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## Review | Elle's brings elegance to Miramar dining

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JOE RIMKUS JR. / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Chef Luci Rosende shows three entrees -- Braised Pork Belly, Thai Mussels and Whole-fried Snapper -- at her Miramar restaurant.

Sleek, sophisticated Elle's has the kind of urban setting you'd expect to find on Las Olas Boulevard or Lincoln Road. But this dynamic new dining destination is a bright spot in the 'burbs, bringing its hip vibe to a Miramar plaza.

Elle's is decorated with colorful Haitian paintings on stark white walls, casually elegant with an illuminated onyx bar, dark furniture and chic artistic chandeliers made from reclaimed aluminum.

While the food and service are of fine dining caliber, the kids will feel welcome, too.

Owners Damian and Elizabeth Davila and chef Luci Rosende and her husband Enrique ran L&L Market Bistro in Miramar for four years before moving to this new space in May. Along with 120-seat Elle's, they've opened Market-To-Go next door, offering gourmet items and a thoughtful, international wine and beer selection.

One of the many reasons to rave about Elle's: No big wine markups. You pay the same price in the restaurant as you would in their market (most bottles are \$18-\$25).

Even more reason to rave: chef Luci Rosende's creative cuisine, influenced

by regional Latin, Asian and Caribbean flavors.

Rosende worked behind the scene for years. A mother of three, she was a culinary specialist for Burdines and Macy's, organizing chef demonstrations, and she also developed recipes (among other jobs) for Gardner's Markets in Miami-Dade.

With a trend toward smaller portions, Elle's menu is divided into several categories: Bar Bites (snacks, cheese and meat boards, burgers) plus Small, Medium and Large plates.

Even simple items are prepared with attention to texture and taste. Rosende tucks a crunchy, lightly toasted Marcona Spanish almond at the center of three dates, which are wrapped in crisp bacon and served on an endive spear with a dab of Stilton and a drizzle of Tupelo honey.

Paella croquette, a dish inspired by Italy's fried rice balls, are shaped like typical Latin croquettes but you'll bite into risotto with a trace of saffron, chopped shrimp and chorizo. Dip into a bold Spanish romesco sauce, with roasted red peppers, tomatoes and garlic.

On the list of ``Small" dishes, miso-glazed scallops are juicy and nicely seared, topped with cellophane noodles, chopped green onions, red pepper and a dusting of panko and presented in a lettuce cup. Our only issue: with miso, the scallops were on the salty side.

Among Elle's must-try dishes: ultra tender and juicy braised pork belly, plated with a fresh, ginger-scented Fuji apple chutney and a summery slaw of Granny Smith apples tweaked with a little fennel. If you like this dish, Rosende is planning a ``Porketarian" all-pork five-course menu (even dessert) Aug. 7.

Also on the hit parade: a roasted poblano pepper stuffed with cheddar cheese grits, fresh corn relish and beer-battered shrimp.

Gnudis are homemade ricotta dumplings served with earthy shiitake mushrooms and sautéed spinach drizzled with brown butter. And Thai mussels get a kick from lemongrass and sliced jalapeños in a coconut milk broth with jasmine rice.

Smitten with so many small plates, we ended up ordering only one Large dish on our visits -- a masterfully presented whole snapper (available

Wednesday to Saturday) that is perched on your plate as if it might swim away.

The snapper, given a quick dip in the deep-fry, has a light, crisp shell. The sauce, with heady spices of garlic, ginger and lemongrass, doesn't overwhelm the fish. It's served with Jasmine rice, stir-fried bok choy and a sprinkling of micro greens.

We'll have to stop back for steak and frites, Mongolian pork chop and other entrees.

But don't pass on desserts like homemade banana bread pudding with Rosende's brown sugar cinnamon ice cream or specials like our decadent pecan-chocolate torte.

We expect Elle's to become a new star -- and not just in Miramar.

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