

Portland monthly



BEST RESTAURANTS



DECEMBER 2004
\$3.99 www.portland-monthly.com



*Favorite dish: Castagna's
bleu cheese hamburger*

Identity theft: Are you
already a victim?

The Oregon Food Bank
feeds a hungry state

Winter solace: Taking
the coast by storm

An ode to eggnog
(plus our tipsy recipe)



Lauro Kitchen

Best Mediterranean

When using the word "Mediterranean" to describe a cuisine, you're covering a wide range of dishes, and according to our chefs, nobody here does Mediterranean better than David Machado at **Lauro Kitchen**.

"He does a great job of bringing it all together," says Castagna's Kevin Gibson. "He's definitely working from a broad palette."

From monkfish with seared potatoes to punchy charcoal vinaigrettes to seared scallops served with red onions and parsley, it's a menu that covers major gustatory ground.

With panache.

"David's combinations, from kabobs to how he presents mussels, it's all done with thought and follow-through using a unique choice of products," says Bruce Fishback of Bread & Ink Café. "Dining should be an educational experience, not just putting something familiar into your mouth."

Bluehour's Kenny Giambalvo admires Machado's unique flair, and his *cataplana* mussels, oven roasted in a copper pot that's opened at the table, filling the room with the dish's fragrance.

"He has perfect presentation," says Giambalvo. "The mussels are never overcooked, and have just the right amount of sausage and tomatoes. It's the kind of dish you remember vividly long after you've left the restaurant."

But Rolland Wesen of Rivers Restaurant gives equal credit to Daren Hamilton, Lauro's amiable general manager.

"He runs a great front of the house, with a real easy style," says Wesen. "His warm, sunny attitude allows for a great feeling in that room, like a family gathering. It doesn't hurt at all that the food tastes like it's been cooked by somebody's Portuguese grandmother, the relative that everyone in the family out-and-out raves about. I love their chicken *tagine* so much that it's an effort for me not to order it every time."

'New twists on old peasant-style Latin cooking'

Best Unknown

Since opening in March, **Nuestra Cocina** has yet to draw the crowds it truly deserves, but it attracted the attention of our chefs, who named it the city's best restaurant that almost nobody knows about. After tasting what Morgan Brownlow of Clarklewis calls "new twists on old peasant-style Latin cooking," you'll be scratching your head too.

Kevin Gibson waxes poetic about the *sopas* ("bite-sized, and crispy on the outside with a creamy, almost cloud-like texture and taste on the inside") and confesses to multiple helpings of the *chicharrones* ("big chunks of pork skin, but these aren't greasy, since everything's been properly cooked to begin with before being combined with those signature chilies").

Other chefs rave about the restaurant's handmade tortillas and single out dishes such as the red snapper *huachinango* and spiced pork with pickled onions, which some might consider a risk, and others an adventure.

"Their food style and taste goals are just a little different than those of the rest of Portland's Latin restaurants," notes Brownlow. "It's that trying for the next level, and they're accomplished enough that it's totally working for them."

That, adds Brownlow, and the atmosphere of the place, which he describes as "sexy."

"Right now I can almost smell the jasmine that grows along trestles on the back patio," he sighs, planning his next visit.