

Invention, informality enliven the tapas bar

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"Traditionally places have a special touch with something and people start talking about it," says Santos. "When people really enjoy a place, they want to have a story to tell their friends and what works in Madrid is word of mouth. People talk and talk and places become famous."

I notice at this point that it's Friday at 4 and things show no sign of slowing down between lunch and dinner.

"Ha! Definitely not on Friday," says Santos. "Things really pick up at about 4 because they get off early for the weekend."

"In other cities, people go out in the afternoon and again at night," continues Uribe, "but here, they're out all the time."

The next day, on my own, the tone is set at Casa Lucio by the secret service guard on the sidewalk — trademark earpiece dangling from his ear — waiting for his client to finish lunch.

Just inside, a blind man selling lottery tickets is as much a fixture as the busts above him. At the bar, under a dozen jamón hocks, there are three kinds of anchovies, two kinds of olives, boxes of canned mussels, and a big silver bowl full of ice and sherry bottles.

The barman asks if I want a drink and frowns like I'm a small-time player when I say coffee.

Floating through the arched doorways that link the dining rooms is Lucio Blázquez, 77, who owns three establishments including this bar-restaurant and the tapas bar across the street. He's as much a Madrid fixture as the Prado and as famous as the celebrities who flock here.

After a lifetime of feeding people, he's got a handle on the tapas draw.

"Tapas is informality, it's fun, it's going out and talking," Blázquez says as he flips through a photo album of famous diners, all standing arm in arm with him. "You don't sit," he says, "you eat."

"Madrid and Sevilla are the most important places for tapas, but Madrid is tapas," he says. "Madrileños are lighter than people in other parts of Spain — they like having fun. We take bits from around the world and make people feel welcome."

More ubiquitous than even



PHOTOS BY JOE RAY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

On a tapas tour of Madrid, there are canapes on display at Cerveceras Dos Gatos, which makes a house vermouth, and a waiter at Casa Alberto carves from a hock of cured jamon (ham).

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the sherry on Lucio's bar — which pairs fantastically with almost every kind of tapas — are tiny draft beers known as "canas." Just having come from Barcelona, where the beer is often good, I can't figure out what the fuss is about.

It's all in the pour.

Back at La Dolores I watch barman Andrés Rivas and manager Oscar Arañda demonstrate the local version of the perfect pour.

Rivas fills the glass, almost foam-free, and sets it on the bar with a clack!

"That gets rid of the big bubbles — the ones that sting," explains Arañda, pointing to the last few lolling toward the surface. Then he gives the tap a half turn, bringing up the percentage of tiny-bubbled suds in the glass and pushing the excess off the top with a spatula.

This isn't lipstick on a pig. It's a completely different animal, filled with Guinness-style microscopic bubbles. Poured right, lines of suds mark each sip on the inside of the glass. At La Dolores, everyone, from the two old ladies catching up by the window to the woman grabbing a quick lunch to all the guys at the bar are having one.

On my last day in town I seek out the new at Arzábal, a tavern-restaurant where I shoehorn into the bar for a plate of tiny fried ar-



tichokes and follow it up with Basque "kokotxas," wedges of cod flesh hidden where the chin would be if a fish had a chin, bathed in a green olive oil, hot pepper, and garlic sauce known as "pil-pil."

Later, at Taberna Laredo, there are steak and green pepper dishes going by that nearly sway me from what I really want to get: "revuelto de erizo," a sort of scrambled egg with sea urchin

dish that gets a textural boost from the egg and slivers of al dente vegetables.

At night, I head to the Chamberi neighborhood to Cerveceria Fide and El Doble, two bars that are snapshots of bygone decades.

At Fide, locals reconnect over beer and little plates of fresh seafood. Here, flat Galician oysters are ordered by the half-dozen, but thinking I've got a lot of eating to do, I finagle an order for

If you go . . .

Where to eat

Tapas enough to fill your belly and a drink or two run about \$13-\$19 at all of the places below unless otherwise noted. Many establishments also offer "raciones" — larger portions good for sharing with a group. Be on the lookout for classics like "gambas" (shrimp), "bacalao" (salt cod), sausages, "pimentons de padrón" (salty, sautéed green peppers where one in 10 is hot), cheeses, sometimes cured or preserved in olive oil, calamari, olives, and meatballs.

Casa Alberto

C/ Huertas 18, Madrid
011-34-91-429-93-56
Escargot, bull tail, spicy tripe, and vermouth on tap.

Taberna de la Daniela

Calle del General Pardiñas 21
011-34-915-752-329
Try the "salmorejo."

Cerveceras Dos Gatos

C/ Jesús 2
011-34-914-293-067
Don't miss: house vermouth, sausage with pine nut canapé.

Arzábal

Doctor Castelo 2
011-34-915-572-691
www.arzabal.com
New, trendy, Basque, beautiful.

