

Hugo Ortega

Chef and Restaurateur



The winner of Best Chef: Southwest at the prestigious 2017 James Beard Foundation Awards started with very humble beginnings. Chef Hugo Ortega was raised in Mexico City and Puebla, Mexico, and learned his love of cooking from his mother and grandmother, a revered mole maker. At age 17, he left Mexico for Houston and began his career in the restaurant industry as a dishwasher and busboy at Backstreet Cafe before graduating from culinary school and later becoming its executive chef and owner, along with wife Tracy Vaught. Ortega is one of Houston's most acclaimed chefs and his poignant life story is a source of inspiration for many. Ortega remains a fixture in his four restaurant kitchens and is an avid bicyclist.

