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## Valley crowd can say Ole! to tapas and wine pairings

By Larry Lipson  
Restaurant Critic

Call them small bites, little plates or tapas, they provide a very popular way to dine in the evening, despite the fact that the bill can jump up significantly if you happen to be more than a little hungry.

The informality of this type of meal-taking appeals strongly to younger diners, while those with older stomachs also like the idea of being able to enjoy dishes with smaller portioning.

Consequently, it made sense to a struggling restaurant like Tournesol in Studio City to discard its French kitchen and reinvent itself as a Spanish tapas cafe.

Ole, as it's called, has chosen brown tones over yellow, dim lighting over bright and Spain over France in its new incarnation.

Dim even turns into dark in some areas. In fact, there was so little light at one end of the dining room during the first visit, a staffer evidently had trouble seeing a bottle of Spanish tempranillo red wine standing on our table and knocked it over while placing the first tapas order in front of us.

Luckily the bottle fell off the end of the table, missing us completely and landing on the floor, sloshing its contents toward the next table, which was vacant.



Chef Richard Crespin and co-owner Eman Talei show off the fare at Ole Tapas Bar in Studio City. (David Sprague / The Los Angeles Daily News)

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Profuse apologies came spilling forth, and we happily moved with a replaced bottle to a slightly brighter part of the room, the limited brightness a result of two large, adequately lit, colorful depictions of bullfighting activities centered on the wall above two booths.

Although Ole's version of gazpacho (\$6), basically a thick puree of heirloom tomatoes, was expected first, the initial plate delivered was a warm assortment (placa caliente, \$12) of four listed tapas offerings.

It was a good start. All of them had merit.

There was a combination of tasty sauteed mushrooms (setas) and artichokes (alcachofas) sharing honors with a piece of fried goat cheese (queso frito) sweetened with honey.

A little heap of fluffy fried calamari (calamar vasco) and a thick wedge of the traditional Spanish omelet (tortilla Espanola) were the remaining tidbits.

A snow crab cake (\$9), better than expected, and sliced flatiron steak (\$8) that was tough in spots, followed.

Flanlike goat milk custard (mamia, \$7), thankfully not oversweetened, decorated with fresh berries, provided a welcome ending.

Eluding the darker surroundings the second time, we successfully requested the same seating.

This time we ordered two tapas and two entree plates.

Ole's paella (\$20), a nontraditional rendition, lacks the yellow hue of most Spanish paellas. However, the soft rice melange with a hint of saffron, studded with chorizo, chicken, squid, scallops and shrimp plus a fringe of mussels en shell, presented a satisfying main dish.

So did a serving of juicy, garlicky lamb chops (cordero con ajo, \$23) accompanied by skin-in mashed potatoes.

Preceding these were a neat arrangement of whitefish ceviche perched on mashed avocado (\$8) and a sort of bay scallop sashimi creation surprisingly accompanied by sliced banana and pomegranate seeds (\$8).

Oh yes, pomegranate seeds. The chef loves them. They showed up with the ceviche and with the lamb and are used in a marinated chicken dish called pollo de la Granada (\$16).

A touch of bright red in the low-lit, shadowed confines of Ole.

## OLE TAPAS BAR

**Food:** ★★★★★

**Service:** ★★★★★

**Wine:** ★★★★★

**Where:** 13251 Ventura Blvd., Studio City.

**Hours:** Open for happy hour (5 to 7 p.m.), dinner and snacks from 5 to 11 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 5 p.m. to midnight Friday and Saturday.

**Recommended items:** Heirloom gazpacho; bay scallops with banana;

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fried goat cheese; fried calamari, mushrooms and artichokes; whitefish ceviche; Ole paella; lamb chops; goat's-milk custard.

**How much:** Starters and small plates from \$5 to \$12, entrees from \$16 to \$21, desserts from \$5 to \$9. Full bar. All major credit cards.

**Wine list:** Single-page starting list offers 41 bottles (\$20 to \$160) and 25 wines by the glass (\$5 to \$10). About half of the labels are Spanish. A pleasant red is Marques de Caceres Tinto Rioja 2000 (\$24). Corkage policy allows better labels in at no fee - but no cheapies.

**Reservations:** Helpful. Call (818) 986-3190.

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*Larry Lipson co-hosts "What's Cooking?" a restaurant, wine and food talk show that airs from 8 to 9 a.m. Wednesdays nationally on Cable Radio Network (CRN) and National Radio Network (NRN), heard locally on KPXN-TV (PAX) Channel 30 SAP; Adelphia Santa Monica on C 74 SAP; Adelphia San Fernando Valley on Channel 1/97 SAP and 25; Time Warner West Valley on Channel 6 SAP and 960; AT&T on Channel 6 in the Valley and Channel 44 SAP in Los Angeles; Charter Communications on Channel 33 SAP; Adelphia Lancaster on Channel 37; Adelphia Simi Valley on Channel 8; Charter in Hidden Hills/Malibu/Agoura on cable FM 97.5; Avenue TV Cable Ventura on Channel 83; Charter San Gabriel Valley on Channel 34 SAP and Channel 56; Time Warner Canyon Country on Channel 960; Time Warner South Pasadena on Channel 6 and 960.*

*Larry Lipson, (818) 713-3668 [larry.lipson@dailynews.com](mailto:larry.lipson@dailynews.com)*

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