Casa Lucio

Cava Baja 35
011-34-91-365-32-52
www.casalucio.es (in Spanish)
Looking for an old classic and a superstar? This is the place. The tiny bar in front serves a good, though limited, menu. Order jamón and prices will skyrocket, but you won't care. Also a good sit-down option. Get the aged Manchego cheese.

La Dolores

Plaza de Jesus 4

011-34-914-292-243

Perfect beer, mussels, anchovies pickled in vinegar, and potato chips that can't have been made more than a mile away.

Taberna Laredo

C/ Menorca 14
011-34-91-573-30-61
New, old, throbbing with customers on a busy day, and with a fantastic wine list. "Revuelto de erizo," \$23.

Cerveceria Fide

C/ Ponzano 8
011-34-914-46-58-33
A trip back a few decades in a stand-up bar, with tiled walls, marble bars, and perfect oysters.
Cerveceria El Doble
C/ José Abascal 16
011-34-91-591-94-62
My kiss goodbye with a mussel on a chip.

Where to stay

Room Mate Hotels

011-34-913-995-777
www.room-matehotels.com
A hip option for the younger set with four locations in town. Rates from \$127.

Hotel Puerta America

Avenida de América 41
011-34-917-445-400
www.hoteles-silken.com/hotel-puerta-america-madrid/en/
An athlete's dream with 12 floors designed by as many architectural firms. Weekend doubles from \$178, weekdays from \$216.

AC Santo Mauro

Zurbano 36
011-34-913-085-477
www.ac-hotels.com/144-ac-santo_mauro.html
A former duke's residence and a tiny Madrid classic; rates run from \$254-\$1,460. Watch for early-bird specials.

just two. The idea lasts as long as it takes to swallow one, at which point I flag the barman for the other four.

Down the street, I step into the bustling, brightly-lighted El Doble, a seafood specialist, with many of their best coming from open tins proudly displayed under glass at the bar. It's my last night in town, so with my beer, I

get mussels and chips like I had with Santos and do as he instructed, popping the whole thing into my mouth. These are every bit as fantastic. The last small bites, the last few sips are little guarantees I'll come back for more.

Joe Ray can be reached at www.joe-ray.com.

Vineyards amid farming community on the North Fork

► **LONG ISLAND**
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Route 25 to the ocean. "We couldn't bear to see this property sold and developed," said Ros Baiz. The site was once an Indian village. "We still find arrowheads," she says, "and all the oyster shells they buried keep the soil sweet." Most of the farm buildings date from the 1850s and '60s, including the ice house, corn crib, farmhouse, and dairy barn (now the winery "so tight you can barely turn around"). The grapevines of this backyard winery stretch from the shady barnyard down the sunny hill.

Perry Weiss, the Baizes'

LONG ISLAND FERRY

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daughter, manages the vineyard, and her mother is the principal winemaker. "It takes years to learn your own place, your soil, your climate, and what you can do with it," Baiz said. She has refined her approach over time, focusing on fruit-forward whites and lean, structured reds with a spicy black-fruit nose. Guests often sip them at a picnic table under leafy oaks as the resident goose and duck waddle around. Baiz doesn't let the chickens out until tastings end at 5 p.m.

The Old Field lies along the gentle south shore of the North Fork, but Barbara Shinn and David Page elected to establish their Shinn Estate Vineyards close to Long Island Sound near the north shore. "This land was the Long Island grain belt — corn, wheat, and rye," Page said.

Both originally hail from the Midwest and had ended up together in Manhattan. Moving to a live-in vineyard on remote Oregon Road in Mattituck was a "big change, but a welcome one," said Shinn. "We came back to beauty in our lives." They planted their

first vines in 2000, and began making wine in 2002.

The operation reflects their years in the restaurant and hospitality trade. Not only do they have a four-room B&B where Page serves amazing farm breakfasts, their tasting room feels like a country pub, complete with seating around small tables. Shinn works there a few days a week, but concentrates on managing the vineyards.

As fierce advocates of organic and biodynamic farming, Page and Shinn have defied conventional wisdom by successfully growing grapes without chemicals. Their wines are made as much in the vineyard as the winery — they even use wild yeasts to ferment whole fruit. Shinn wines are among the Long Island darlings of influential critic Robert Parker, who has praised their Bordeaux-style "Nine Barrels" blend and their cabernet franc. White-wine drinkers favor "First Fruit," a shellfish-friendly sauvignon blanc.

The Long Island Wine Council claims that 1.3 million people visit Long Island tasting rooms each year. But wine has not entirely eclipsed traditional agriculture on the North Fork. The Harbes clan has been farming on Long Island for 12 generations. Although they did plant five acres of chardonnay and merlot grapes in 2003, the Wine Barn at their Harbes Family Farm complex in Mattituck is overshadowed by vegetables (including heirloom tomatoes and melons) and "agritainment" attractions such as mazes, weekend pig races, animal exhibits, and a children's play area. The cafe sells roasted corn (a local delicacy) and slices of the farm's fruit pies.

