

Si si, Pepe

 **PEPE @ TORITO** (276 Augusta, at College, 647-436-5874) Complete dinners for \$40 per person, including all taxes, tip and a glass of Spanish sherry. Average main \$10. Open for dinner Friday and Saturday from 6 pm. Closed Sunday to Thursday. Licensed. Access: 10 steps at door, washrooms on same floor. Rating: **NNNN**

NOBODY DOES TAPAS BETTER THAN Torito. So common is this knowledge, most nights there's a queue out the door patiently waiting for one of this cozy Kensington cantina's too-few tables.

To alleviate the lineup, the resto's Veronica Laudes has finally opened her long-promised basement bar, the idea being that the subterranean space can handle the spillover crowd on weekends and appeal to those who want to do tapas in a somewhat more authentic and leisurely manner.

But after their first visit to this simply stellar cellar, no one's ever going to want to sit on those hard picnic benches upstairs again. Some dilemma!

Dimly lit and oozing atmosphere, the intimate room seems warmly welcoming this cold winter's night, and the volume level of the lounge-y soundtrack ("It's Bran Van, man!") perfect for conversation. The card is much the same as that upstairs – deliciously smoked trout over new potatoes daubed with creamy avocado mayo (\$8), chewy Chilean tripe stew with chickpeas and Manchego cheese (\$9) – but now includes a few daily bar-only specials.

We're particularly taken with chef Carlos Hernandez's skinny merguez sausage over wild mushrooms 'n' lentils (\$8).

And if you really want to do tapas the way they're done back in Barcelona, don't miss Torito's eye-opening card of Jerez sherries. Pronounced "heh-reth" in Spanish and ranging in flavour from very dry to cough-syrup-sweet, these fortified wines are shockingly good, especially when sipped while lounging over tapas.

And starting at only \$6 a glass for a 2-ounce pour, they're the cheapest ticket to foodie paradise in town. **SD**