

Hot Spots!



Torito sous chef Arul and co-owners Carlos Hernandez and Veronica Laudes bring chic and cheerful tapas to Kensington.

All Hail TORITO!

PART OF THE BURGEONING KENSINGTON CULINARY SCENE, TORITO IS BRINGING TAPAS WITH A TWIST TO PICANTE-STARVED DOWNTOWNERS *By Emily Haskins*

WITH LITTLE FANFARE, Carlos Hernandez and Veronica Laudes opened their new tapas bar, Torito, just this past December. The opening may have been low key, but since then the restaurant has been garnering positive reviews in a number of local publications and is being heralded as helping to lead the restaurant renaissance that is happening in Kensington Market.

Chef Hernandez has worked in some of Toronto's most respected kitchens for upwards of 20 years. He has manned the stoves at Brownes Bistro, Delisle Restaurant and Wine Bar, Xango and Sarkis and he continues working during the day as the special events chef at the nearby AGO. With the opening of Torito, he is returning to his roots and cooking Spanish tapas that respects tradition, but doesn't slavishly adhere to it.

The long, narrow room with simple brick walls decorated with bullfighting posters and a carved bull's head (an allusion to Ferran Adria's famous kitchen at El Bulli, perhaps?) is lit by devotional candles. Blackboards list the small, all-Spanish wine list. Seating is found at the white marble topped bar or at chic, picnic-style tables along the walls. A vintage clock from the "Pasta Telegraph" company keeps time.

Menu prices start at \$3 for the "Bread, fresh cheese and fiesta" plate, and nothing costs more than \$11. "Dishes are somewhere between an appetizer and a main," explains chef Hernandez. "We'll put six or seven shrimp on a dish, and meat and fish portions are four ounces each." The menu's familiar offerings include a Spanish tortilla, salt cod stuffed piquillo peppers, Serrano ham and chocolate flan, but also dishes like braised beef cheek and tongue and a Chilean tripe stew that, somewhat surprisingly, have become favourites with the restaurants growing clientele of regulars.

For take-away, the restaurant has a small selection of such Spanish delicacies as canned piquillo peppers, saffron tea, dulce de leche, smoked paprika and various olive oils. That, along with honest, simple cooking and affordable prices, make it a welcome addition to Kensington.

Torito Tapas Bar, 276 Augusta Ave. (just south of College), 647-436-5874

Calendar

JANUARY 30

Toronto by Table at Perigee

Toronto by Table is a partnership of five of Toronto's finest restaurants. At this event, all five of the city's best chefs collaborate on a seven-course tasting menu. The five partners are The Fifth, Via Allegro Ristorante, Splendido, Perigee and Avalon. All have been ranked among the best restaurants in the city. The group aims to focus attention on the excellence of Toronto's gourmet scene. Events occur semi-regularly; log onto their website and sign up for news. Upcoming in March: a celebration of the wines of Burgundy. torontobytable.com

MARCH 3 - 5

Cuvée Weekend

It's the Oscars of wine, the annual red carpet celebration of the Ontario wine industry. Geekfest? Yes! But even the novice Ontario wine lover will find endless opportunities to learn and taste. As the winners are announced, more than 50 Ontario wineries will pour more than 170 of their best wines at the Cuvée Gala taking place March 5. Eight chefs, including Michael Olson, Jason Parsons and Erik Peacock, provide the accompaniment. In its 15 years, this is the Cuvée's largest number of participants. Events are happening all weekend, so check out the website for details. The Cuvée En Route program allows passport holders to visit wineries for special tastings (included in the purchase of a Gala ticket). \$200. White Oaks Resort and Spa, Niagara on the Lake. cuvée.ca

MARCH 8

Great Cooks on Eight, The Bay

Culinary advocate David Chrystian continues a project he started last year with The Centre for Wine and Food. His unique dinners throw unusual pairing challenges at his guests, who then discuss and score the results, which are later posted at Chrystian's website. Time and cost TBD. thecentreforfoodandwine.com

APRIL 15 - 24

Harvest in South Africa

Join John and Zoltan Szabo for a seriously fun gourmet food and wine tour of the Cape, as they (and you) travel and taste your way through some of the best wines on the Cape, watch whales off Walker's Bay, dine with local winemaking celebrities, see first-class chocolate being produced, and much more. You'll laugh and learn a lot. Call or email for details. 416-654-9695. info@szaboandszabo.com