

A NEW BBQ IN TOWN

Wasi puts a Peruvian spin on American barbecue BY NADIA RAZA

If you have driven down the midtown area of Willamette in the past few months, you may have noticed an unassuming sign across from The Bier Stein announcing the opening of Wasi, a Peruvian barbecue joint — the new project of Chef Corey Wisun, known for the beloved Eugene restaurant Membrillo.

After four (delicious) years, Wisun felt that Membrillo had run its course. Wasi came to fruition with some spontaneity when the sale of Membrillo fell through — around that time, Wisun noticed that the closing of Papa's Soulfood Kitchen left a void in Eugene's barbecue scene.

With a culinary and cultural love for both American barbecue and Peruvian cuisine, Wisun dreamt up Wasi.

The concept for Wasi is an approachable take on American barbecue in a Peruvian direction. As he proved with Membrillo, Wisun excels at showcasing regional Latin American flavors with imaginative dishes that highlight local seasonal ingredients.

Wasi continues this trend by focusing on seasonal vegetables and local meats. From masterfully smoked brisket and pulled pork to grilled local alpaca, Wasi honors complementary flavors and concepts from Southern barbecue and Peruvian cuisine.

This expression carries through in the sauces offered at Wasi. Blending Peruvian chilis (called *aji*), Wisun created an *aji panca* (inspired by Kansas City-style barbecue), an *aji mirasol* (inspired by Carolina gold sauce) and an *aji limo* (inspired by Carolina vinegar sauce). Honoring the distinction of regional flavors and traditions is part of the experience eating at Wasi.

Their impressive selection of meats should not overshadow their vegetarian options. The grilled vegetable platter with chimichurri, as well as all of the side dishes — including my favorite, *solterito* (a cold salad with potato, favas, olive, feta, red onion and creamy rocoto dressing) — would make any vegetable lover revel in flavors that are hard (if not impossible) to find in Eugene.

With affordability achieved through a casual counter service, Wisun has created an atmosphere that is welcoming, lively and intimate. It's a perfect setting for either a quick meal or long encounter with friends and family.

The menu encourages a family-style feast named the *Pachamanca*, boasting all the meats and all the sides. The name Wasi translates as "home" in Quechua, the indigenous language in Peru.

As I watched three large groups licking their fingers, sharing food and conversation, the name Wasi made perfect sense. Rather than evoke the idea of home, Corey Wisun has created a way to invite people into his.

Wasi Peruvian BBQ is open 11:30 am to 2:30 pm and 5 pm to 9 pm Thursday through Tuesday at 1530 Willamette Street. More info at 541-344-1534 or wasibbq.com.

