Taberna Restaurant brings Spanish flavors to Fairfield
By Mike Lauterborn
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Do you like a little Latin flava? Does paella make you purr? Then you will love Taberna II Nuevo Latino restaurant, which officially opened at 1229 Post Road, Fairfield in mid-September. *FCL* attended the open house to meet with Chef/Owner Daniel Lopez and sample a few menu items.

It's worthy to note that Daniel, along with his brother Jaime, opened what you might call Taberna I, on Madison Avenue in Bridgeport, CT, in October 2008. It operates out of the first level of a two-story house, with a front dining room seating approximately 30 people, a main dining room housing 50 and a full bar with tables. In the summer months, a patio accommodates dining al fresco.

Building on a successful formula of good service and even better food, Daniel launched Taberna II, in June, on the footprint of what was formerly Baro, in the Brick Walk shopping center. The interior is much the same as Baro, with a glass wall dining room, colorful painted murals and ample seating in its spacious bar area. Like Taberna I, it also features an outdoor patio, which can be enclosed in cooler weather and is accented by an herb garden and seasonal flowers.

With regard to the Menu, visitors can start with one of a dozen choices of Antipastos, priced $10-$12. The Soft Polenta is hearty, served with grilled Portobello mushrooms in roasted garlic and extra virgin olive oil. You'll dig the tenderness of the Calamari a la Plancha, which is grilled baby squid offered with green mixes and white Cannellini beans salad, caramelized garlic and aged balsamic vinaigrette. Or nosh on Carpaccio: thin slices of strip steak nestled beside baby arugula salad and drizzled with lemon, EVOO and Parmesan cheese.

Like your greens? Go simple with an organic mixed green salad or jump into the Mozzarella Caprice, with homemade fresh mozzarella, beefsteak tomatoes, fresh basil, caramelized garlic and aged balsamic vinegar. $7-$10.

Then step up to Homemade Fresh Pasta, tagged at $20 to $26. Try the Ricotta Gnocchi: handmade little pods of fresh ricotta cheese and reggiano Parmigiano with Black Angus beef Bolognese sauce. Or go for the Goat Cheese Ravioli, served in a creamy sauce with sweet peas, sweet corn and sautéed oyster mushrooms.

In the Entrees (Platos) column, with listings generally at $26 apiece, choices abound from veal, steak and ribs to salmon, lamb and chicken and, of course, Seafood Paella, perhaps the restaurant's most popular dish. The latter is

prepared with calamari, shrimp, clams, mussels, scallops and saffron cebolla rice and is made for two or more people.

Not into the entrée approach? Go Tapas. This has become a very trendy way of enjoying a lot of different foods, particularly if you are with a group. Plus, you can eat a little more economically and share the expense, with choices at $8 to $15 each. Consider the Chorizo con aluvias y setas, which is sautéed Spanish chorizo with mushrooms and white beans in a red wine sauce. Or try the Lomo de cerdo adovado: marinated and grilled loin pork served over toast with Manchego cheese and Mediterranean vegetables relish and Spanish paprika oil. There are more than a dozen tapas dishes available.

Naturally, you need some tasty libations to wash everything down. In the red wine department, there are affordable selections by the glass from Italy, Chile, Argentina and California. In the Whites, you can travel to Spain, Italy, Chile, Portugal and Germany. Beers are thoughtfully chosen, with entries on the list like Estrella (Barcelona), Sagres (Portugal), Grimbergen (Belgium) and Modelo Special (Mexico). You can also try homemade sangria (red, white and rose) by the glass, half pitcher or pitcher, as well as cava and prosecco by the glass.

Further, at the bar or patio, you will receive a free bottle of wine or pitcher of sangria when you order a minimum of 5 tapas if you are in a group of 4 or more people, available Tuesday to Friday, 4:30-6pm and Sundays 4-6pm. And, Ladies, Thursday is your night at the bar or patio, with ½ price beer and sangria from 4:30-6:30pm.

Looking to have a party at Taberna? The front dining room, main dining room and bar are all available for special occasions. Taberna will also cater your off-site event, with customized menus including tapas and paella.

For more information on hours, specials, catering, parties and more, visit http://tabernarestaurant-ct.com/ or call 475-999-8585 or 203-338-0203.