

Latin Lover

by Janice Wald Henderson



Photography © Robert D'Amico

(Above) Cinnamon-crusted pork loin with yam puree and figs is among the winning selections at D'Cache. (Right page) Set in a 1920s home, the restaurant offers intimate dining spaces and live entertainment on select nights.



Housed in a 1928 Spanish cottage, D'Cache is a find. For starters, the home's integrity—dark wood beams, stained glass and graceful arches—is beautifully maintained. By the tiny bar, the chef pulls rosemary-scented flatbread from the wood-burning oven, and the aroma wafts through the dining rooms like French perfume. I think I am in love with D'Cache before I eat a thing.

I'm not sure where I want to dine; on a cozy outdoor patio, tucked away in a side room or in the main dining room where one wall projects larger-than-life tango, samba and other hot Latin dance scenes. Later in the evening, entertainers perform, perhaps a duo of Spanish guitarists. Come with a lover; at D'Cache, there's passion in the air.

This Latin-fusion restaurant (think Spain and South America, with European and modern American influences) calls Luis Ochoa their chef; he garnered attention at Toluca Lake's Eight-18. Ochoa cooks with confidence and flair.

The staff is warm and welcoming. On a first visit, you may well be offered a tour. Or receive a complimentary dessert. One evening, my sister and I chat with a waiter who is also a former New Yorker. But had we not pursued the conversation, he would have kept his personal life to himself. Another evening, I have fun with a Chilean server, who helps me with my Spanish pronunciation.

Dinner can be all tapas, or the more conventional starter-entrée route. Complimentary fresh-from-the-oven rosemary flatbread and homemade herbed butter is a delicious way to begin any meal. The bread is thin and chewy, the butter aromatic with fresh herbs.

Grilled seafood salad is delightful. The shrimp are sweet, and the calamari is astonishingly tender. The butter lettuce, tossed with ripe avocado and lemony mustard dressing, tastes fresh-picked.

Brazilian-style lamb chops, roasted in the wood-burning oven, are a must-try. You'll hear the sizzle, see the smoke and inhale the aroma before the plate is anywhere near. The meat is carved tableside and presented with a flourish.

The best way to express this lamb's virtues is to tell you that my sister and I fought over it, picked up the bones with our hands—and we both dislike lamb. I mean, we never order it. That night, we nearly went to war over the last of the five chops. The pistachio pesto marinade permeates the soft meat to the bone. The rich char and delicious coconut lemongrass sauce sends this dish over the top. Creamy risotto sprinkled with twice-baked crispy shredded yams and perfectly grilled zucchini and asparagus are fine accompaniments.

Paella is bold and hearty, each grain of tomato-soaked rice drenched in flavor. Sometimes paella can be boring; a bountiful dish with similar notes in every bite. Not D'Cache's version. Ochoa's paella packs some heat, but taste the chorizo, and the spiciness skyrockets. Big bright-green peas add color and sweetness. The same firm shrimp and tender calamari in the seafood salad are found here. Moist chunks of chicken and good black mussels complete this rustic dish.

Only in the mood for appetizers? D'Cache's wood-oven roasted pizzas are splendid. Try a large rectangle of flatbread topped with porcini and portobello with gouda and truffle oil; or Grandma's pizette, with slow-roasted vegetables, goat cheese and micro-greens. Either makes a lovely light meal.

Other tapas include Caesar with blackened skirt steak, empanaditas Cuban-style, and yucca croquettes with mascarpone cilantro sauce. Baby-back ribs, barbed in

pasilla (chile) honey barbecue sauce of uncommon depth, arrive glistening, the meat falling off the bones. Skirt steak skewers, with grilled asparagus and chimichurri (Argentinean olive oil-parsley-garlic sauce), are excellent.

Most wines are modestly priced, of good quality and poured into delicate stemware. The selection includes intriguing bottles from Chile, Argentina and Spain.

Desserts are simple, the kind offered when there isn't a pastry chef. They include a trio of sorbets, crema Catalana (similar to crème brûlée) and a not chocolaty or moist-enough warm chocolate cake. No matter, D'Cache has so much going for it. I, for one, will be a regular. VM

D'Cache

10717 Riverside Dr.
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www.dcacherec.com

MENU HIGHLIGHTS

Grilled seafood salad, skirt steak skewers, Grandma's pizette, paella, Brazilian-style lamb chops.

AMBIENCE:

Romantic 1920s Spanish cottage.

SERVICE:

Skilled, gracious.

PRICES:

Tapas/starters: \$9 to \$17.

Entrées: \$26 to \$42.

Dessert: \$7 to \$11.

CREDIT CARDS:

All major.

SERVINGS:

Dinner Tuesday through Saturday.

PARKING:

Vallet and street.