

SunSentinel FOOD



A rendering of the patio at El Camino Boca Raton. Pam Manhas, the restaurant's interior designer, says: "We have an amazing patio to work with, so the design of the exterior spaces was just as important as the design of the interiors, if not more so." **PAM MANHAS/MANHAS DESIGN**

'Mexican soul food'

First look at El Camino coming to Boca Raton's Restaurant Row

By Rod Stafford Hagwood
South Florida Sun Sentinel

El Camino is looking to park in Boca Raton. The restaurant concept — scratch kitchens turning out what's billed as "Mexican soul food" — will open its largest location yet this winter at the cuisine-centric Restaurant Row, a dining destination next to the Town Center mall. The other El Camino locations are in Delray Beach, West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale, all under the Modern Restaurant Group umbrella that is owned by Brandon Belluscio, Brian Albe and Anthony Pizzo (the same trio behind Cut 432 and Park Tavern in Delray Beach).

This is a full-circle moment for the cofounders, who all started their hospitality careers in Boca Raton and met as teammates while working at Pranzo before owning Vertical 114 Modern Wine & Bistro.

"Since we were in Boca, I think this was 17 years ago, it's evolved and changed so much," Belluscio says. "But when you really think about Boca, it's been so long since something new is coming along in Midtown. So I really do feel like all the customers and the guests are really going to embrace us. ... We've



El Camino at Boca Raton's Restaurant Row will serve the eatery's signature scratch-made "Mexican soul food," including tacos, quesadillas, fajitas, burritos, enchiladas and nachos. **EL CAMINO RESTAURANTS**

been away from it for a while. And, yeah, it certainly feels like coming back home. For sure."

The venue

Each El Camino location has grown in size and stature, according to Francis

things unique about this location is we've really embraced the outdoor part of it ... in a larger format than we have in the past. So this restaurant, not only is it going to be our largest one, it's going to be our largest one with the offering of outside seating."

The interior design is by Pam Manhas of Fort Lauderdale-based Manhas Design.

"The main patio dining area features two live trees with banquet seating below them to create a more intimate dining experience. There is also a series of high-top tables with umbrellas, along with various dining table configurations including a drink rail and soft seating in one of our favorite spaces — the outdoor fireplace," Manhas says. "The fireplace anchors the entire corner of the patio while providing a cozy dining and lounge experience. The indoor/outdoor bar wraps around our building to create an engaging experience for all bar guests."

As with the other El Camino eateries, the featured muralist is Miami street artist Ruben Ubiera.

"After working with El Camino for all their projects, I have a feeling for what marries their look," Ubiera says.

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Need a quick breakfast? Oatmeal cups hit the spot

By Carolyn Casner | EatingWell

The nutty flavor of pecans and sweetness from fresh blueberries and bananas combine for an extra-tasty snack or breakfast. Make a batch on the weekend and keep them in your fridge or freezer for quick and easy breakfasts all week. Reheat in the microwave for about 40 seconds.

BAKED BLUEBERRY AND BANANA-NUT OATMEAL CUPS

Makes: 12 servings
Active time: 15 minutes
Total time: 50 minutes

3 cups oats
1 ½ cups low-fat milk
2 ripe bananas, mashed (about ¾ cup)
½ cup packed brown sugar
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ teaspoon salt
1 cup fresh blueberries
½ cup chopped toasted pecans
1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Coat a muffin tin with cooking spray.
2. Combine oats, milk, bananas, brown sugar, eggs, baking powder, cinnamon, vanilla and salt in a large bowl. Fold in blueberries and pecans. Divide the mixture between the muffin cups (about ½ cup each).



Wake up to an easy breakfast with these filling oatmeal cups. **TNS**

3. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 25 minutes. Cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack. Serve warm or at room temperature.

To make ahead: Wrap airtight and refrigerate for up to two days or freeze for up to three months. People with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity should use oats that are labeled

"gluten-free," as oats are often cross-contaminated with wheat and barley. **Recipe nutrition per serving:** 181 calories, total fat: 6 g, saturated fat: 1 g, cholesterol: 33 mg, carbohydrates: 28 g, fiber: 3 g, total sugars: 12 g, added sugars: 6 g, protein: 5 g, sodium: 124 mg, potassium: 241 mg, phosphorus: 139 mg, iron: 1 mg, folate: 11 mcg, calcium: 115 mg

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The agony and ecstasy of home winemaking

About half-million amateurs produce drink in US, Canada

By Eric Asimov
The New York Times

The pickers began to arrive at 7 a.m. at the home of Greg and Emily Ernst in Geyserville, California, to help harvest their half-acre zinfandel vineyard before the October day reached its 95-degree high.

