

9:15

DINNER DATE



drama**starters**

CLASSIC SPANISH TAPAS GETS A FLAIR FOR DRAMA IN THIS COOL CITY HOT SPOT.

The Spanish are good at dramatics. So it's fitting the CBD's newest Latin-inspired restaurant is making a bit of a scene in the city. Subsolo (which is Portuguese for basement) has an inconspicuous entrance but once you head down the stairs, you are greeted with a red light-filled arena with all the drama of a bull fight.

The cool cocktail bar and white linen tablecloths give the place an air of refined cool – a touch of Barcelona (or Melbourne at least). Barman Sam Fallows has created an imaginative list of cocktails, including a do-it-yourself caipirinha and the Fendy, a subtly smooth fennel martini.

The food complements its sophisticated stage. Medieval-style espetada charcoal skewers are the main attraction in the show. Half-metre vertical spikes arrived at the table, spearing the succulent meat, which was still sizzling from the spit roast. We chose a rock salt crusted rump steak, oozing with juice and flavour. It was a display of pumped-up macho drama.

The paella came in a small cast-iron pan – too hot to handle. The saffron-stained rice was baked and hard, just as it should be, leaving enough of the soccarat (burnt pieces of rice) at the base of the pan – just how the Spanish like it. Pieces

of seafood and shellfish poked out the top, and were miraculously tender and juicy. This was paella cooked extremely well: it's a bugger of a dish to get right.

Other dishes included a rustic crunchy cod croquette – a comfort food for the kids (and nostalgic adults like me) and salty warmed olives. The baked pimentos rellenos (roasted red capsicum) had a sweet, nutty flavour, offset with the salty and sour goat's cheese.

For dessert the rightly heavy and milky cooked crema catalana with quince puree was theatrically bruleed at the table and the churros with dulce de leite and honey cream was an interesting take on the traditional midnight (or 4am post-party) sugar hit.

All up it was authentic Iberian food with clever twists, served with flair and passion.

WHERE: Subsolo, 161 King Street, Sydney

PHONE: 9223 7000

WE ATE: roasted olives, \$8; baked pimentos, \$17; cod croquettes, \$14; steak espetada, \$29; paella \$33; crema catalana, \$14; churros with dulce de leite, \$14; cheese plate, \$14