



**DESSERT:**  
Latin Bites  
Terrine (mango,  
chirimoya, and  
white chocolate  
terrin, served  
with dulce de  
leche truffles  
and raspberry  
couli sauce)

# Color for your tastebuds

By Greg Morago

At Latin Bites, chef Roberto Castre and his partners put a contemporary twist on Peruvian cuisine

The food world is littered with inspiring tales of culinary leapfrogging — the dishwasher elevated to chef; little restaurants that grow into city institutions; mom and pop shops that after toiling in obscurity for years suddenly earning 4-star reviews.

Latin Bites Café has one of those stories that take direct aim at the always-besotted foodie heart.

To see how far the partners of this winning new restaurant on Woodway have come, you have to imagine a young Roberto Castre, his sister, Rita, and Rita's eventual husband, Carlos

Ramos, working together at a Chili's in Lima, Peru.

"We were dreaming for a long time. We knew some day we'd have a restaurant," Rita Castre said.

Latin Bites began as a Houston catering business, then begat a 40-seat, sit-down restaurant in a Warehouse District spot in August 2010. But Roberto Castre's food was so inventive, so flavorful and so downright gorgeous, foodies immediately chomped. The humble, BYO restaurant was booked every night, with reservations necessary weeks in advance.



After about two hours of prep and cooking, it was finally time to sit down. Cavnar kept the wine flowing as Glen Boudreaux entertained Michael Swail, from left, Frank Steininger and Karen Garcia.

## DIY DINNER

# A hands-on night with Recipe for Success

Michael Paulsen Photos | HOUSTON CHRONICLE

SubZero-Wolf executive chef Garth Blackburn recently helped Gracie Cavnar's Recipe for Success board put their mouths where their money is with a cooking class and dinner. Chronicle photographer Michael Paulsen captured the fun.

Recipe House offers cooking classes and is available for private parties; proceeds benefit Recipe for Success. Learn more at [www.recipe4success.org](http://www.recipe4success.org).

— MOLLY GLENTZER



Recipe for Success founder Gracie Cavnar and chef Garth Blackburn got the party started with appetizers. "If you want to eat anything else tonight, you'll have to make it yourself," he teased the group.



So Latin Bites took its biggest leap recently by relocating to the 115-seat space that formerly held Rockwood Room. Open only a month, the new Latin Bites Café gives Castre a larger staging area for his unique, personal take on Peruvian food.

"It's just my vision of Peruvian," the 30-year-old chef said. "I try to keep the flavors that remind me of when I was a kid, but with a different presentation."

Those flavors are amazing, but the presentation is truly spectacular. Castre invests his extensive menu — Peruvian dishes influenced by native foods with culinary interjections from Spain and China — with artistic, even theatrical flair. Elegant sauces, bright pops of vegetal color and streaks of lush purées decorate already-sophisticated creations such as cebiches and tiraditos (cold fish and seafood dishes), stir-fries and rice dishes, hot seafood entrees and the classic Peruvian lomo saltado (a tangy toss of soy-flavored beef, onions and tomatoes served with fried potatoes and rice).

Rita Castre said they chose the Woodway space because most of their catering jobs came from the Galleria area.

There are also new partners: Maggie Dyer, a cousin, and Vicky Arata, Carlos'



**POTATO TRIO:** Causitas (a trio of traditional Peruvian whipped potatoes)

mother. The new Latin Bites also has a private dining room and, even better, a full liquor license. That means Peruvian wines on the modest but entertaining wine list, four native beers and lots of pisco.

For years Peruvian food has been hailed as one of the most exciting cuisines in the

KAREN WARREN PHOTOS: HOUSTON CHRONICLE

world. Now you can find an accomplished interpretation in a place where dreaming big has paid off handsomely.

5709 Woodway near Chimney Rock, 713-229-8369; latinbitescafe.com

greg.morago@chron.com



**AHA, AHI:** Sashimi Tiradito Nikkei (tuna with creamy lime sauce made with soy sauce, oyster sauce mirin and sesame seed oil and cucumbers)



Fresh ingredients for the 1-Minute Garlic Basil Sauce.



Frank Steininger had the task of peeling brussels sprouts before roasting the tiny leaves.



The chalkboard changed as each course was readied.



The chef replaced skewers with fresh rosemary sprigs to dress up the pork.



Plated: The Rolled Pork atop Poblano Polenta and Veggie Confetti.



Board members Arvia Few, from left, Glen Boudreaux, Karen Garcia and Amy Anton, get ready for the next step.



The first course: Spinach and Texas Goat Cheese Strata.



Blackburn talked the group through everything from making "vegie confetti" to properly stuffing the pork loin and filling the strawberries.



While the guests ate, the chef put the finishing touches on the dessert.



Voilà, Strawberries with Ghirardelli and Honey Buttered Rum Sauce. Yummy ending.