These are not professionals. They are family and friends for whom helping the Ernsts is an annual social highlight. The Ernsts, in turn, are not planning to sell their grapes. They are amateur winemakers who take great pleasure and pride in farming and fermenting grape juice into their own expression of zinfandel.

Throughout the morning, the 30 or so pickers, including seven children, filled buckets with bunches of plump purple grapes. They deposited their hauls onto a table under bright lights, where Greg Ernst culled the underripe or marred grapes, setting them aside to be stomped on by the children. He tossed the remaining bunches into a machine that would destem and crush them, yielding frothy purple juice and skins in a 30-gallon plastic vat.

This is the time of year when the Ernsts and thousands of other home winemakers are filling barrels, vats, carboys or whatever containers they can rustle up with fresh grape juice that will begin the slow transformation into wine in cellars, garages and sheds around the country.

No official numbers exist for precisely how many amateurs are making wine, said Brad Ring, publisher of the periodical WineMaker magazine. But he estimated, based on sales of equipment and participation in competitions,



Lisa and John Nordmann destem grapes at their home in Fenton, Missouri. Lisa was inspired to take up winemaking by her son Timothy's own efforts. **BRYAN BIRKS/THE NEW YORK TIMES**

that a half-million people are making wine in their homes in the United States and Canada.

The majority, he said, are on the West Coast, where — like Ralph Maltese, a semiretired supply-chain consultant in Santa Cruz, California — they have ready access to a wide variety of wine grapes. In 2002, Maltese joined a group of a dozen or so hobbyists to form a winemaking cooperative. Together, they divided up tasks, some specializing in tasting or lab analysis. An oceanographer served as winemaker, while Maltese was the group organizer and cellar rat, a wine-industry term for those performing

menial but essential tasks like topping off barrels.

Each year, they would arrange to buy a ton or so of grapes from vineyards on the California coast. Over time, they developed extensive contacts and would occasionally be offered free grapes.

“A guy who farmed for Gallo would call and say, ‘I got two acres of grapes I’m not picking, you want it?’” Maltese recalled. In 2018, the group, which called itself Cave Gulch Winery after Maltese’s Santa Cruz neighborhood, won a best of show at the Santa Cruz County Fair for a 2016 negrette, a red grape mostly grown in southwestern France. Sadly, they

disbanded last year after the winemaker died unexpectedly.

The best part of it, Maltese said, was the togetherness.

“We would share equipment with a couple of other winemaking groups in town and get together for dinner,” he said. “When we had problems, like with a pinot noir, we’d call up one of the winemakers and ask how to approach it. People were great. It was a lesson in community.”

Americans have always made a little wine at home, particularly immigrants from wine-producing countries who wanted to reproduce a bit of the old country. But the practice

really took off during Prohibition, when the authorities created an exception for home winemakers, who were permitted to produce up to 200 gallons a year. Vineyards were able to stay in business catering to them. Cesare Mondavi, father of Robert Mondavi, moved his family from Minnesota to California in 1923 to start a business selling grapes, largely to home winemakers.

The 200-gallon household limit persists today, and winemakers are not permitted to sell their wares. Most give it away to friends and family, enter amateur winemaking competitions sponsored by WineMaker, the American Wine Society and numerous local entities, while stashing some away to see how the wines evolve.

Not everyone is lucky enough to have their own vines or live near wine country. They, like Cesare Mondavi’s customers, will order fresh grapes to be shipped, or buy frozen grapes or grape juice.

Lisa Nordmann in Fenton, Missouri, was inspired by her son Timothy’s winemaking efforts and in 2015 took up the challenge. Her first try, with cayuga, a white hybrid grape, did not turn out well as the juice oxidized in the heat of her garage. But they soon got serious.

“My husband and Timothy built a cool wine room so we could do long, slow fermentations,” she said. “It needs to be cool, especially with whites, so you can get the aromas and flavors.”

Soon, they were winning competitions, primarily with hybrid and native varieties that are grown in the Midwest, like norton, chambourcin, traminette and vignoles. But she also buys syrah or cabernet sauvignon juice from California or Chile. She’s served as president and secretary of the Missouri Winemaking Society, and she travels

to conventions of wine-makers.

“You learn a whole lot talking to others,” she said.

Making wine is not a cheap hobby.

