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Review: Elle's in Miramar

By Judith Stocks, Dining Correspondent

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★★★★★ **Background:** Chef Luci Rosende, her husband, Enrique, and Damian and Elizabeth Davila relocated their co-owned Miramar based L&L Market Bistro to new digs last April. The move resulted in a name change to Elle's Market-To-Go and the addition of the 120-seat restaurant Elle's. The self-taught Rosende's culinary pedigree includes time spent as a culinary specialist for Burdines and as assistant food service director for Miami's Gardner's Markets.

Ambience: Comfy banquettes and a stunning backlit white marble bar set a casual yet polished tone.

Starters: Rosende's style is global with Latin, Asian and Caribbean cuisines each taking a turn. Paella croquettes (\$8), for instance, are scrumptious panko dusted parcels of saffron risotto, shrimp and chorizo accompanied by a side of excellent almond based romesco. Equally good are crispy dates (\$7), stuffed with marcona almonds, wrapped in crisp bacon and placed on blue cheese tucked inside an endive leaf. Drizzles of tupelo honey make it even better. If you're lucky, the open face tacos du jour (\$7-\$9) might be topped with luscious bits of short rib meat, sauteed onions, peppers and feta cheese.

Entrees: The menu is categorized into small, medium and large portions, but we found even the small size generous. Tasty Greek lamb meatballs (\$12) are paired with house-made tzatziki, spicy harissa infused yogurt, Kalamatas, feta and toasted naan. Gnudi — light ricotta dumplings prepared from house-made ricotta — take well to shiitakes, sauteed spinach and brown butter (\$12). A 16-ounce espresso rubbed bone-in rib eye (\$32) has a slightly spicy crust. Even poultry gets a nice twist, with a jerk-seasoned half chicken (\$18) slow roasted in a banana leaf, partnered with tasty mofongo, a Puerto Rican specialty of mashed plantains with meat and veggies. Or, just go for a great grilled 8-ounce Black Angus burger, particularly the Cuban burger (\$13), topped with pulled pork, ham, Swiss, pickles, and mustard. On my next trip, I'll try the braised Kurobuta pork belly with Fuji apple chutney, green apple slaw and green peppercorn sauce (\$14).

Sweet!: We'd been told not to miss the house-made banana bread pudding with caramel sauce and brown sugar cinnamon ice cream (\$8), but there was none. We consoled ourselves with a slice of divine cognac pumpkin cheesecake (\$8) and a moist mojito cupcake with hints of lime (\$3).

Service: Casual, but sometimes too. I'd like to see every server on the floor provide service that matches the outstanding food.

Liquid assets: Thoughtful international selections show up in a moderately priced wine list without the usual



restaurant mark-up.

—*Judith Stocks*

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