



CLEANER, CRISPER FLAVORS

JOHN RIVERA SEDLAR RESURFACES WITH RIVERA

In the '80s, long before Bobby Flay entered a professional kitchen, John Rivera Sedlar helped to elevate Southwestern cuisine to an art form at Los Angeles restaurants like Abiquiu. After more than a decade away from the kitchen, Sedlar resurfaced downtown in January, opening a modern pan-Latin restaurant called Rivera with Bill Chait and designer Eddie Sotto.

Rivera hosts three distinct environments, including the "Playa" bar, which provides views of the kitchen and showcases a prized leg of *jamon iberico de bellota*. "Samba" is a sleek room with banquette seating and plasma screens that display fleeting Meso-American images. In back, a stately blood-red dining room called "Sangre" features sumptuous booths, conquistador helmet lamps and pullout tequila "lockers" designed by Sotto so that guests might "drink the architecture."

Sedlar grew up in New Mexico, where his grandmother cooked empanaditas in the wood-burning oven while snow fell outside. He started working in French restaurants, but quickly decided to combine "intricate culinary techniques" with "delicious indigenous ingredients from the Southwest." Equipped with his gastronomic vision, Sedlar moved to Los Angeles and built a reputation for concentrated blasts of "cleaner, crisper flavors."

At Rivera, Sedlar is blending ancient forms of Latin cooking with molecular gastronomy. "It's like a river going in and out of Spain, Portugal, South America, regional Mexico and the Caribbean," he says. "They're all sort of woven together geographically, but they're also drawn together chronologically."

Sedlar and his kitchen staff playfully sift spices onto the plates with stencils. In the case of sea scallop crudo, cumin is imagined as a gas mask. Basque lamb chops are plated with allspice shaped like a pair of eyes, plus a tangy mix of chorizo, piquillos, olives and capers. Individuales (larger plates) include a Kurobuta pork chop blanketed with molé and sprinkled with pepitas, almonds and sesame seeds — three ingredients in the molé. The chop arrives with earthy purple potatoes and "black" carrots, a rarely seen dark purple variety.

At lunch, Rivera draws a steady crowd of downtown businesspeople and conventiongoers, who swoon over the complimentary lunch-only *sopapillas* and the pull-apart Navajo flatbread. Visitors will also find extra-large pork short ribs with cilantro mashed potatoes and an "old-fashioned" red chile chicken enchilada.

Previously a Patron spokesperson for 10 years, Sedlar developed a cutting-edge tequila program for Rivera, including seasonal tequilas infused with fruits, vegetables and spices, all dispensed from an Enomatic.

Behind the bar, guests will find *comme Ça* veteran Julian Cox, who crafts such balanced cocktails as the Añejo Honey Sour, a frothy amber drink with añejo tequila, fresh lemon, honey and a flame-licked grapefruit peel.

Postres (desserts) include crisp-edged crepes served with a tart key lime "cloud" and a beaker of white rum, all arranged to mimic the flavor profile of a Cuban mojito. In Sedlar's world, his "river" even runs through Cuba.

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