Nordmann says she’s spent thousands of dollars on equipment, including a bladder press, a crusher-destemmer, various vats, barrels and carboys, pumps, bottle fillers and ingredients including yeast.

That doesn’t include the grapes or juice. Nordmann can pay roughly \$72 for 72 pounds of fresh Missouri hybrids, which would yield 5 gallons of wine. For California grapes, Musto Wine Grapes in Hartford, Connecticut, charges \$98 for 72 pounds of cabernet sauvignon from Lodi, California. Six gallons of Lodi cabernet juice, which also makes 5 gallons of wine, would run \$60. Shipping would be extra, and would depend on many factors to arrive at a price. Of course, many serious amateurs aim for closer to the 200-gallon limit, so costs multiply.

Mark Diehl, who started making wine with his wife, Sandi, at home in Kennesaw, Georgia, said conventions often include a seminar titled, “So You Think You Want to Go Pro,” for those fantasizing about the wine business. The usual message: “Don’t.”

The Diehls, both retired physicians, didn’t listen. When their friends, who owned Stonewall Creek Vineyards in Tiger, Georgia, near the South Carolina border, decided they wanted to retire, the Diehls bought it. They now produce 1,200 cases or so a year of wines made of both hybrids and French grapes like petit verdot and cabernet franc, with Mark Diehl making the wine. He has had to learn about growing grapes and dealing with government bureaucracy.

“It’s been a learning process,” he said, “with an unending amount of paperwork!”



Mission BBQ’s sampler allows diners to make their own tray of two to three meats, two sides and cornbread — in this case, pulled chicken, brisket and sausage. **COURTESY**

Restaurants

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sides such as coleslaw, green beans, baked beans and mac-n-cheese. 11929 Southern Blvd., Royal Palm Beach; Mission-BBQ.com

Ya Masi Taverna, West Palm Beach

More than a year after hospitality honcho and “Big Brother” star Memphis Garrett (No Man’s Land, Point Break) brought his first Greek restaurant to tony Las Olas Boulevard, Ya Masi will expand into its first sister taverna on West Palm Beach’s bustling Clematis Street restaurant row. Expected to open in late 2023, the new Ya Mas! will dish an identical menu of modern and classic fare, such as dolmades and muhammara, bechamel short rib, and loukaniko with melted leek and pepperoncini. 216 Clematis St., West Palm Beach; YaMasTaverna.com

Maggie McFly’s Local Craft Eatery & Bar, Boca Raton

Touchdown probably won’t be until later this winter for this concept flying into SoFlo out of Connecticut. Celebrating its 30th anniversary with this first foray into Florida, Maggie MacFly’s is doing a total down-to-the-studs makeover of a space inside Town Center at Boca Raton mall (where Rex Baron once stood).

The Maggie McFly’s menu has more than 180 items including burgers, pizzas, sandwiches, street foods (tacos, gyros, sliders), pastas, chicken dishes, salads, seafood, steaks and ribs, house specialties (such as Shepherd’s Pie, Pot Roast, Cajun Jambalaya), appetizers, snacks and desserts. “We will do seasonal specials that will be much more focused on Florida and Boca, more fresh fish,” says founder and owner Ray Harper, a snowbird in Palm Beach Gardens. The company also touts the use of locally sourced products, both in the kitchen and the bar. 6000 Glades Road, Boca Raton; maggiemcflys.com

Fiolina Pasta House, Boca Raton

Michelin-starred and James Beard Award-winning chef Fabio Trabocchi is coming to Boca Raton. Not only is he opening Fiolina at the highly anticipated Restaurant Row this fall, but Trabocchi is also moving his family to Boca Raton, where he and his wife first met. Fiolina will occupy the venue’s largest space at 7,000 square feet and, in addition to the main dining room, will feature a lounge, pasta room, show kitchen (with counter dining), private dining room, outdoor terrace and an open Mozzarella Bar Kitchen (with charcuterie station and wine room). “While memorable food and

exceptional service will be the core draw, Fiolina Pasta House will be much, much more,” Trabocchi says. “It will be the place where you will always find a sense of community, and everyday life celebrations happen.” Trabocchi already has Fiola in Coral Gables, and his Washington, D.C.-based restaurant group includes Del Mar and Sfoglina Pasta House. 5355 Town Center Road, Boca Raton; fabiotrabocchi.com

