

... & Drink

WORD OF MOUTH

Pretty little dishes all in a row

Tapas, tapas everywhere . . . At **Torito**, a week-old tapas bar in Kensington Market, high style meets Spanish tradition. Owner Veronica Laudes (ex-Latitude) brought design savvy to a former ethnic craft store on the hip end of Augusta Ave., complete with the stylized black bull hanging out front. (Torito means "little bull" in Spanish.)

Chef Carlos Hernandez (ex-Xango) builds his menus around Spanish ingredients. In addition to the, de rigeur *tortilla española* and garlic shrimp, Hernandez puts a modern spin on such dishes as arugula salad with manchego cheese, roasted almonds and quince vinaigrette. His octopus terrine is just that: poached octopus suspended in its own jelly, served with caper salad. The braised tripe, though, is based on a Chilean recipe of Laudes's grandmother.

"It's not main courses, not appetizers, but something in the middle," is how Hernandez explains the burgeoning appeal of tapas.

There's also the price factor. Dishes at Torito cost between \$3 and \$11.

► It'll be even more tapas when **Doku 15** opens next month. The Blowfish

offspring, scheduled for a mid-January opening, will offer "trans-Asian" small plates in the new Cosmopolitan Hotel on Colbourne St., that wisp of pavement near Yonge and King.

In addition to a lounge catering to the after-dinner crowd with tea- and sake-based cocktails, Doku 15 promises such revolutionary ingredient combinations as grilled pineapple and veal gyoza skewers with chilli-ponzu sauce. Tapas are to be priced from \$8 to \$18.

As for the name, co-owner Zark Fatah explains that Doku means "poison" in Japanese — extending the Blowfish image — while the number 15 represents "completion and perspective in Zen Buddhist culture," since the new restaurant is "the evolution of what we learned at Blowfish."

Executive chef G.Q. Pan will split his time between Blowfish and Doku 15.

► It's small plates of an Italian kind at **MoDo**, restaurant No. 3 for the Philobes brothers (La Vecchia, Monte Cristo).

The brothers gussied up the former Ricochet at Ave/Dav and installed executive chef Ian McKinstry (ex-Noce).



No bull about the tapas at Torito.

The modern Italian offerings range from \$6 for *zuppa del giorno* to \$16 for grilled lobster tail with parsley-garlic butter. Best of all? The 17 kinds of fantastically inventive homemade gelati. Love the sound of strawberry with prosecco, or orange with burnt-brandy orange rind.

► In non-tapas news, Laurent Brion has said goodbye to Teatro on College St. and moved over to **Eight**, a new restaurant on Brant St. The French-born chef is in charge of the open kitchen, putting on a show for diners; other entertainment is provided by the nightclub downstairs, **Image**. Brion's luxe menu includes classics like steak frites and rack of lamb with pommes anna.

Amy Pataki