

A Piece of Uruguay in Florida

A family looks to the Sunshine State as a springboard for its northern expansion plans.

There are nearly 4,400 miles and 114 years separating the riverside wine estate that Jerónimo Cantón's family founded in Uruguay at the turn of the 20th century and the restaurant and gourmet food company he now manages in South Florida, but time and distance have a way of collapsing inside the doors of Narbona.

Hand-made cheeses and pastas crowd display cases, and containers of Narbona branded olive oil, balsamic vinegar and dulce de leche line shelves. Almost everything they serve in the restaurant

and market — from the coffee to the yogurt to the wine — carries a little bit of the family's history and traditions dating back to when Juan de Narbona founded one of the first wineries in Uruguay in 1909.

Over the generations, the estate became a boutique hotel, and the Cantón family looked to expand to the U.S., with the first locations opening in Key Biscayne, then at Coconut Grove's CocoWalk in 2022, and Boca Raton earlier this year. A factory is under construction in Little Haiti, where the

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restaurant's dairy products will be turned into yogurt, cheese and the signature Narbona dulce de leche.

South Florida is where Narbona has entered the U.S. market, but it's only the first stop, says Cantón, who is leading the North American operation and eyeing potential expansion throughout Florida, New York and California. "The idea is to try to build our brand as locally made," says Cantón. "I don't know how many yogurt factories there are in Miami, but you are going to come to our restaurant and have a yogurt made in Miami."

It was Cantón's father, Eduardo, who saw Florida as the place to jump-start their North American operation, opening in Key Biscayne — a favorite vacation spot for the family because of its European vibe. Eduardo Cantón had built a career in real estate development before turning his attention to the family's winery in Carmelo on the Río de la Plata, just across the border from Argentina. The lodge only has five rooms, but the property and the products reflect the cultural influence of large waves of Italian immigrants who settled the region in the last decades of the 19th century. All these generations later, Cantón family members are still hands-on when it comes to making cheeses, wine and dozens of other products.

Jerónimo Cantón says he's trying to retain that history as the restaurant opens in some of Florida's most modern destinations. "It's like a little travel to the past, where everything looks a little bit simpler," he says.

The factory will start small. It will use milk sourced from Florida farms in its dairy products and eventually employ about 40 people. "We are starting really slow, but we are planning to be here a long time," Cantón says. "The idea is not to be the restaurant that is hot right now. The idea is to be a classic for the United States. It's a totally different country, but we love the idea of what can develop." — By Vickie Chachere