The Baked Bear, Dania Beach

The Baked Bear plans to open its second South Florida location sometime this winter at Dania Pointe, the sprawling al fresco mall and entertainment enclave in Dania Beach. As with the other location in Sawgrass Mills, this new novelty dessert shop will feature 13 baked-from-scratch-daily cookies and 13 premium craft ice cream flavors. You will also be able to mix and match two cookie flavors and choose an ice cream flavor for the filling, thus creating your own customized ice cream sandwich. Additionally, The Baked Bear will serve pints, sundaes and Bear Bowls (a warm cookie and brownie served with a scoop of ice cream). There are two more shops planned for Miami-Dade County. 139 S. Compass Way, Dania Beach; thebakedbear.com and daniapointe.com

El Camino

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“The new El Camino Boca Raton location is a very elevated space, very modern. They’ve really pushed the envelope, and that’s what I am trying to do with the murals in this space. I’m trying to make things very three-dimensional.

“The murals will be very funky and pretty edgy. I’m going to keep them a surprise, but I’ll say that people will really enjoy taking pictures in front of them.”

The food

The El Camino menu focuses on tacos, quesadillas, fajitas, burritos, enchiladas and nachos — or what they call their signature “Mexican soul food.” “The reason that we say that, it really comes from the heart,” Lake explains. “Everything that comes out of our kitchens is made from scratch. The same love is put in with our beverage program. ... We have over 25 sauces that are made from scratch fresh daily. We have tamales, we have empanadas. We have things that are like labors of love, that are literally handmade, day in and day out, to preserve freshness and quality.”

There will, however, be some dishes unique to the Boca Raton location.

“We’re doing a Red Snapper Ceviche Veracruz with Manzano chilies, pickled Cambray onions, caper berries and organic green olives,” Lake says, as well as an El Camino Chop Salad and a Cochinita Pibil Taco with a habanero salsa.

The cocktails

Drinks that will debut at El Camino in Restaurant Row include:

- Mango Lassi Margarita with Mezcal, Tequila Reposado, lime, Firewater Bitters and a special Mango Lassi Mix (mango puree, spiced green mango powder, lime, sheep’s milk yogurt and turmeric-chili salt)



Like the other three SoFlo locations, El Camino Boca Raton’s cocktail program will include handcrafted margaritas with options such as savory, sweet, smoky and spicy, or combinations. **EL CAMINO RESTAURANTS**

- Blueberry Margarita with Tequila Reposado, Mezcal, Pasubio Amaro, Palo Cortado Sherry and lacto-fermented blueberry syrup
- Avocado Margarita with Blanco Tequila, orange Combier, ripe avocado, fresh lime and avocado pit orgeat

- Other cocktail highlights include:
 - Michelada (a beer-based cocktail) using a house-made michelada mix (El Camino hot sauce, Maggi seasoning as well as miche-lada salt made in-house using Tajín, alder-smoked sea salt and ground chipotle peppers)
 - Prickly Pear Gin & Tonic with Las Californias Citrico Gin and herbal botanicals from Mexico and California
 - Hibiscus-Guava Margarita with house-made spiced hibiscus syrup (piloncillo, dried hibiscus flowers and cinnamon)
 - Banana Tequila, in which 30 pounds of bananas are used to make 12 bottles; Reposado Tequila and bananas are sous vide for four hours (the house-made banana peel demerara uses the restaurant’s leftover banana skins so there’s zero waste)

just the space that we have is super special, so we’re going to embrace that,” Belluscio says. “I think what we deliver, it’s just going to bring the crowds.”

Boca Raton-based PEBB Enterprises is the developer of Restaurant Row, a 22,500-square-foot ground-up, restaurant-only project that is surrounded by class A office buildings and at least 10 hotels within a 10-minute drive. Fiolina Pasta House, Pubblelly Sushi and Shabibi (the latest concept from “Hell’s Kitchen” alum Ralph Pagano) also signed on.

“(It’s) strategically located. We think that area is an up-and-coming part of Boca, a resurgence of Boca’s greatness,” says Lake. “One of the things that we love about that area is that we’ve done well in the financial districts, so that holds true with that there ... And then the location of the mall certainly helps as well.”

There’s also “the stature with other restaurateurs that are going in there, the elevated food scene,” Lake adds. “We certainly felt that was an area where we could continue our great success.”

The grand opening

You can register to attend the grand opening by signing up at the restaurant’s website. The new El Camino will be at 5535 Town Center Road, Unit 4, Boca Raton. To sign up for the grand opening, or for more information, go to ElCaminoBocaRaton.com.

“I certainly feel like the product and the value and