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FIRST TASTE Small plates, big
flavor at Corsica Wine Bar

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THE
Food
ISSUE

TOP DISHES



PAELLA OF THE MOMENT

Available only on weekends, this dish just one of the many reasons why getting a table at Lucina Eatery & Bar is like striking gold.

It's the Summer of Yum! Discover the city's most mind-blowing menu items and get the inside scoop from the chefs who created them. Featuring The Wolf's Tailor, Restaurant Olivia, Brasserie Brixton, and more!

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top DISHES

In our quest to uncover the city's top dishes, we dined out a lot. And we found an impressive spread of iconic dishes that our local chefs have been honing for years. From American to Asian, Italian, Latin, French, and Mediterranean, we present our top picks from each culinary tradition. And we didn't just sample these dishes—we sat down with the chefs themselves to discuss the nuances of their flavors, the inspirations driving their restaurants, their take on the latest season of *The Bear*, and their favorite dining spots (hint: they all recommend each other's places, revealing a tight-knit community of culinary artisans). Additionally, we explore Denver's best appetizers, where first impressions count, and highlight the top tasting menus because why settle for one mouthwatering dish when you can enjoy a full culinary journey?

Bon appétit, Denver—orders up!

by SAHALE GREENWOOD & STEPHANIE WILSON

photography by JONI SCHRANTZ

index

54	56	58	60	62	64	66	68
LATIN	MEDITER- RANEAN	ASIAN	AMERICAN	ITALIAN	FRENCH	TASTING MENU	APPETIZER



RICE RULES “The rice is the most important part,” says Lucina chef Erasmo “Ras” Casiano. Following his mother Lucina’s technique, the chefs first toast the bomba rice to nicely brown it, then add grated tomatoes and cook it in a veggie stalk.

FIERY FINISH Lucina’s open-concept kitchen allows guests to enjoy fiery displays, such as torching the top of the paella. “Not only to show off because we’re right there,” Casiano says, “but mostly to make the shrimp tails pop off easier and get that pink, blistered appearance.”

LOCAL INGREDIENTS The chefs source umami oyster mushrooms for the paella from Colorado Mushroom Company.

Lucina the DISH

Chefs Erasmo “Ras” Casiano and Diego Coconati’s Paella of the Moment features bomba rice cooked in a vegetable stock with grated tomatoes and saffron, Spanish chorizo, chicken, and oyster mushrooms. Topped with a celebration of Chilean salmon, shrimp, and mussels, it is finished with chili threads, garlic crema, and a squeeze of lemon.

LATIN

The very concept of Latin cuisine is a melting pot, representative not just of the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America and Europe, but the myriad regional styles within them. In Denver, upscale Mexican and Latin cuisine is leading the culinary renaissance. Led by a cadre of chefs inspired by a coalescence of family recipes, global travel, and local ingredients, Denver restaurants are serving dishes that showcase their heritage, giving diners a taste of the ties that bind them to their roots.

Better Together

THE SECRET INGREDIENT: COLLABORATION



At Lucina Eatery & Bar, chefs Erasmo “Ras” Casiano and Diego Coconati, both of whom were named James Beard semifinalists in the Best Chef: Mountain Region category in January, know that the best things in life come from quality collaboration. Take, for example, Lucina’s signature dish: the weekend-only Paella of the Moment. “It’s a Spanish dish,” Casiano says, “but really it’s a culmination of a lot of world happenings.”

The same could be said for Lucina’s entire menu, which borrows flavors and culinary traditions from Latino communities everywhere, from South America to the Caribbean to Spain. It’s a way for the chefs to honor their ethnic backgrounds. Casiano grew up eating his family’s Mexican food in Texas, while Coconati’s roots span Argentina, Venezu-

ela, and Puerto Rico. At Lucina, the chefs combine these influences in dishes that showcase flavors, colors, and presentations that are anything but expected. “It’s not a splitting of philosophies, but rather a merging of them,” Casiano says. “In Spanish, we have a saying: *‘ni tanto ni tan poco,’* meaning ‘not too much over here, not too little over there.’ It’s all about balance.”

Lucina’s paella is a perfect example. The menu describes it as a showcase of “Mother Earth’s Bounty”; Casiano calls it “a celebration of the day’s catch.” Depending on what the chefs are able to source from local farms and top importers, the dish comes laden with ingredients like red peppers, plump mussels, oyster mushrooms, carrot strings, chorizo, shrimp, and large chunks of Chilean salmon, all simmered with Spanish bomba rice flavored by grated tomatoes and saffron stalk. The made-to-order dish easily feeds two to three and may take up to an hour to prepare. And it’s well worth the wait.

When the dish arrives at the table in a waft of saffron and seafood, Casiano says the rice is continuing to caramelize in the pan. “I like to say that patience is a virtuous trait when I drop off the dish,” he says. “To get that crispy layer of rice on the outside, let it finish.”

When the time comes, it’s love at first bite—rich but not overpowering, savory down to the last grain of rice.

Lucina

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THE CHEFS’ NOTES

“My favorite dish in Denver is at *Alma Fonda Fina*,” says chef Casiano. “Chef Johnny Curiel sets the tone for what Mexican fine dining can be in Denver. The *camote asado*, a sweet potato dish with creamy fennel-whipped cheese, just works so beautifully.”

TOP CONTENDERS



ALMA FONDA FINA:

AGUACHILE DE CHILE FRESCO

Chef Johnny Curiel has been perfecting his signature dish—adobo-seared hamachi, roasted pineapple, and tepache oil—over the course of his entire career. almalohidenver.com



TORO: AMARILLO CEVICHE

A dish that transforms flavorful Latin ingredients, ceviche is an icon of the menu at this Latin kitchen from chef Richard Sandoval, recognized as the “father of modern Mexican cuisine.”

torodenver.com



SUPER MEGA BIEN: PORK WINGS

Rooted in the flavors of northern Mexico, the carne asada-inspired pork wings fly off the serving carts at this pan-Latin dim sum spot founded by six-time James Beard Award nominee Dana Rodriguez. supermegabien.com

ALMA, SHAWN CAMPBELL; SUPER MEGA BIEN, MELISSA CHAMPION; TORO, LC PHOTOSTYLE