Niche farming is also flourishing on the North Fork. In East Marion, Serge and Susan Rozenbaum grow 20 varieties of lavender plants on 10 acres. The



PATRICIA HARRIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Corey Creek Vineyards in Southold, N.Y., offers a garden-variety tasting experience, Napa Valley, California-style.

bloom season is over now at Lavender by the Bay (it peaks in July), but the shop sells virtually every imaginable lavender product, including dried blossoms and live garden plants.

Goat cheese from Catapano Dairy Farm in Peconic is the perfect complement to North Fork wines, and its fresh chevre is ubiquitous at tasting rooms and farmstands. The farm also has its own little shop and a pen full of exuberant kids. Visitors who stop around 4 p.m. can watch the 98 dairy goats being milked. Retail manager Debbie Slack, who identified herself as coming from "out west" (meaning Amityville in western Long Island), celebrates the rural idyll of the North Fork. "We do have a McDonald's in Mattituck," she admitted. But of chain development, "that's as far as we want to see it go." The farm shop offers its antidote to fast food with a "picnic special" of two goat cheeses, a block of goat milk fudge, and a box of crackers.

We took our special to Paumanok Vineyards, established in 1983 by Charles and Ursula Masoud. There were already a few chenin blanc vines on the potato farm when they bought it, and

their Loire-style chenin blanc sells out quickly every year. Right now, it's only available at the vineyard, so we each ordered a glass to sip on the shady back deck overlooking 73 acres of vineyards.

The opportunity to sip and survey a wine-country idyll is the ultimate appeal of the North Fork. On another day we bought grilled tuna sandwiches at Southold Fish Market and proceeded to nearby Corey Creek Vineyards, which is frankly designed to offer the Napa-like garden tasting experience. It doesn't hurt that this second vineyard of well-established Bedell Cellars produces a bracing reserve chardonnay and an Alsatian-style gewurztraminer. As we ate lunch and sipped gewurz on the porch, we chatted with Frank and Patricia Farello, who had added fresh peach slices to their white wine. "It's the Italian way," said Patricia.

They drive an hour from West Babylon "a couple of times a year, just to relax," said Frank. "It's beautiful here."

Patricia Harris and David Lyon can be reached at harris.lyon@verizon.net.

If you go . . .

Where to stay

Greenporter Hotel
326 Front St., Greenport
631-477-0066
www.greenporterhotel.com
Modern two-story motel at the edge of the North Fork's biggest village makes a good driving base for vineyard touring. Doubles \$99-\$339.

Shinn Estate Farmhouse

2000 Oregon Road, Mattituck
631-804-0367
www.shinnfarmhouse.com
The B&B in the winery's 1880s farmhouse offers four contemporary country rooms with private baths. Wine and cheese are served every afternoon. Rooms \$149-\$245 weekdays, \$225-\$325 weekends. Two-night minimum on weekends.

What to do

Lenz Winery

Main Road, Peconic
631-734-6010
www.lenzwine.com
Tasting room open daily through Columbus Day 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Columbus Day-Memorial Day 10-5. Tastings \$3-\$10.

The Old Field Vineyards

59600 Main Road, Southold
631-765-0004
www.theoldfield.com
Tasting room open Thu-Mon 11 a.m.-5 p.m. through November, weekends only December-April. Tours Saturday 11:30 a.m. (sustainable agriculture) and Sunday 1:30 p.m. (historical). Tastings \$1-\$7; tours \$10 including tasting.

Shinn Estate Vineyards

2000 Oregon Road, Mattituck

631-804-0367
www.shinnestatevineyards.com

Tasting room open Mon-Thu 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Fri-Sun 10:30-6. Vineyard tours Sat-Sun 1:30 p.m. Tastings \$2.50-\$10.50; tours \$12.50 including tasting.

Paumanok Vineyards

1074 Main Road, Aquebogue
631-722-8800
www.paumanok.com
Tasting room open daily 11 a.m.-6 p.m. through October, 11-5 November-March. Tastings \$4-\$12.

Corey Creek Vineyards

45470 Route 25, Southold
631-765-4168
www.coreycreek.com
Tasting room open Mon-Thu 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Fri-Sun 11-6. Tastings \$8-\$12.

Harbes Family Farm & Vineyard

715 Sound Ave., Mattituck
631-298-9463
www.harbesfamilyfarm.com
Open daily 9 a.m.-6 p.m. through October; tasting room daily year-round 11-6. Tastings \$2-\$6.

Lavender by the Bay

7540 Main Road, East Marion
631-477-1019
www.lavenderbythebay.com
Open daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m. through October, weekends only in November.

Catapano Dairy Farm

33705 North Road, Peconic
631-765-8042
www.catapanodairyfarm.com
Open daily 11 a.m.-6 p.m. through November.