Color for your tastebuds

By Greg Morago

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

DESSERT:
Latin Bites Terrine (mango, chives, and white chocolate terrine, served with dulce de leche truffle and raspberry couli sauce.)

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 earn 4-star reviews.

Latin Bites Café has one of those stories that take direct aim at the always-hungry 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 Chelis 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 became 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.

DIY DINNER

A hands-on night with Recipe for Success

Michael Pausen 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 Pausen captured the fun.

Recipe House offers cooking classes and is available for private parties. Proceed benefit Recipe for Success. Learn more at www.recipesforsuccess.org.

-- MOLLY GLEINZER

After about two hours of prep and cooking, it was finally time to sit down, Cavnar kept the wine flowing as Glen Bushhouse entertained. Michael Swall, from left, Frank Steiniger and Karen Garcia.
So Latin Bites took its biggest leap recently by relocating to the H&L space that formerly held Rockwood Room. Open only a month, the new Latin Bites Café gives Castro a larger staging area for his unique, personal take on Peruvian food.

"It’s just my vision of Peruvian," the 50-year-old chef said. "I try to keep the flavors that remind me of when I was a kid, but with a different presentation."

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

Kita Castro said they chose the Woodway space because most of their catering jobs come from the Galleria area.

There are also new partners: Maggie Dyer, a cousin, and Vicky Araca, Carlos' mother. The new Latin Bites also has a private dining room and, even better, a full liquor license. That means Peruvian wines on the menu, 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 world. Now you can find an accomplished interpretation in a place where dreaming big has paid off handsomely.

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**Unrolling Pork of Brie and Crab Pollono Stuffed Polenta, Veggie Confetti**

Fresh ingredients for the 5 Minute Garlic Basil Sauce.

Fresh ingredients for the 5 Minute Garlic Basil Sauce.

Frank Steininger had the skill of peeling Brussels sprouts before roasting the tiny hens.

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

Plate: The Stuffed Pork with Pollo Polenta and Veggie Confetti.

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

Board members Arisa Fie, from left, Glen Roadroot, Karen Garcia and Amy Anson, get ready for the next stop.

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

Vials, strawberries with Ghee orrifici and Honey-butressed Stem Sauce. Yummy ending.