

The thick slab of celery root at Reverie is a welcome change from the vegetable's usual pureed preparation.



PHOTO COURTESY OF REVERIE

Falling for Local Flair

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

When I showed up for dinner at Reverie one weeknight in October, Johnny Spero was having quite the week. His wife had just given birth to their daughter; Netflix had announced that he would be competing in its upcoming series *The Final Table*; and he'd been named a finalist in *People* magazine's 2018 "Sexiest Chef Alive" contest. Oh, and did I mention his aforementioned restaurant, a long-awaited entry in the D.C. dining scene, had just opened? It wasn't surprising, then, that the chef, whose pedigree includes cooking at Noma in Copenhagen and minibar and Komi in D.C., justifiably seemed a tad bit stressed.

Tucked down a quiet alleyway in Georgetown, the restaurant features a small menu of elevated plates (Spero is known to wield tweezers in the kitchen) with a killer burger and fried-chicken sandwich for good measure. A thick slab of celery root served with lemon balm, caramelized carrot juice, and coconut upgrades a lowly root vegetable usually reserved for purees, while his twist on steak and potatoes charcoal- and pan-sears a ribeye tossed with allspice oil and topped with sunchokes.

The drinks, meanwhile, are a collaboration between General Manager Evan Zimmerman and Columbia Room bartender JP Fetherston. The Dutch Salute mixes genever with fino Sherry, secco vermouth, and citrus-fino cordial, while the Shenango Division riffs on the Manhattan with bonded rye, apple brandy, Cap Corse Rouge, Peychaud's Bitters, and sweetgrass. As for the wines, Zimmerman has fun with grapes from unexpected regions, orange wines, and bottles that have



PHOTO COURTESY OF SER

A glass of one of three types of sangria is a perfect way to start a meal at SER.

undergone extended fermentation. "Reverie" refers to Spero's penchant for daydreaming in school, which is still somehow contagious: I left that evening already thinking about what to order when I return.

Speaking of repeat customers, they are the norm at SER in Ballston. Arlington residents have been flocking to the restaurant, which is co-owned by chef Javier Candon and wife Christiana Campos, for authentic Spanish cuisine and tapas for the past three years. (A freak pipe explosion in July forced SER to shutter for three weeks, much to the dismay of its rabid fans.)

At a recent fall dinner, I sampled ridiculously crispy croquetas filled with jamon, chicken, and bechamel sauce; seared tuna belly carved tableside; and irresistibly tender roasted suckling

pig. The food was accompanied by a few fab bottles from a list that serves as a virtual journey across every Spanish region from Toro to Priorat: Standouts included the 2017 Mar de Viñas Albariño and the 2014 Avante Tinto Fino, a versatile red from Ribera del Duero. I made sure to save room for *goxua*, a layered dessert of strawberry, cream, sponge cake and custard with a brûléed top. (If you go, bookend your meal with a glass of sangria to whet your appetite and Candon's grappa-like digestif to wrap things up.)

And in case you're wondering what SER stands for, that would be "Simple. Easy. Real." Three more fitting adjectives may have never been uttered. ■■

Kelly Magyarics, DWS, is a wine, spirits, and lifestyle writer and wine educator in the Washington, D.C. area. She can be reached through her website, kellymagyarics.com, or on Twitter and Instagram @kmagyarics.



The Dutch Salute at Reverie is an aromatic and refreshing genever-based cocktail.

PHOTO: KELLY MAGYARICS