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Fishers gets the flavors of Spain

Posted on Oct. 14, 2009 by Jennifer Litz

BARcelona Tapas downtown has been around for about two years, but the portions there are probably much larger than what you'd have in Spain to tide you over in between meals, as a complement to your chato. El Bodegon, the new tapas place and Spanish/South American grocery store at 96th street, might be closer to the real thing, at least in form.

El Bodegon has only been open since about last Tuesday, but the marquee in front of the shopping center two intersections from 69 already bears its name. That's good, as it took me a windy trip around the center to find the actual store, which is nestled next to a non-descript beauty place and not facing the street. I arrived to an empty, clean space with a couple of friendly men (one of them Victor Diaz, whom I believe is a co-owner besides manager) keeping the tapas and mounds of jamon Serrano, blood sausage, Manchego cheese and other bulk-sale items company. There is an island of dried good groceries in the middle of the store; I suspect these offerings may grow beyond the Spanish candies and Columbian malt beverages soon. Beer and wine is also eminent here, according to Diaz—after all, "bodegon" means "tavern."

Many of the tapas here, as in Spain, are seafood based: various permutations of anchovies, seafood-studded paella, garlicky shrimp and steamed mussels dot the menu de tapas. Serrano ham and Manchego cheese—the two prides of Spain—also make a cameo on this menu, but undoubtedly play a bigger role sandwiched between two pieces of crusty bread when served as bocatas (\$4.99), simple but delicious Spanish-style sandwiches.

Don't be surprised when your tapa portion is a bit smaller than even "small plates": "Tapa" means lid, like the slivers of bread Spaniards used to cover the tops of their beloved olive oil jugs with. This morsel usually got eaten. You can probably deduce the term's evolution.

I myself was out to simply taste. So I ordered tapas of most of what I saw behind the glass: paella (\$2.50), mussels in vinaigrette (\$2.50), gambas al ajillo (shrimp with garlic) (\$2.50) and an arepa (\$2.99), or Columbian corn fritter.

I'll start with the best: The mussels in vinaigrette were covered with a vibrant, rough-chopped salsa whose tomato-onion tang popped tastily. I made short shrift of those four guys. Unfortunately, they had been preceded by some rather chewy gambas, which tasted a few steps shy of dried shrimp. Now, I know that tapas have a longish shelf life under glass in their native land, usually. But I suspect the turnover over there is kinder to these crustaceans. They might have been much better fresh.

No importa: on to the arepa. I think it was supposed to come with cheese, but didn't. Anyway, the Spanish-style fritter was typical comfort food. Get it warm, so the outside is crispy, giving way to the thick corn patty laced with potato strings and, possibly, pork grease that coats your mouth deliciously. I'd recommend it for breakfast, but there are so many other meal deals to try in the early morning hours—like a bocata plus coffee (\$5.99) or an Argentinean turnover plus coffee (\$2.99)—that might be better recommendations.

I had been working my way up to what I considered the star of the meal, a paella dotted with a squid tentacle there, a few mussels here, and, of course, the blank stare of a whole shrimp. This must have been the remains of the day: The rice was gummy, and the pervasive fish flavor just didn't have a lot of saffron or other spice to produce a nuanced, well-balanced taste.

Para postre, I had snatched a ration of their tres leches cake (\$3.99), each portion doled out in diminutive cone-shaped receptacles. Diaz told me the cakes were homemade, and I believe him. The cinnamon cake was soaked with a horchata-like liquid on the bottom, and it was good. I'm used to a tres leches with an eggy, flan-like base, but this will do, too.

The verdict: Once this place picks up, the food might be fresher. Perhaps I visited too early, as there's a definite void in our city's Spanish offerings, and I was eager. I will continue to look to this outlet as a source to possibly satisfy my craving.

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A tapa portion of paella at El Bodegon. Photo by Jennifer Litz. -

El Bodegon
 8510 E. 96th Street
 Fishers

Phone:
 317-841-3350
Mon - Fri:
 7:00 am - 7:00 pm
Sat:
 9:00 am - 8:00 pm
Sun:
 11:00 am - 3:00 pm

Food: 3
Ambiance: 3
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