

Dining»



KELLY MERRITT (3)

An order of succulent Iberico ham at Lamoraga.



One of the best treats at Lamoraga is the olive tapenade with bread served before the meal.

LAMORAGA

Contemporary Spanish cuisine comes to Naples



Lamoraga's calamari is served with a parsley citrus aioli.

By Kelly Merritt
Daily News Correspondent

When I first drove by Lamoraga just north of Golden Gate on U.S. 41, I couldn't help but think, "Gee whiz. Just what Naples needs — another car dealership."

But the building, which is ultramodern and unassuming, actually houses Lamoraga contemporary Spanish cuisine. Despite the oh-so-sleek lines and cool vibe, it's a warm place to meet friends and enjoy a few unique dishes not found elsewhere in town.

Lamoraga boasts a full bar and 26-seat community table that wraps around the open kitchen. The space stretches a whopping 5,300 square feet and is completely open, making it bright and airy. This is the first American location of the Spanish franchise, but owners decided to go with a French chef instead of a Spaniard to run the kitchen.

Chef Pierre-Julien Regnard came to Naples direct from France with a welcoming attitude and gracious demeanor in tow. He seems to relish coming out from behind the kitchen counter to greet guests and isn't above asking for feedback on these dishes that are so new to Naples.

I was especially excited about the beverage menu at Lamoraga. Sangria always is a good idea, and there are several here, including sparkling, white and red

See LAMORAGA, 17F

LAMORAGA

from 16F

IF YOU GO LAMORAGA RESTAURANT

Where: 3936 U.S. 41 N.,
Naples

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to
10 p.m. Monday through
Friday, and 5 to 10 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday.

Information:
239-331-3669;
LamoragaRestaurant.com

sangrias, all \$7 and each containing different fruits and citrus. There are several other cocktails that warrant tasting. The ones that drew my attention included the Grapefruit Crush with Deep Eddy Ruby Red Vodka, Cointreau, grapefruit juice, honey simple syrup and soda. Bourbon lovers might prefer the B&E Bourbon Smash with St. George Raspberry Liqueur, lemon juice, honey syrup and fresh mint.

So refreshing is the garden Collins, prepared with St. George Botanivore Gin, lemon juice, simple syrup and fresh cilantro. If you like ginger beer, try the King's Collins with St. George Dry Rye Gin, The King's Ginger, lime juice and Fever Tree ginger beer. All are \$11.

One of the best things about Lamoraga is that the restaurant features the same menu for lunch

and dinner. How nice it is to have the option of noshing on your favorite tapas whenever you like, without having to wait until 5 p.m.

The meat croquettes (\$10) are a home run, crunchy on the outside and creamy deliciousness on the inside. Among salad options, the melon and serrano ham (\$14) does the trick, served on baby greens with sea salt and Port reduction. The restaurant also serves sashimi dishes (\$11-\$12) and steak and tuna tartare (\$15). The parsley citrus aioli on the almond dusted calamari (\$12) is one of many sauces on this menu that fall under



KELLY MERRITT

Sliders at Lamoraga include a choice of pork or beef — or both.

the outstanding category — no doubt a testament to Chef Regnard's traditional French cooking skills.

Eggplant people will want to try the Mirin-and-honey marinated fried eggplant (\$12), while egg people can partake of the traditional Spanish omelet made with potatoes. Other worthy mentions include a cuttlefish-and-squid ink croquettes dish with yuzu aioli (\$8) and seared foie gras with fig Port reduction

and berries (\$16). There are two sliders; one is made with pork and one with beef. I liked the beef Lamoraga slider best, with havarti cheese, arugula and aujus aioli (\$7), but you can get a combination of both for \$13.

Perhaps the most fun is this is a great place to get the guilty pleasure ham that sends foodies into a complete and utter dither: Iberico ham, made from pigs whose only diet is acorns. At \$25, the simple plate

containing nothing but shavings of this ham is worth every penny. The cured Spanish meats and cheeses are served with little slices of bread garnished with tomato, and there are several choices ranging from \$16 to \$20.

Some of the fish entrees include a Miso-marinated baked black cod (\$34) and grilled sea bass on banana leaves (\$34). The miso-marinated and grilled pork shoulder is served over a shiitake mushroom ragout with mashed potatoes (\$30), while various steaks are prepared with a choice of creamy mustard, red wine reduction or blue cheese sauce. The teriyaki chicken breast (\$27) is prepared with snow pea tempura and rice.

For dessert, there are several goodies, including illy coffee. It contrasts beautifully with the warm roasted fig shortbread with pistachio ice cream and, of course, chocolate desserts.

There are a few

things that beg mention: It's easy to miss the driveway, so be on the lookout for it. While Lamoraga is paving the way for the masses to partake of modern Spanish cuisine, some of the dishes felt a little dumbed down in heat and flavor (read: Americanized) compared to similar Spanish dishes I've tasted.

On previous visits, those dishes have included the unexciting Andalusian garlic shrimp, which was too oily and lacked heat. The gazpachos were lackluster, especially the tropical one, which reminded me of canned coconut milk.

All in all, Lamoraga is a worthwhile place to go with many dining options — even for people who might not understand Spanish/international cuisine. I found myself wanting to return to try new things and get a repeat order of those croquettes and Iberico ham. Lamoraga is just a great gathering spot, too.