

DINING

Cuisine of Spain served at new Hola! Tapas Cafe

By ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

In Spain, even the smallest village has at least one spot where locals gather to enjoy tapas, drinks and conversation with friends. Now, on a larger scale, you can enjoy a fairly authentic Spanish experience at Hola! Tapas Cafe in Pontiac.

Spanish dishes are today's "in" food. A Spanish-theme restaurant means a U.S. metro area is dialed into the world of international foods.

Make no mistake, I'm talking about Spanish cuisine, not Mexican, and there's a world of difference. In mid-June, owner Nino Cutraro transformed from Italian restaurant to an Italian restaurant. He said "Hi" (Hola!) to decidedly Spanish. The little Xs and Os etched on glass dividers still speak to the hugs and kisses translation of bac! abraçci, but a loving touch is OK in any language!

Interior face-lifts opened up the main dining room to the bar/dance floor and produced a female flamenco dancer in brilliant red dress on the wall. Gone are the white table cloths. Now terra cotta covered with white butcher block, tables offer the feeling of casual, a place to gather with friends, kick back and order rounds of tapas and a couple of paellas — food to be shared.

Tapas originated around the

Hola! Tapas Cafe
Where: 40 W. Pike St., Pontiac (248) 263-1300.
Hours: 5-11 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday; until midnight Friday and Saturday.
Menu: Spanish all the way from tapas (little dishes of Spain), four types of paella and entradas (main courses) prepared a la brasa (roasted), a la plancha (flame grilled) or a la sal (baked in salt).
Entertainment: Thursday DJ Salsa night at 9 p.m. Live Latin music Friday and Saturday evenings at 10 p.m.
Cost: Tapas \$3-8; Paella \$9-13; Entradas \$13-17.
Reservations: Accepted.
Credit cards: All majors accepted.

19th century in Andalusia, the most-laid back region of Spain. It was a bartender's practice to top a sherry glass with a cover (tapa) to keep the contents free of flies. The custom progressed, and today, tapas are the rage of Spain. They can be as simple as a dish of olives, fried salted almonds, jamon serrano or Manchego (traditional Spanish cheese) to an elaborately prepared hot seafood dish.

Hola! Tapas Cafe offers 10 tapas frías (cold) and 10 tapas calientes (hot). Tortilla Española is one of the cold, or more precisely, room-temperature tapas. This tortilla is nothing like the Mexican. It is more like an omelet with potato, onions and green peppers, akin to an Italian frittata.

Among hot tapas, try Violras a la Plancha, grilled sea scallops with saffron sauce, topped with roe mayonnaise; Calamares Rel-

lonos, stuffed squid with multi-colored peppers, onions and sausage in a light pescadora sauce; and Pincho de Solomillo a la Pimienta, grilled tenderloin of beef bruchetto rolled in cracked black pepper.

Having spent several weeks in Spain and some days in Valencia (paella's capital) recently, I've grown very fond of paella. In Spain, one of the ways you know paella is made to order is that the menu requests allowance of 30 to 40 minutes for its preparation and the minimum is a two-person order, priced per person. This is precisely what Hola! Tapas Cafe does for its four paellas: Mariscos (seafood), Valenciana (chicken and pork), de Verduras (vegetable), and Fideuà de Mariscos (macaroni-like pasta with seafood).

Pretty close to authentic! At one of Valencia's star paella restaurants, my husband Ray

and I paid just under \$40 U.S. for dinner that included a sherry copa for each of us that came with tapas, paella Valenciana, a bottle of quality Spanish red wine and a shared flan for dessert.

At Hola!, without the sherry, you'll pay \$10 per person for the paella, \$30 for the most reasonably-priced Spanish wine and \$4 for the flan.

Close, but driving up the cost is the wine, which at its source was much cheaper. Handicapping for our alfresco, your drive to Pontiac for a near-Valencia experience is priced fairly.

Among entrees, the most interesting is the Dorada a la Sal, red snapper baked in salt and served with alioli sauce. It, too, is made to order and requires a prep time of 40 minutes. Arrive your taste buds with tapas while you wait. On a low sodium diet? Don't fret. The salt crust is not eaten, it's just the medium used to bake this Mediterranean-style fish specialty.

Interesting Spanish desserts include two unique: Arroz con Leche, baked Spanish rice pudding. If your mother made better, you're lucky! Leche Frita is fried milk with vanilla and cinnamon, sugar laced with black raspberry sauce.

Behind all this authenticity is Cutraro's friend Chef Julia, a native of Vigo in the Galicia region of northern Spain. Chef Julia is director of the culinary



At your service: Executive chef Bradley Kimelman (left) and sous chef Bud Saley prepare authentic Spanish cuisine at the new Hola! Tapas Cafe in Pontiac.

school in Vigo, Spain's largest fishing port. She created all the recipes and taught. Hola's kitchen staff including executive chef Bradley Kimelman, a 1981 OCC culinary department graduate, who has been executive chef and general manager at a number of area restaurants before Hola.

"I love Spanish food," he said enthusiastically. "My wife is from Columbus and I've cooked it for her for a decade. It's colorful and flavorful food that Americans are embracing."

Nino's brother Luigi Cutraro is banking on this because he's opening Sangria, a similar Spanish-themed restaurant in Royal Oak on Lafayette at the corner of Fourth Street, in a few weeks.

WHAT'S COOKING

Send information for consideration in What's Cooking to Koely Wygonik, Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 30251 Schoonerd, Livonia, MI 48150, fax (734) 691-7270 or send e-mail to: kwygonik@eo.com

Excalibur — Presents the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, 7 p.m. Friday, July 23, 28876 Franklin

Road, Southfield. Tickets \$25 per person, cash bar and hors d'oeuvres menu available. Call (248) 358-3065.

Morels, a Michigan Bistro — 30100 Telegraph, Bingham Farms (248) 642-1094 is the site of Master Sommelier Madeline Triffin's monthly "Wednesday Wine Bar." Upcoming dates for wine enjoyment in an unpretentious atmosphere with the most upstart, unpretentious wine export are July 28 and Aug. 25. Served with eight featured wines

are a couple of cold and one hot appetizer along with cheese, fruit and bread for \$35 per person.

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The exhibition is sponsored by Louis E. Young U.S. Artwork support was received through the generosity of The Henry Ford Foundation. Additional funding was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. Organized by The Jewish Museum, NY.

For further information or to purchase tickets, please contact the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs and the City of Detroit.

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