



1. Latin warmth: the restaurant's inviting interior.
 2. Grilled Alaskan wild salmon is served with grape tomatoes, broccoli rabe, avocado, and a balsamic glaze.
 3. Chef David Martinez puts a unique spin on a wide variety of dishes

Union Restaurant & Bar Latino

Haverstraw

“People are never quite sure what kind of restaurant we are at first,” says Manager Paulo Feteira. “They think we’re Mexican or Cuban. Some people think we’re Colombian. But we’re not from one country. The best way to describe it is that it’s David Martinez-style cooking. He has his own way of doing everything.”

Chef Martinez and Feteira, who honed their skills working at Peter Kelly’s Freelance Café before launching the 95-seat eatery in September 2007, set out to do something different. “That’s not always so easy in the suburbs,” says Feteira. “People are not always as adventurous.” But by all accounts they’ve succeeded. The ambitious business is leading the charge for change on Haverstraw’s long-struggling Main Street. More importantly, the charming hacienda-style place — with exposed brick, antique yellow walls, and a live tree growing toward a skylight — oozes Caribbean warmth, while Martinez’s food pulsates with exotic flavor.

Take the pinto bean ravioli. “People don’t expect to find ravioli at a Latin restaurant, but it’s different,” says Feteira. Made with white truffle oil, chorizo, and Parmesan cheese, it can be served as either a “small plate” or entrée. “It’s become a huge, huge success,” he says. “Everyone

is talking about it.” Then there’s the equally famous ceviche: a tantalizing mix of shrimp, calamari, mussels, and crab meat tossed with an intriguing lime juice dressing — a tasty, sweet-and-sour combination. Although you can opt to have ordinary cocktail sauce with the fried calamari, by all means indulge in the mango chili sauce. Of course, not everything is that offbeat. *Vaca Frita Cubana* — braised skirt steak served with rice, beans, and plantains — is a menu staple.

Martinez, who worked as a car mechanic before leaving El Salvador 20 years ago, is a self-taught chef who is constantly studying, reading, and experimenting with ingredients. He and wife Maria often spend their one free day each week testing things out in their home kitchen. And Maria is responsible for creating the one traditional El Salvadoran entrée: *Pupusa Mexas*, a homemade pancake stuffed with cheese, black beans, and bacon. “But even she uses a different cheese than what is traditional,” notes Feteira.

So try a mojito or a glass of wine (all reasonably priced), and take a cue from master chef Kelly. “He came down recently on a Sunday. He gave us a few pointers,” says Feteira. “But later he E-mailed me to tell me how much he liked it.” *24 New Main St., Haverstraw. 845-429-4354.* ♦