

España

Restaurant & Tapas

Celebrating five years in business, España has become a downtown icon that's not to be missed.

BY KAREN MILLER • PHOTO BY WILLIAM RASER

Of all the wonderful restaurants on Amelia Island, España is a perennial favorite. My friends Emily and Joe both agree, and one weekday night we decided to meet at the restaurant to catch up on all the latest news. The two of them were planning their yearly trip to Spain, and naturally I wanted to hear all about it—and what better atmosphere than España?

We began our dinner with a lovely Spanish white wine, Vina Esmerelda Torres. A wonderful choice with tapas, the wine is flowery and feminine, just like its name. Chef Roberto

meg really makes this dish a winner. The fourth tapa was a plate of cold cuts, including Serrano, Chorizo, roasted peppers, and Spanish olives. Little bites of heaven, they were.

Chef Roberto recently acquired some unique stew pots that are handmade in Brazil and is offering a special Portuguese Fisherman's Stew, served from the table. What beautiful pots these are—black and heavy, sitting atop a sturdy stand. Arriving directly out of the oven, the stew actually continued to simmer as we served ourselves. Right before serving, fresh tomatoes and cilantro are placed on top of the stew, creating a layering of flavors: savory, garlicky, then fresh and acidic. It's absolutely fabulous! The fish was perfectly cooked and consisted of mahi mahi, scallops, oysters, and shrimp. The sauce has coconut milk in it, along with white wine and onions. It was such an incredible dish that we couldn't stop sipping on the sauce. Enormous in size, it normally serves two, but four guests could easily share this dish with tapas and salads.

I always suggest to people who are planning to visit España to save room for dessert. Chef Roberto's sweets are homemade and decadent. This evening he brought us two: a Caramel Flan and Tres Leches Cake. I have always loved the creamy and comforting flan, which is the perfect ending to a rich and spicy meal. But the Tres Leches Cake is now my new favorite. The pound cake is freshly baked then soaked in three milks—evaporated, whole milk, and sweetened condensed milk. It is rich and sweet, topped with whipped cream and served with a raspberry sauce.

It seems like no matter what night we visit España, the restaurant is full, so I suggest making a reservation, especially on weekends and peak season. Something that you may not know is that Chef Roberto will host special dinners for a group. One night we celebrated Joe's birthday and Chef Roberto served a roast suckling pig with spicy greens and many Spanish delights. It was of a wonderful "Spain meets the South" party. España boasts a cozy main dining room, an enclosed patio dining room, and a lush outdoor garden, weather permitting. Celebrating five years in business, España has become a downtown icon that's not to be missed.

provided us with an array of wonderful starters, beginning with one of my favorites, Garlic Soup. The garlic in the broth is sweet and pungent and fills the senses as you sip it. Unfortunately for me, Joe took over this dish and I was allowed only a spoonful. Fortunately, there were many other tastes awaiting us. España's famous shrimp in garlic sauce is out of this world, and we used our bread to sop up all the good juices. We also shared the Portobello Espana, a giant mushroom that has been grilled and topped with Serrano ham, Manchego cheese, brown gravy, garlic, and nutmeg. Yes, the hint of nut-

