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- COLUMNS ▾
- NEWS
- FISH
- A&E ▾
- EAT ▾
- CLASSIFIEDS
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1 WEEK AGO

Southernmost Cevicheria – Croce's Turtle Kraals claims ceviche crown

Executive Chef Michael Schultz apprenticed in Peru just so he could give Key West a taste of the cool culinary scene of South America. Turtle Kraals' Cevicheria has five main dishes and a conch ceviche in the works.

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 Jason Köler
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In the corner of a seaport steeped in a tradition of conch fritters, salvaging and turtle soup is a dockside cevicheria changing the way Key West enjoys seafood. A cevicheria is, of course, an establishment dedicated to the art of ceviche, or fish "cooked" in citrus juices.

From fresh lime juice and sushi-grade fish to organic, home-grown herbs and the aji amarillo chili, the ceviche flights at Turtle Kraals are creating a craze not seen since in the southernmost city since that crazy old man built a railroad to the sea.

The brainchild of executive chef Michael Schultz, the cevicheria at Turtle Kraals is as much a lesson in culinary creativity as it is a Peruvian culture lesson.

And he should know. When the idea for a cevicheria struck Pat Croce's director of operations, Shultz found himself on a

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plane to the birthplace of ceviche – Peru – where he sifted through the open air markets in search of robust produce, offered locals their first glimpse of a “gringo,” inhaled the aromatic flavors of South American herbs, and absorbed what he could from the Peruvian chefs who did not offer recipes, but rather lessons in proper ceviche preparation.

“They said, ‘If you are going to do this, then you are going to do it right,’” Schultz said while flipping through his Peru slide show. The album contains photos of bushels of choclo (corn) stacked in an open-air market, whole snapper and mahi piled onto carts and open burlap sacks of fresh grains and herbs.

Upon returning to the States, Schultz immediately went to work developing a series of ceviche dishes to be served from a “shack” right smack dab in the middle of the iconic Key West eatery. The ceviche features seafood that is flash frozen to stave off “undesirables,” then cooked in a “Tiger’s Milk” marinade of lime juice, fish stock and the chili with produce and organic herbs bringing as much visual appeal to the dish as flavor.



Ceviche chef Tommy Radziejewski says the dish is as simple as it is flavorful. “Citrus juice cures the fish, and the chilis, herbs, and vegetables enhance it.”

Like a South American sushi bar, the ceviche tingles the buds on even the most disconcerting pallets and offers a taste of nostalgia to those who grew up enjoying fresh conch salad.

The most traditional ceviche is nothing more than local seafood “cured” in citrus juices and enhanced with ripe veggies such as translucent red onion, crunchy corn, and soft avocado while garnished and embellished with herbs such as lemongrass, basil, cilantro and mint.

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As his ceviche chef Tommy tosses ingredients, Schultz expounds upon the many virtues of Peru's national dish.

"There are several beautiful ingredients that cure the body," he says. "It's a natural aphrodisiac, hang-over cure and energy drink."

Schultz, a former U.S. Navy rescue diver turned chef, has honed his skills all over the world, including the famous Alinea restaurant in Chicago. Most recently he sold his small plate venture, Fin, before signing up with Croce's growing empire of restaurants that includes Island Dogs, the Green Parrot, Half Shell Raw Bar, Charlie Mac's, and the Rum Barrel.

This past week he unveiled a wine flight that serves as the perfect accompaniment to his robust seafood salads – a flight of four ceviches paired with four wines for \$50.

Turtle Kraals is open seven days a week from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and noon on Sundays. For more info call 305-294-2640 or visit www.turtlekraals.com.

The Ceviches

Peruvian Classico

yellowtail snapper, red onion, sweet

potato, corn, celery, aji and cilantro,

with key lime leche de tigre

Nikkei

grouper, yuzu, tamarind, sesame,

soya, ginger, candied lime, with thai

basil and chiles

"The Cure"

shrimp, our lime marinade, coconut,

red onion, cilantro and corn nuts

with rococo pepper leche de tigre

Key West

diver-caught hogfish, avocado,

sour orange, jalapeño, cherry

tomato and basil

Mojito

diver scallops, pineapple, mango, mint,

red onion, aji amarillo and agave nectar

End

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