron Village neighborhood | La Royal [Official Photo]

Celeste, a tiny Peruvian restaurant in Somerville's Union Square and winner of Eater Boston's **2018 Restaurant of the Year award**, no longer has an end date — and it will soon have a sibling nearby in Cambridge's Huron Village neighborhood, too.

Celeste is three years into what was supposed to be a five-year lifespan. Founders Maria Rondeau and JuanMa Calderón — an architect and filmmaker, respectively, by trade — **always intended for it to have an ending**, at least in its current form with themselves at the helm.

“It’s good to know where the exit is,” Calderón told Eater in late 2019. “We didn’t want to feel tied to something for the rest of our lives, so we were right to say only five years, even if it’s super.”

They acknowledged at the time that the five-year mark wouldn’t necessarily be the end of Celeste; it’s possible they would leave the restaurant to their team. But they would move on to other ephemeral projects, perhaps around the world. At the time, they were already laying the groundwork for Esmeralda, a new experimental project up in Vermont that they intend to debut a few months from now with monthly events.

But now Celeste is sticking around in its current form, and Rondeau and Calderón are also expanding their local roots.



JuanMa Calderón, photographed in 2018, prepares lomo saltado in Celeste’s tiny open kitchen | Rachel Leah Blumenthal/Eater

“Three-years-and-one-pandemic later, things look very different,” the duo told Eater via email. “As you know, we thought this would be a five-year-project — that’s when we were two pre-pandemic newbies. We’re now a family of fifteen, going strong with our original team taking on larger roles and mentoring a new generation.”

“Yes, the pandemic taught us many things,” they continued. “Celeste has been a space of resistance and a place of hope, where we’ve become closer, more committed, and more deeply embedded with our staff and our community. So much so, that we’ve had to reconsider our romantic and rebellious position of closing after five years — a projection which served us well because it gave us the courage to launch a project which would otherwise have been too overwhelming to tackle without knowing there was an exit strategy behind. But the truth is we’re now convinced of one thing — we cannot walk away from what has become a beautiful and extended family — both staff and guests — that have stood by us through the darkest hours; a project which has become our life.”

Rondeau and Calderón will come full circle with their new restaurant, La Royal, named for the street across the way from its location, Royal Avenue. It’s “the place where it all began,” they tell Eater. “We live on Royal Ave., where we started cooking at home many years ago, opening our doors to friends and friends of friends, for home-cooked dinners around a communal table; this experiment led to Celeste, and we now hope to carry on closer to home!”

Describing it as a “beautiful opportunity” that came their way in their own neighborhood, they knew it was a chance to be embraced “with all [their] might.” The bigger space, which Rondeau will design, will be “a large and vibrant open area with an open kitchen where guests take part in the experience of the cooking of the meal.”

More space means the chance “to experiment with a whole new range of flavors and dishes” that can’t be made in the duo’s “beloved and tiny” Celeste. At La Royal, Calderón will “experiment with new dishes only possible with a grill, oven, and lots of space,” such as anticuchos (grilled pinchos), jalea (breaded, deep-fried seafood platters), and conchitas a la parmesana (baked scallops with parmesan). La Royal will also feature an extensive raw bar, including oysters with salsa madre and tiraditos (Peruvian-meets-Japanese sashimi-like fish dishes).

La Royal is in the early stages of planning; Rondeau and Calderón have a zoning permit hearing on May 13, to be followed at a later date by a liquor license hearing. If all goes as planned, construction could begin around mid-June, followed by an early fall opening.



Eater Boston

Sign up for our newsletter.

Email (required)