

SCALLOP TIRADITO WITH
CHILI VINAIGRETTE, WOOD
SORREL, CILANTRO, THAI
BASIL, GINGER OIL, SEA
SALT, PEA FLOWERS,
CUCUMBER AND RADISH



Coming Home

MEBRILLO HEAD CHEF **COREY WISUN** SHARES
HIS TAKE ON CUBAN CUISINE By Rachael Carnes

On a drizzly May morning, Membrillo Latin Cafe offers a warm departure to sunnier climes. Notes of simmering black beans and caramelizing onions fill the air as music wafts from the compact kitchen.

“This is my home,” says chef and co-owner Corey Wisun. “And when others come into my home, this is how I want to treat them.”

Since bursting on the Eugene foodie scene in May 2014, Membrillo has gained an ardent following for its fresh, locally sourced Cuban, Spanish and South American flavors.

Now Membrillo is on the move to 15th & Willamette Street, to a 50-seat restaurant set to open in June. With Wisun in the kitchen and his partner and co-owner Sarah Footit running the front house, jumping into a bigger space feels right, Wisun says. After all, the new restaurant will still focus on the exquisite fixings that Membrillo’s patrons expect.

“I go to the [Lane County] Farmers Market every Saturday to see what’s new, what’s exciting,” Wisun says. “After I get the ingredients, then I try to figure out what to do with them.”

With a menu that can change daily, Wisun serves up fresh, seasonal gems, like an *Ensalata Del Dia*, made with tender root vegetables and greens; and *Calabaza*, fried squash blossoms with a goat cheese and chorizo stuffing, served with a nettle-ramp salsa verde.

Although Wisun knows his way around meat, seafood and poultry, vegetarians will also find Membrillo features some of the most inventive meat-free dishes in town.

Wisun says he’s continually inspired by new Latin foods, each bite piquing his curiosity.

“When I try a new Latin dish, I want to know more about it,” Wisun says. With the mind of a chef, Wisun breaks the components of a new dish down and imagines how he could make it unique, “to put my own local spin on it,” he says.

Born in Miami and raised in the suburbs of south Florida, Wisun grew up on a diet of “Cuban food and Jewish deli food,” he says, and his cooking tries to bring that sense of adventure, and comfort, to every plate.

Wisun praises the sweet and savory balance of a traditional *mofongo*, a fried, plantain-based dish, mashed in a wooden mortar-and-pestle and studded with crunchy pork cracklings or bacon. The signature dish, common in Cuba, offers a perfect harmony of flavors that keeps people coming back for more.

“Guests that come in the door that have a Latin upbringing say that the food evokes a lot of food memories,” Wisun says. “They say it reminds them of their grandma’s house. That keeps me going.”

Wisun admits that he didn’t learn cooking at his grandma’s elbow. In fact, he says his earliest fascination with cooking began as a youngster, watching Julia Child and *The Galloping Gourmet* on PBS. “That made an imprint,” he says.

He began cooking professionally in 2004, and after training at a culinary school in Florida, Wisun opened his own successful catering company and later was head chef at Falling Sky’s Brewpub and then Pour House (if you’ve eaten your fair share of pastrami at either location, the recipe is Wisun’s).

“Most of my education has come on the job, just cooking,” Wisun says.

Whether it’s the bite-sized *arepa*, a corn flour and cheese pancake with smoked Tillamook cheddar cheese, or the pork spare ribs, braised and grilled with a sherry glaze, Wisun aims to create food that is complex yet approachable, with “simple, good flavors that work well together,” he says.

“This is tapas style,” Wisun says. “The food’s meant to come out in waves.”

By shining a spotlight on the colors, textures and flavors of Latin culture that don’t include Central America, Wisun says, Membrillo can offer tastes that diners “can’t get anywhere else in town.”

The new restaurant space, at 1530 Willamette Street, will more than double Membrillo’s seating capacity.

“It’ll be a completely different restaurant,” Wisun says. “Inviting, great space, contemporary, fun. There will be a bar with seating and floor space available for a band. We’ll have dancing on Friday and Saturday nights.” ■

For more information about the new opening, follow Membrillo Café on Facebook or call 205-8470.



COREY WISUN

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