

Updated tapas at Cafe Madrid 🍷

Spanish chef applies modern techniques to traditional dishes

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By TINA DANZE / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

Spanish chefs have invigorated the food scene from Barcelona to New York City. Now you can add Dallas' Cafe Madrid to the list of spots getting a jolt of modern Spain.

Recently, Chef Mariano Fernández, a native of Valencia, Spain, left New York's Avalon Hotel to become executive chef of Cafe Madrid. Each week, he'll add four or five updated Spanish dishes as specials to the two restaurants' regular tapas menus.

"We'll be making traditional dishes, but we're going to play with them, giving them a more aesthetic presentation and applying modern techniques to get new textures," Mr. Fernández says.

On a recent visit, a delicate, chilled tomato soup with a briny clam garnish floated over a goat cheese crema. Charmingly served in a dessert wine glass, it resembled a parfait more than a savory starter.

A tapas sampler held four mini portions: potato and pine nut bunuelo of bacalao (dried salted cod) with aioli; breaded fried piquillo pepper stuffed with shrimp; canelloni of morcilla sausage with rice and pisto manchego (similar to ratatouille); and tagliatelli of calamari with zucchini pasta and squid ink. The latter was the most playful of the set, with the calamari and zucchini cut to resemble pasta noodles, and squid ink streaked across the plate like a broad brushstroke.

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Photos by RANDY ELI GROTHE/DMN
Chef Mariano Fernández, a native of Valencia, Spain, prepares a tapa at Cafe Madrid.

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[VIDEO Watch chef Fernández prepare one of his new dishes.](#)

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The specials approach the adventurous side, yet their flavors and textures are comfortingly accessible. There are no foams or airs such as those popularized by Spain's most cutting-edge chefs. Mr. Fernández says he patterns his culinary style after that of José Andrés, the acclaimed Spanish chef of Jaleo restaurant in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Fernández fell in love with Dallas while in town for the opening of the Balenciaga exhibit at the Meadows Museum in February. After a chance meeting with Cafe Madrid owner Donica Jimenez, he stayed for five days as a guest chef. Now, he is executive chef for both the Travis Street and new Bishop Avenue locations. (Initially, he will spend more time at the Bishop Avenue restaurant.)

His arrival dovetails with the city of Dallas' recent cooperation agreement with Valencia. Through the partnership, the two cities, along with Southern Methodist University, will engage in cultural, educational and commercial exchanges. Cafe Madrid will join in with a series of culinary events.



Tina Danze is a Dallas freelance writer.

Tagliatelli of calamari with zucchini pasta and squid ink is one of Mr. Fernández's tapas.

TASTE SPAIN

- Monday, chef Mariano Fernández will prepare a four-course wine dinner in honor of the Dallas-Valencia cooperation agreement. It's at Cafe Madrid's Bishop Arts District restaurant (408 N. Bishop Ave.) \$75; call 214-942-8272 for reservations.
- Starting Tuesday, Cafe Madrid's Travis Street restaurant will feature "*Martes con Mariano*" (Tuesday With Mariano), a monthly exploration of regional Spanish food, wine and culture led by Mr. Fernández and guest speakers. Besides food, topics will range from art to architecture to tourism.

The series will be at 7 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at 4501 Travis St. From May through October, the Valencia region will be celebrated. Call 214-528-1731 for information and reservations.