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ArroZeria: Long time coming



By [Angelo Comsti](#) January 20, 2015 / 06:33 PHT
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COCONUTS HOT SPOT — It's a bad idea to tease me with good food because you can expect me to bother you about it in the days that follow. In the case of chef Chele Gonzalez and biz partner Jean Salonga, I bugged them for weeks. Ever since they made me sample their Caldoso two months ago, I've been dreaming of the day their restaurant opens. So you can just imagine my excitement when I finally got invited to try the full ArroZeria experience yesterday.



Your own enclave



Jackstone doorknobs

Notice, I refer to it as a whole package because it's always an affair when you're dealing with creative geniuses like Chele and Carlo Calma. The whole room is thoughtfully cluttered with art, from the jackstone doorknobs to the inverted ladder lamps.

In fact, the space feels much like their other restaurant, Curve, where you dine not just with friends, but also with design. In ArroZeria, one wall is decked with a blown up photo of a church in Valencia, Spain, while another displays piled up rice sacks. There's an enclave in one corner, which lends privacy to a very open space. Here, the

artworks giveaway its creator. The distinct style is unmistakably Carlo's, and perhaps it's this familiarity that somehow gives the space ease and comfort.

It's no different with the food. Vask may be known for its refined presentations and flavors, but at ArroZeria, rice is the hero, as its tagline says. There are more than ten rice-based dishes to prove that. Five traditional paellas are available and they can be cooked according to your preference — al dente and thin (the way the Spanish normally enjoy it) or soft and wet (the way many Asians prefer it). There's the Caldoso, which is brothy in nature and Fideua, which is akin to paella, only with thin noodles replacing rice.



A paella cart designed exclusively for the restaurant

The paella is served tableside, with the server who is fitted with black gloves, rolling a black cart to the table then plating the dish for each one. It's the kind of entertainment and personalized service that's becoming trendy as of late and this restaurant is able to pull it off quite well.



Meloso: Cerdo Adobado Y Boletus

The Cerdo Adobado y Boletus (PHP375) is so robust in taste that you tend to let it linger in your mouth a bit longer to savor and enjoy every ounce of flavor out of it. The rice, which is locally harvested, by the way, is tender without losing body or bite. You won't even care for the pork, cauliflower and mushroom toppings anymore because the rice alone is that good.



Foie Gras Y Boletus Risotto

Paella might be an easy choice, but not when there's the Foie Gras y Boletus Risotto (PHP550) around. This, to me, is THE ArroZeria signature dish, the way the Foie Gras on Mango Toast is to Vask. It seems like they have extracted as much flavor from the porcini mushrooms as they could, tempered it with cream, then let the rice bathe and cook in the rich vat until al dente. The cubes of seared foie provide a rich, buttery taste that plays second fiddle to the risotto's undeniable decadence. It is so delicious it had me sighing with content in every spoonful.

Come weekends when they serve brunch buffets, Chele lets you know that he too can make traditional tapas — and good ones at that. So it comes as no surprise to see typical fare done well at ArroZeria.



The Croquetas Trio

The Croquetas Trio (PHP275) is composed of three pieces of each of the three variants: seafood, porcini mushrooms and a Spanish stew called cocido. Each is distinct in shape and pronounced in taste. They are crisp and golden on the outside, while the inside is so creamy it sneaks its way out of its fragile casing upon prodding. For me, that's exactly what the consistency should be, unlike other croquetas where the filling is dry or a tad too gluey in texture.



Tabla de Pates

Among the culprit of my weeks-long craving is the Tabla de Pates (PHP395). It was something they made me try before and it delivers the same unbridled satisfaction to date. Four slices of terrine — campagne, cochinitillo and mushrooms, chicken and pistachio, and fish — lay on a wooden paddle, along with a mound of crisp bread slices and three condiments: black olive, parsley and porcini mayonnaise. You get to choose your own adventure and selfishly indulge on the one you like. Mine is the cochinitillo with porcini. The nubs of fat squeezed in between the meaty pate play well with the earthy notes of the dip.

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Fideua de Costillas

There are bocatas (sandwiches) and verdes (salads) to keep you company and satiated while your paella is being cooked, or for when you wish for lighter fare. If you're down to go heavy, heartier items are at your disposal, there's grass-fed Angus tomahawk, chuleton or ribeye, crispy chicken in white wine, and grilled tuna loin with tapenade.



Cuajada Al Momento

Much like the art that surround the space, the Cuajada Al Momento (PHP250) adds a bit of fun and whimsy to a meal. First, goat's milk that's been injected with rennet is poured into a sexy glass. A small hourglass is then turned over and the server asks the guests to wait before they can dig in. During this time, the milk turns into a jiggly curd, akin to the streetside snack taho. Chopped walnuts, honey and apple compote complete the delectable meal ender. For a heavy dish like paella, this makes for the perfect light dessert.

ArroZeria has certainly taken our love for rice and has made it possible for us to love it even more. I'm smitten. I have been since the day I got to try that soupy crab rice.

ArroZeria, 4/F, Century City Mall, Century City, Kalayaan Avenue cor Salamanca Street, Brgy. Poblacion, Makati; +63 920-9744742. It opens its doors to the public starting Feb 1, 2015.