



Ramon Martinez perfects tapas at Jaleo in Washington.
ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Jaleo: Hooray!

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

When you first enter Penn Quarter's Jaleo, you'll see crowds, staff and plenty of food. But chances are you will not see Ramon Martinez, the ebullient young chef who rules over Jaleo's kitchen, because he is busily cooking. In fact, Martinez gets to work in tandem with his boss, Jose Andres, and help control food quality in all three Jaleos (Crystal City, D.C. and Bethesda).

A lifelong passion for cooking set him on his path. "This comes from my grandmother and mother," he said, recalling how after school each day in Terrassa, Spain, he would anticipate enjoying his mother's fresh escudella, a Catalan stew with chicken, ham and sausages. "I remember my mom making this every day."

Martinez said even his dad's love of food helped inspire him. "My dad loves fancy foods," he said, "so he cooked for guests. He has all the kitchen tools. He learned from what he watches others do. So my mom cooked normal dishes; my dad, fancy ones."

Because he was an indifferent student, his frustrated parents asked their teenage son what he wanted to do in life. His answer: chef, of course. At the age of 16, he enrolled in culinary school in Spain. He spent five years as a student, and saw his exam grades improve greatly.

After graduation, Martinez spent several years cooking at various restaurants in Spain, including such

What is your comfort food?

Toasted bread, rubbed with a tomato, spread with olive oil and topped with Serrano ham. All Catalans do this at home every day.

What is your favorite ingredient?

Extra-virgin olive oil. No matter if I am sauteing or whether I use it raw on bread. If sauteing, olive oil is amazing, and not like other oils. I use it for everything.

Which are your favorite restaurants?

2 Amys for pizza; Yechon for its seafood pancake, and Momo-fuku in New York.

What's in your fridge?

Pineapples. I love them. Also onions, garlic and a piece of a special sausage. Lots of fruit and green onions.

What has been your luckiest moment?

I worked in a place called Falset [Spain]. It was a small hostel and two grandmothers were really nice. We did traditional cooking, and I learned from the grandmothers, who taught me the importance of traditional food. They were amazing, and made the best croquetas in the world.

IF YOU GO Jaleo

» **Where:** 480 Seventh St. NW
» **Info:** 202-628-7949
» **Hours:** 11:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. Tuesday to Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to midnight Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday and Monday; brunch 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

destinations as Hacienda Benazuza, Ferran Adria's restaurant located just outside of Seville; Joan Roca's El Celler de Can Roca; and Martin Berasategui's eponymous restaurant in the Basque Country. He also worked several jobs at restaurants in the U.K.

But, as Martinez notes, his life

changed dramatically after attending a chefs' conference in San Sebastian in 2005, when he met Andres. Martinez remembers Andres needed someone for the Crystal City Jaleo. "Although I was content that he asked me," he said, "I said no. Afterwards, when I was back in Barcelona, I started thinking that maybe I should try it for a year."

Since then, Martinez has moved from Crystal City to D.C.'s Jaleo. He and Andres work to develop and perfect tapas recipes. "I love to have as an excuse to have him to taste my food," Martinez said. "Andres is here three to four times a week when he is in D.C."

Since making that move, Martinez concedes he is amazed by the number of doors that have opened for him. And just consider how many great meals he has enjoyed at Jaleo.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Best of the best from San Fran's International Wine Competition

For the second straight year, I participated as a judge in the 30th annual San Francisco International Wine Competition, considered by many in the industry to be the largest and most influential international wine competition in America. The contest is judged by multiple panels and is done on a blind, consensual procedure, meaning that the three-judge panel tasting a particular set of varietals has to come to a consensus on each wine tasted. For a wine to be awarded a Double Gold, it had to receive a Gold score from all three judges.

This year, winemakers from 29 countries and 20 states submitted a total of 4,184 wines. The entries were judged in several different classes, including best white wine, best red wine, best sparkling wine, best white dessert wine, best red dessert wine, as well as a few other categories.

This year, there were a total of 158 Double Gold awards handed out, with many of the top wines available for less than \$35. These medal recipients represent some of the best values available in their class. Here are a few of the top winners (the complete list of award winners is available at sfwinecomp.com/subresults.html). Retail prices are approximate.

Best in Show

» **Best in Show Red Wine: 2009 Lynmar Estate Winery Pinot Noir, Quail Hill Vineyard from the Russian River Valley appellation of Sonoma, Calif. (\$60).** This is the second year in a row that a pinot noir has taken top honors in the red wine category. It possesses aromas of black plum and boysenberry on the sweet nose. The flavors on the palate are fruit driven with notes of blackberry, blueberry and earthy spices. Hints of baked cherries provide a memorable note on the medium-bodied finish.

» **Best in Show Dry White Wine: 2009 Turk Gruner Veltliner from Kremstal, Austria (\$20).** With just a touch of sweetness, it is still considered a dry wine, featuring a concentrated palate of nectarine, melon and green apple. The wonderfully refreshing finish hits high notes with enough acidity to play off of the ripe tropical fruit flavors.

Double Gold winners

» **Best Chardonnay: 2009 Fritz Winery Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Sonoma, Calif. (\$25).** The bouquet features buttered toast, nectarines and white peach aromas. Flavors of green apple, ripe peach and nectarine are kept in balance by the wonderful acidity. Hints of roasted almonds and toasty oak glide in on the lengthy finish.

» **Best Viognier: 2009 Robert Hall Winery Viognier, Paso Robles, Calif. (\$20).** Scents of honeysuckle, acacia and orange blossom dominate the bouquet and buttery flavors of citrus fruits, green apple and apricot explode on the creamy, rich-textured palate. Nice touch of mineral notes on the finish provides depth and balance.

» **Best Zinfandel: 2008 Sobon Estate Fiddletown Zinfandel, Lubenko Vineyard, Plymouth, Calif. (\$22).** Notes of sweet plums and pepper dominate the nose while flavors of blueberry, raspberry, cinnamon and black pepper glide across the palate. The silky smooth tannins deliver a soft, fruit-driven finish.

» **Best Shiraz: 2009 Zonte's Footstep Shiraz, Lake Doctor Vineyard, Langhorne Creek, Australia (\$16).** This was definitely one of the best values of the competition, with classic aromas of black plums, cassis and licorice on the nose and flavors of black cherries, briary fruits and black pepper on the medium-body palate. The wine finishes remarkably soft with smooth tannins that sustain the prolonged finish.

FINDOUT SIGN UP
FIRST! For Our Email Alerts
Today at Bassins.com!



Follow us:



Addy Bassin's
MacArthur Beverages
Fine Wine and Spirits Since 1957

Best Selection, Lowest Prices, Period.

Bassins.com | wine@bassins.com | (202) 338-1433 | 4877 MacArthur Blvd., N.W., Washington, DC 20007

