

David Martinez

Union Restaurant and Bar Latino, Haverstraw

This hacienda-style eatery, which opened last September, may be just what Haverstraw needs to push its renaissance into full swing. “We’re starting to get regulars,” says Chef David Martínez, who honed his craft by working with master chef Peter Kelly at Freelance Café for more than 10 years and now serves up American Continental food with a Latin twist. A word of advice: Don’t miss the ceviche.

age 44 hometown El Salvador **first food memories**

I lost my mother when I was very young, but to this day I remember her tamales. **growing up** I never expected to become a chef. I was a car mechanic before I left El Salvador 20 years ago. **big break** When I came to this country, I got a job washing dishes at Xaviar’s [Kelly’s acclaimed restaurant in Piermont]. Peter had seen my curiosity and when he opened Freelance, he put me at the cold station, then he moved me to the hot line. Peter trained me very well. **moving on** I was always ambitious and Peter knew that I wanted to open my own restaurant someday. I told him a year in advance and he supported me. He said to me, “David, whatever you need, just let me know.”

Peter’s favorite dish He had tortilla soup and loved it. **favorite meal** A steak, medium rare; either pinto bean ravioli with chorizo or pupusa (a tortilla filled with mozzarella, black beans, and bacon); and coconut cake, coconut sorbet, coconut ice cream — anything with coconut. **in the kitchen**

I cook with my wife María. Even when we’re not here, we often try to create new dishes at home. **in his free time** I spend almost all of my time at the restaurant, but on Mondays I try to take my wife out for a good meal or a movie. **the much talked about ceviche** Just shrimp, calamari, mussels, and crab meat tossed with some diced fresh tomatoes, red and white onion, cilantro, and lime juice, and then a little roasted red pepper, jalapeño, and a taste of orange juice. It’s very fresh but a little smoky, sour, and sweet at the same time. **other twists** I use Manchego cheese instead of Gruyère with the French onion soup. **feeling good** I got the American dream. My family is here, they’re happy.

