



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

It is a busy start to 2013 for Victor Albisu, owner and executive chef of not one but two soon-to-open restaurants in the Washington metro area: Taco Bamba in Falls Church and Del Campo in downtown D.C.

Victor Albisu: Ready to make the food dance

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Chef Victor Albisu is about to enter a new phase of his culinary life: chef/owner of not one but two distinctive restaurants.

First up, and more takeout than sit-down, is Taco Bamba. A taqueria located in Falls Church, Taco Bamba promises an exciting and unconventional assortment of these portable goodies. And his second venture: an upscale South American grill called Del Campo, slated to open in early 2013 in PS 7's former location in D.C.

But why tacos? Yes, he admits, Taco Bamba is something of a departure, but it will be lighthearted and all about the food, he promises. "No, tacos are not part of my history," said Albisu, whose father is from Cuba and whose mother is from Peru. "But I love all Latino food ... life is a series of challenges, so I wanted to take on something different ... I am going to try to elevate what's there and make the taco modern, fun. ... We will be on the cutting edge, the forefront of tacos."

Hailing from a family with intimate ties to the food world — one grandfather was a baker, two aunts own Cuban restaurants in Miami, his mother runs a Latino market-butcher shop located next door to her son's new taco place — it's not surprising that Albisu cooks. "My heritage has shaped my love for food," he said.

But for Albisu, the real culinary inspiration has come from his

What is your comfort food?

A traditional plate of Cuban food, including roast pork, black beans, rice and yuca, or a South American asado at my house.

What's in your fridge?

Gordy's pickles, seasonal fruits like Concord grapes, and we always have leftovers such as stews.

Who is your favorite chef?

My grandfather, with his natural ability to cook and his love for

every meal. And my mom, she is the same way.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

Graffiato, the Source, but the place I love is Little Serow. And Ichiban Sushi.

Which is your signature dish?

I have a signature style and I don't believe in signature dishes because my cooking is always evolving. It is always driven by my heritage with a vibrance in every flavor in every dish.

IF YOU GO

Taco Bamba

- » **Where:** 2190 Pimmit Drive, Falls Church
- » **Info:** 703-639-0505
- » **Hours:** 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. daily
- » **Note:** Taco Bamba is projected to open the first week in February

grandfather, who taught the very young man how to make empanadas. "I had to learn his techniques," Albisu said. "It wasn't about the ingredients, but about the 'dance' of cooking," he said, adding that his grandfather was the best natural cook he has ever known. "I do this as a tribute to him, as much as I love cooking."

Despite his childhood days in the

kitchen and helping his mother in her Falls Church market, Albisu did not seem destined to cook. Instead, he graduated from George Mason University and headed to work for an international aid organization. Bored with office work, Albisu moved to France to study cooking at Le Cordon Bleu.

With diplomas in cuisine, pastry and wine, he returned to Washington and began working for a series of upscale eateries, including 701 Restaurant, the Tabard Inn, Marcel's and Ceiba. "I wanted to see everything," he said. "I wanted to learn about D.C. and modern American cooking."

With that mission accomplished, Albisu is setting off to conquer a rather different world: owning his own restaurants. No surprise that his family is excited about this challenge. "They believe in me," he said.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Poker night wine selection

A few years ago, several moms from my son's third-grade class decided to create a monthly "book club." On the rare occasions that I was allowed to stick my nose under the tent, I quickly concluded that "book club" was a euphemism for "you won't believe what my husband lets the kids get away with" support group.

So I decided to level the playing field and start my own "book club" with some of the dads from the same social circle. Only this monthly gathering would not pretend to be as intellectually curious as our feminine counterparts. No, this "book club" would be nothing more cerebral than a bunch of neighborhood "dads" getting together to play a friendly game of poker. And drink wine.

I am happy to report that seven years later, my club is alive and well. However, my poker group has evolved beyond playing cards. It has morphed into a neighborhood wine club where the same group of dads now gets together on a monthly basis to try interesting, value-oriented wines, usually with the goal of exposing the rest of the group to either a new wine discovery or earning bragging rights about a popular wine found on sale.

This week, I tip my hand and share some of my all-time favorite poker night wines. Retail prices are approximate.

It's a good bet that you will like the big floral nose of the **2011 Domaine de la Solitude Cotes du Rhone Blanc (\$18)** from the Rhone Valley of France. This fragrant white wine carries scents of green melon, apricot and white flowers over the open bouquet. Creamy flavors of apricot, peach and nectarine fill the mouth with juiciness, while bright acidity and mineral undertones add a refreshing counterbalance on the pretty finish. **QPR 8.5**

No one will want to call your bluff when you put the **2010 Restivo Malbec Reserve (\$16)** on the table. From the starkly beautiful vineyards of Patagonia, Argentina, this fruit-centric wine is full of

charm and character. Aromas of blackberry and cassis dominate the nose. Ripe flavors of blackberry, black plum, tar and spices travel effortlessly across the palate. The smooth tannins provide a medium-bodied structure where notes of pepper and vanilla combine for a stylish finish. **QPR 9**

If you want to up the ante, try the **2009 La Crema Pinot Noir (\$24)** from the cool coastal climate of Monterey County, Calif. Full of luscious red berry fruit, the midpalate is soft and silky, featuring strawberry, raspberry, red plum and bright cherry flavors. While the wine certainly has enough fruit to fill the palate, there is plenty of acidity to keep the flavors light and bright all the way through the attractive finish. **QPR 8.5**

The **2009 Dry Creek Vineyard's Old Vines Zinfandel (\$30)** from Dry Creek Valley, Calif., will surely raise the stakes of any dinner. It's made from vines whose average age is 80 years old and contributes a signature flavor profile. The nose is full of smoky vanilla, black fruit and pepper, while the palate shows off deep, spicy flavors of black cherry and dark raspberry on the front of the tongue. The bold, complex finish shines with a signature touch of black pepper and notes of roasted coffee and bitter dark chocolate that complement the firm tannins. **QPR 9.5**

You can go all-in with the **2009 Amici Cabernet Sauvignon (\$40)** from Napa Valley, a blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and petit verdot sourced from several vineyards located throughout Napa Valley. The resulting wine is beautifully balanced with lush fruit from the valley floor sites and firm but supple hillside tannins, which will allow for extended cellar aging. This wine displays ample aromas of wild berries along with espresso and vanilla, while the flavors showcase dark fruits, toffee and mocha. **QPR 9.5**

Note: QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.

