

Read this: Miami Book Fair International kicks off Sunday

By Christina Veiga

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DANIEL BOCK / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Rachael Roque, author of "Cocina Latina: El sabor del mundo latino" and owner of Downtown Book Center, inside her shop, Wednesday, Oct. 31, 2012, in Downtown Miami.

Miami is known for its steamy weather, championship basketball team and, the week of November 11th, the city will be known for books — lots of books.

Downtown Miami will be flooded with prolific authors and voracious readers Nov. 11th - 18th, when the Miami Book Fair International comes to town for the 29th year.

Though Miami Dade College has herded in authors from far and wide, some notable presenters hail from much closer to the fair's home.

Miami's mystery, flavor and beauty have inspired local authors such as James Grippando, who spins legal thrillers from the lush backyard of his Coral Gables home; Bunny Yeager, who's sizzling pin-up girl photos captured not only breathtaking girls but also stunning Miami beaches; Raquel Roque, who has preserved Miami's Latin recipes in two cookbooks; and Larry Perez, who feels at home in Florida's wild Everglades.

Here's a look at each of these Miami authors.

JAMES GRIPPANDO

Jack Swyteck is a Miami criminal defense attorney who graduated from Coral Gables High and practices in Coconut Grove. His goal: getting people off of murder raps while trying to find love.

He's the main character in Coral Gables author James Grippando's legal thriller series, in which Miami's real-life beauty and connection to crimes both strange and heinous serve as a backdrop.

There's no shortage of material to pull from when living in the Sunshine State, Grippando said.

“The kind of books I like to write could only be set in Florida,” he said, calling South Florida an “idea capital” for authors.

“Not only does Florida have a sort of sexy side to it, but it has that connection it seems to just about every major crime or disaster that hits this country,” he said.

Grippando has written 20 novels in his 18-year career, but he didn’t set out to become an author. In 1985, Grippando was a young lawyer at a prestigious Miami law firm, but “always had dreams of becoming a writer,” he said.

Grippando, 54, was practicing law at a time when crime in Miami was at its highest and cocaine cowboys ruled. Along came shows like Miami Vice and, “either arrogantly or naively I said, ‘I can do that,’ and I took a shot.”

He still practices law when a case piques his interest, but now Grippando’s lush backyard serves as his office. His Golden Retriever, Max, is always close by. Grippando lives near Matheson Hammock Park with his wife and their three children.

Grippando will be on a panel of authors, presenting at 11 a.m. on Nov 17, in room 8302. He’ll be alongside Jeffrey Siger (Target Tinos: An Inspector Kaldis Mystery) and Sharon Potts (The Devil’s Madonna.)

BUNNY YEAGER

Miami in the 1950s provided no shortage of pretty ladies and beautiful backdrops for Bunny Yeager to photograph. Both helped her get her nude photos into men’s magazines around the country — and was the only woman of her time to do so.

“When I submitted my pictures, I had to submit them to people in New York and Chicago, and they had not seen the scenes that I had in my pictures,” she remembered. “They just loved the backgrounds that I had. It put me in demand immediately. And all my pictures were in focus and the girls were all gorgeous.”

Now, her photos are on display again, some which have never been seen before, in the book Bunny Yeager’s darkroom: Pinup photography’s golden era, penned and culled by Petra Mason.

Yeager grew up in Pennsylvania and moved to Miami Shores during her last year of high school. Her career as a photographer actually started on the opposite side of the camera, as a model.

“I started taking pictures of myself and seeing my mistakes, and seeing what I could correct so I could be really good at modeling,” she said.

Turns out, she was as good at snapping photos as she was posing for them, and earned herself the nickname “the prettiest photographer.”

In particular, her photos of Betty Page, the iconic pinup girl, made both women’s careers.

Yeager, 83, still lives and shoots in Miami Shores.

Yeager and Petra talk about the book and photography at 1:30 p.m. on Nov. 17 in room 2106.

RAQUEL ROQUE

Raquel Roque, 57, has spent her life around books.

Her family came to Miami from Cuba in 1965 when Roque was just 11 years old. They set up a wholesale book company in Downtown Miami. Forty-seven years later, The Downtown Book Center is still in business.

Now, Roque can put her own title on book store shelves. She's woven her Cuban heritage with her love of books to produce two cookbooks: *Cocina Cubana* (Cuban Kitchen), and her latest, *Cocina Latina: El sabor del mundo latino* (Latin Kitchen: The taste of the Latin world.)

"In Miami, we eat Cuban 24/7. It's become part of our culture," she said.

The book started with the need to preserve the recipes that have become the city's staple.

"I'm Cuban and all the recipes, I think, were getting not necessarily lost, but not recorded either," Roque said.

That's no longer the case: Roque collected 500 recipes in her book, saying she wanted it to be "encyclopedic." Eager chefs can learn how to make *cafe con leche*, *croquetas*, shakes, desserts and even baby foods with the help of her book.

Her new cookbook, due out in April 2013, features recipes from 20 Spanish-speaking countries. She decided to expand on her first book because Miami's cooking has come to include flavors from all over the Spanish-speaking world, she said.

"I'm a Miami woman, and I've tasted all these recipes. There are so many connections to all of these countries in our city," she said.

Roque lives in Westchester with her husband, daughter and son.

Roque is reading with Maricel Presilla at 12:30 p.m. on Nov 17 in Room 6100 and will take part in a cooking demonstration at 4 p.m. on Nov 17 at Wine Theater.

LARRY PEREZ

It took a 2004 photo of a python splitting open while trying to devour an alligator for the world to take notice of a creeping problem: the invasion of Burmese pythons into the Florida Everglades.

But, inside Everglades National Park, scientists have known the non-native, predatory snake has not only made the park home, but its breeding grounds, since at least 2000 — when the first peer-reviewed study to that effect came out, said park ranger Larry Perez.

Perez has seen the invasion from up close, and said he wanted to put the research coming from Everglades scientists into the hands of the public. So he wrote a book titled: Snake in the grass: an Everglades invasion.

“It’s sort of a worst case scenario, because it’s established itself into an area that is recognized as an international treasure,” Perez said. “We have no idea of what the future will be of pythons in the area. The only thing we can be certain of is that they are going to be here for a very, very long time.”

He added: “We’re going to have to sort of come to grips with living with large predatory reptiles.”

The snake issue is surprisingly contentious, Perez said, with differing opinions on the need and ways to curtail ownership of the exotic pets.

His goal, Perez said: “Let the readers draw their own conclusion.”

Though he’s made the ‘Glades his life work, Perez wasn’t always a naturalist. He grew up in the suburbs of Kendall and spent many afternoons at his grandmother’s Little Havana home.

“I was raised pretty much like a veal, never really left the house,” he joked.

It wasn’t until Perez took an ecology class at Florida International University, which required him to dive into Coral Reefs and wade through the Everglades, that he got in touch with Florida’s wild side.

“These were very liberating and different experiences for me in South Florida, and I knew almost instantly that I wanted to make this my life’s work,” he said.

Perez, 38, lives in Country Walk with his wife two children.

Perez will be on a panel at 10:30 a.m. on Nov. 18 in room 2106. He’ll be alongside Craig Pittman, (The Scent of Scandal: Greed, Betrayal, and the World’s Most Beautiful Orchid), Jose Castro (The Sharks of North America), and Jessica Speart (Winged Obsession: The Pursuit of the World’s Most Notorious Butterfly Smuggler).