

BRUNCH AND SEAFOOD, OH MY!

CARMELITA SPATS SURE TO PLEASE
FANS OF SIMPLISTIC VARIETY

BY JORDAN TICHENOR
PHOTO TODD COOPER



SARA ELLIS

“No foams, no gels,” says Sara Ellis, self-proclaimed “serial entrepreneur” and owner of the soon-to-open Carmelita Spats. Although the name invokes Mexican seafood (Carmelita is the name of her Chihuahua, and spats refers to mollusks) this is not really representative of the direction of the restaurant. It is more representative of the unique style of this restaurant.

In reality, the only category for the whimsical fare is “what Sara wants for dinner,” she says. “That’s the menu.” Many of the plates will be straightforward: Kobe beef filets, a plate of prosciutto, sautéed green beans and tomato soup round out some of the ideas that fly off the top of Ellis’ head. She ponders putting some of these in a “risotto setting” and wonders aloud whether she can match some Mexican flavors with French cuisine.

If her name seems familiar, you might recognize Ellis from her previous endeavors, Red Agave and Fandango, among others. This is in addition to her career as a private chef in Mexico. But while the pay was good, the environment wasn’t right. “I miss that social feel from a restaurant,” she says. “I just enjoy it.”

Depending on the day and time of day, you may only be able to choose between three plates. “They’ll change, and I’ll offer like a vegetarian, a pescatarian and a meat option,” Ellis says, pondering the idea. “Yeah, it’ll be easier that way.” That will be the lunch menu, which will be available Wednesday through Friday.

Between Wednesday and Saturday, later in the day, the menu will be “tapas” style, with many plates of varying sizes and styles of food. It will be all about choice. “I sit down at restaurants and I pick everything apart,” Ellis says. “I want a place where people can get exactly what they want.”

Tapas, which are offerings of many small-to-medium-sized plates, are a staple in the European market, but in America the concept has not quite taken off. Perhaps it is because most restaurants are looking to expand, when in reality tapas only work “in a small place,” as Ellis noted after a recent trip to Paris to research food for the restaurant.

Saturday and Sunday will offer “hangover” brunch — “I love a good brunch,” Ellis says.

The restaurant is small. Having taken over the space that used to house Not Your Mama’s Sandwich Shop, it is definitely down the scale from some of Ellis’ grand endeavors. However, she wears her excitement on her face as she walks around the very unfinished dining area. In her mind everything is laid out, but she is still tinkering with it. “It’s going to be very colorful,” she says. “It needs lots of lush tones.”

Ellis’ passion for her food is more than infectious. It’s impossible to not be caught up in her descriptions of the food she sees in her head; her words are full of activity. “It’s going to be a blast of whatever I like to eat.” ■

Carmelita Spats is scheduled to open at 150 Shelton McMurphey Blvd. on Sept. 15.



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