



The Incredible Shrinking Plate

If Spanish tapas superstar José Andrés has his way, the dinner entrée might finally get its just desserts. // BY ADAM BAER

"BEHIND YOU!" bellows a young sous chef delivering a bowl of eggs to the immersion circulator sitting in front of me. I shuffle out of his way, and he drops the eggs into the simmering water alongside vacuum-packed fish filets cooking slowly in the contemporary "sous vide" style. To my right, one

chef checks a digital order screen, à la McDonald's; to my left, another chef turns out six perfectly composed plates of salmon and crème foam; behind me, a cook quickly assembles "Philly

JOLÉ MMATADOR! Chef Andrés carves a *jamón* before a portrait of Manolete.

Cheesesteaks," bullets of hollow "air bread" that are filled with cheddar cream and topped with wagyu beef, and beyond her, more than 40 other cooks work at various delicate fine-dining preparations as if their lives were on the line.

I'm in the stainless steel, high-tech

kitchen of The Bazaar by José Andrés at the SLS Beverly Hills, which opened just over a year ago and has since become the nation's most talked-about restaurant. Even though it's already 10 p.m., Andrés, the feisty star chef of the hit PBS show *Made in Spain*, has just turned up after dining on tapas (or small plates) with friends in the restaurant's private dining room. Red-faced and beefy, Andrés, 40, is only in town for a few days—he shows up in LA about once a month—and already he's packed in a rousing talk at a restaurant industry conference (“You must invest in your R&D!” he told a room of captivated CEOs), an early morning interview, a meeting with partners and a *GQ* photo shoot. The Bazaar kitchen is carefully designed to operate smoothly without him—the chef has three kids, a wife, a house, and seven restaurants in Washington, D.C.—and tonight, his team's churning out plates for hundreds of stylish diners, including Anthony



HOW BAZAAR Andrés and two other chefs toil behind The Bazaar's *jamon y queso* bar.

in concert with renowned designer and partner Phillipe Starck, and SLS founder and hospitality impresario Sam Nazarian. It's an all new type of eatery: dining as participatory postmodern theater. “We've broken down walls,” Andrés tells me. “It's like a little town.” Walking in, there's an outpost of the luxury design store Moss to your right; statuesque women and men peer at pricey tchochkes resting in illuminated vitrines. Toward the rear of the space, one finds Bar Centro, the dark, loungey

The Bazaar is Andrés's eighth and largest restaurant, a new frontier for the chef-owner of seven hit Washington, D.C. eateries (including Congressional favorites like *Jaleo*, *Café Atlantico*, *Zaytinya* and *minibar*) that span a variety of cuisines but mostly emphasize, expand and reinterpret the Spanish tapas philosophy, which has recently overtaken the American culinary world. Blame Andrés, if you must, for the demise of the entrée, but remember, his small-plates are more interesting and flavorful than most, and few of those who've tried his food would have it any other way.

At *minibar*, an elite six-seat station inside *Café Atlantico*, Andrés has pioneered a new form of Spanish-inflected, avant-garde cuisine that calls for very small plates; it's also his private laboratory, where he creates new dishes and then puzzles out how to produce them on a large scale across his growing empire. “I may do a dish at *minibar* that I cannot do for four thousand people a day,” he says. “But I can extract touches of that idea and bring it to the masses.” A shrewd businessman, he's a partner with Starck and Nazarian in the SLS hotel brand, as opposed, say, to just being the celebrity chef-owner of the eatery. The only restaurant to receive four stars from the *Los Angeles Times* in recent memory, The Bazaar will be the first in a series. SLS Hotels has plans to redo Miami's Ritz-

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food&drink

Carlton and The Sahara Las Vegas, installing a Bazaar in each.

Andrés started his cooking career at age 15, choosing Barcelona's best culinary school over a traditional high school. He soon wound up in the Michelin-starred kitchen of *El Bulli*, created by Ferran Adrià, the master of the avant-garde culinary movement, whom Andrés calls “the pope.”

When Andrés opened his first restaurants in Washington 15 years ago, Spain was having a moment—but even

today, some people think “Spanish food” and still picture rice and beans. “We still have a long way to go, which is one of the reasons I have to work,” Andrés says. “Ninety-nine percent of paellas are not really paella! But we're going to see a big acceleration in Spanish cuisine soon. I'd prefer I didn't have to concentrate so much in the Spanish tradition, but if I don't do it, who will?”

Andrés regularly dispels the widespread believe that he alone brought tapas to America, but he's passionate about his role in their development. “What is true is that no one was really doing tapas the way I did,” he says. “Portions were bigger. A table of four might have four plates to share. My table of four had ten or twelve even smaller plates, and that was a dramatic change.”

The chef believes dining should be more social, more fun and more varied. Others seem to agree. “Tapas now shows up in the most absurd places. Korean, American... And the ones that don't want to create tapas do it anyway and call it ‘small dishes.’” In addition to the new outposts of The Bazaar, Andrés is also hatching plans for an airport restaurant concept and a new Washington *minibar*. Asked how he keeps on top of everything, he evokes Napoleon. “He waged war, but he was not just a warrior,” Andrés says. “He was a master of logistics.”

I congratulate him on having Yorke and Hopkins in the restaurant on the same night. “Also Luke Perry!” he says, demonstrating a surprising knowledge of teen-oriented '90s television. Then he lets out a raucous laugh and squeezes my shoulder the way he does to many of his staffers before heading back into the dining room. I watch as he sits down at a VIP booth, leans back and begins to chat animatedly with his customers. Meanwhile, as fast as the kitchen can turn them out, waiters scoop up those little plates and carry them out into the world. //

L.A.-based journalist **ADAM BAER** loves small plates, as long as there are enough of them.



TAKE A BITE Japanese tacos filled with eel (top) and panna cotta with apricot gelatin

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DARKO ZAGAR

“I'd prefer if I didn't have to concentrate so much in the Spanish tradition,” José Andrés says. “But if I don't do it, who will?”

Hopkins and Radiohead's Thom Yorke, here to sample not only the chef's innovative take on tapas but the high-energy space as well.

The 417-seat Bazaar, a free-form new “dining concept,” is a little like a swanky food court with wait service—an “indoor piazza” cooked up by Andrés

cocktail and raw bar where bartenders present margaritas topped with “salt air” and “magic” smoking mojitos with liquid nitrogen. To the bar's right resides a fanciful patisserie, where deconstructed desserts and homemade candies tempt some to skip dinner. And on the far left is the main event, two back-to-back tapas bars separated by a floating wall. One, *Blanca*, decorated in blonde wood and white fabric, sets the stage for contemporary tapas: tiny jicama pouches filled with guacamole, liquefied “olives” served on white spoons, foie gras-cotton candy “lollipops,” and faux miso linguine. *Rojo*, the other side, sports darker woods and photos of matadors; it's designed to evoke the spirit of more traditional tapas like scallops romesco and *jamon Iberico*, from acorn-fed pigs. (Andrés is a partner in a company that produces this acclaimed ham, which he brought to the U.S. for the first time last year.)

CAN DO Tinned mussels and King Crab are two of The Bazaar's *latas y conservios*.

