

Black Palm Restaurant

Mel Saraceno

Lui Arango's energy fills the Black Palm restaurant and bar and wills life into the space. Maria and I had the pleasure to dine in Lui's and Kathy's establishment recently, and I was struck by the unique eclecticism of the very large, very bright art work, and how the colors reflected off the classic, dark, shiny wooden bar to breathe life into it the same way Lui affects the rest of the space.

Lui, his wife Kathy, and the rest of the family all work in this center of Nuevo Latino Cuisine. But don't try to squeeze this eatery into any stereotypical box, because it won't quite fit. Take the Black Palm's signature dish, the Paella Marinera, for example. Personally, I've never heard of paella made with only seafood and without rice. But it works, and Lui explains why: he refuses to mix sushi grade seafood with plebeian sausage and chicken. And he changed from rice to orzo to diminish the cooking time, and therefore highlight the high quality calamari, shrimp, snapper, scallops, mussels and clams by keeping them as tender as they deserve to be served.

His creativity in developing this Pass-a-Grille version of the classic paella is again seen in another unique flair. He and Kathy are experienced wedding coordinators, since they developed a weekend wedding business in Dallas for several years. Here at the Black Palm, they marry their fine cuisine with expert coordination of your wedding. You buy the food, and the coordination is added gratis. Here, only steps from the beach, this idea has already taken off. In fact, our good friends David and Laurie are utilizing Lui's services and his yummys as you read this. Another offshoot of the wedding idea is that many wedding parties from the large beach hotels have

booked their rehearsal dinners and parties in the Black Palm's private room.

One more unique item which I have never had the pleasure to read on other menus is Arepa Rellena, white corn cake stuffed with your choice of seasoned chicken or pulled brisket. This is a gem of an appetizer, and I highly recommend it. For classic meat lovers, Lui serves up juicy tender filet or rib eye, to mention a couple of favorites.

Lui makes all his own desserts, and you don't want to miss the Cheesecake de Guava. Creamy and delicious like food of the angels. For chocolate lovers, the Volcan de Chocolate oozes pure chocolate from every fork gash. Lui tells me that a cup of flour is enough to make twelve of these chocolate heavens. There is also fabulous Flan, Tres Leches, and a soft custardy dessert called Natilla Grand Marnier, all created in house.

We are lucky to have this original and energetic family literally in our back yards here in Pass-a-Grille, walking distance from most of our homes. This may even allow some of us to splurge on an extra goblet of red nectar occasionally, and not worry about a long drive. This is one more reason never to leave our island in the evening.

Lui is in our community to stay and to raise a family, and hopes he will one day watch his one year old, along with one still in the oven, play and grow on the 8th Avenue sidewalk. I would love to see his dream come true, while I enjoy the sweet results of his talented hands.

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FULL BAR

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www.blackpalmrestaurant.com