



Federico Castellucci, co-owner, the Iberian Pig



Chad Crete, managing partner/chef, the Iberian Pig

THE IBERIAN PIG



The Iberian Pig restaurant in Historic Decatur Square



Cabrito carbonara (slow-roasted goat)

A TASTE OF SPAIN IN DECATUR

DINING ESSENTIALS

THE IBERIAN PIG

121 Sycamore St., Decatur
404-371-8800
www.iberianpigatl.com

Hours: Dinner only Mon.-Thu., 5 p.m.-1 a.m.; Fri. and Sat., 5 p.m.-2 a.m. Late night menu served until midnight Mon.-Thu. and until 1 a.m. Fri. and Sat.

Reservations: Recommended but not required

Dress: Business casual to whatever's comfortable

Cost: Tapas start at \$3, flatbreads at \$9 and main plates range \$12 to \$29

Alcohol: Full bar

Parking: Street. Restaurant is very close to the MARTA train station in Decatur.

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

The Iberian Pig may have just opened last October in historic downtown Decatur, but its owners bring a wealth of experience to their new venture. Sibling co-owners Federico “Fred” Castellucci III and Stephanie Castellucci are both graduates of the Hospitality School at Cornell University and fifth-generation restaurateurs. “There’s a photo in the restaurant from 1917 that shows my great-great grandfather behind the bar,” says Fred, insisting that passion and not pressure lured him into the family business (the Castelluccis currently operate three Sugo restaurants in Atlanta). “My first restaurant job was not with the family, but a little bakery-deli in Rhode Island. I was only 11 and lied about my age to get the job!”

By the time Fred left Cornell, he’d helped his father franchise Sugo and taken over an abandoned location. “It had been closed two months, and the reputation was tarnished,” he recalls. “At times, I didn’t think we were going to make it.” But his hard work paid off, and in two years, that location became the company’s most successful. He then phoned a friend.

“Fred and I met our first semester at Cornell,” says Chad Crete, executive chef and managing partner. “We really connected in terms of our past experience working in the restaurant business.” During school breaks, the New Hampshire native, who began his career at age 14 as a dishwasher, visited Georgia to work with the Castelluccis. After graduating, he worked in Chicago and Las Vegas. Still, “Fred and I always talked about teaming up at some point and doing a restaurant in Atlanta,” he says. The Iberian Pig is that dream realized.

The Spanish theme developed “because we both like the idea of tapas,” says Crete. “It really allows for someone to go into a restaurant and taste a wide breadth of food.” The menu also offers entrées to provide guests flexibility in dining options. Spanish and South American wines are showcased, many available in half-glass, full-glass or bottle portions. Behind the bar, Thomas Fable Jhun mixes culinary cocktails (often featuring house-made infusions), as well as classic cocktails.

“I wanted to bring something to the Atlanta culinary scene that hadn’t been done before,” says Fred. “Spanish ingredients and cuisine are a good canvas for being creative. I didn’t want to put us in a situation where we’re really tied to having to be the most

authentic XYZ period. I wanted it to be a creative outlet so we could do things a little differently using Spanish ingredients to create new dishes that aren’t totally traditional. That thinking led to *jamón Ibérico* [Iberian ham], which hasn’t been served in Atlanta with any regularity.” One of the most prized and expensive cured meats in the world, *jamón Ibérico* is made from the *cerdo pata negra* (black-footed pig) native to Spain.

While imported ingredients lend authenticity, local and organic ingredients are used as much as possible, and so the menu will change seasonally. In line with its local commitment, the restaurant converts excess cooking oil to biofuel, has a composting partnership with Whole Foods, limits water consumption and sources biodegradable to-go containers.

Complex flavors reign. “We believe in slow roasting to let layered flavors develop,” says Chad. Pork cheeks for the popular tacos are roasted eight hours “with lots of different spices and vegetables.” Being unique is a goal. “Everybody has calamari,” says Chad, “but typically it’s fried. We stuff smaller tubes with vegetables and bake them in the oven with a tomato-based sauce. It’s one point of differentiation.”

Though all menu items—from charcuterie to tapas to entrées to desserts—have

been selling equally well, some stars have emerged. *Huevos con trufa* layers rustic bread, pork cheeks, poached egg and black truffles. The Iberian burger features American Wagyu beef, bacon-onion relish, Mahon cheese and a toasted brioche bun and is paired with eggplant fries. *Cabrito carbonara* combines slow-roasted goat with chitarra pasta, applewood smoked bacon, fresh cream and a poached egg.

While customer response has been positive and the restaurant attracts diverse guests, the goal is to “continue to evolve and improve,” says Fred. “We hope to push the boundaries on the food a little bit and get some new ideas out there. But long-term, a dining experience is not about food: It’s about how you treat people.” And so he makes a point of speaking to every guest, every night. **SP**