



# La Noche Cantina: A Family Affair

by Julie Vitto | [jvitto@flymagazine.net](mailto:jvitto@flymagazine.net)

After eight years of prominence on the Harrisburg food map, restaurateurs Juan and Lisa Garcia understand the importance of continuing to evolve in a changing environment.

"It's going to always be a work in progress," says Lisa. "An important issue for anyone who cares about the city is to continue to be creative and find ways to bring people ... into the city."

The Garcias newest effort to add to Harrisburg's dining scene is Mexican tapas and wine bar La Noche Cantina. The restaurant opened for lunch and dinner service in the city's SoMa (South of Market Street) district last November.

The Garcias started their culinary careers in Harrisburg with the opening of El Sol Mexican Restaurant in 2007. Since then, they've gone on to open El Sol Express and the recently expanded taqueria, Taco Solo. When the space opened next door to their flagship restaurant, Lisa explains, it was an opportunity they didn't want to walk away from.

"Juan has a talent and an ambition for continuing to grow, continuing to do new projects," Lisa says of her husband and business partner. "He really enjoys trying to come up with a new vision."

The cozy restaurant has table seating for 30 and room for a few more at the bar. The Garcias are excited to open up the space for private parties and events – an option that wasn't readily available at El Sol. They also hope to add al fresco dining in the future. Until then, the best table on a nice day is in front of the opened stained glass doors offering a view of South Third Street from behind a decorative wrought-iron railing.

Garcia says she helped to order all the decorations from Mexico. Hung on an exposed brick wall inside the restaurant are colorful paintings of village scenes.

On the warm yellow walls throughout the rest of the space are unique glass sculptures, mirrors and metallic lighting fixtures.

La Noche Cantina translates to "the Night Bar" – and any night you stop in, you'll be well-treated at the bar.

There's a refreshing drink list that includes beer, wine, cocktails and four different sangrias. One example – the Citrus Elderflower Sangria – is a sweet blend of Moscato and St. Germain infused with orange, lemon and lime juices.

Pennsylvania beers that made it to the list of 12 include Tröegs, Victory and Yuengling, alongside domestic and imported brands like Corona and Sierra Nevada. There are 13 whites and 13 reds on the wine list (all available by the glass or bottle) that range in origin from Mexico and the United States to South America, Australia and Spain.

The cocktail list features gems like the La Noche Mule – a bubbly mix of Tito's Vodka, Crabbie's alcoholic ginger beer and Canton ginger liqueur. Another must-try cocktail is the Pomegranate Press – a refreshing blend

of Grey Goose vodka, PAMA pomegranate liqueur, fresh squeezed sour and club soda.

As to the food, Lisa says, "We wanted to do something slightly different here. So this would be like a Mexican take on Spanish tapas."

The menu was created by her husband, who, with his nine brothers, is originally from the Guadalajara region of Mexico. Keeping it in the family, his younger brother, Osbaldo Garcia, runs the kitchen as head chef.

You'll find an authentic array of appetizers, small plates, sandwiches, vegan and vegetarian options and desserts to choose from. To start, a complimentary basket of bread and crispy whole tortillas pairs with any of the marinated plates like the La Noche Plate – a colorful assortment of olives, marinated red and poblano peppers and artichoke hearts.

Highlights from the tapas menu include the tacos served open face on soft corn tortillas. They come in varieties like shark, shrimp, chicken, filet mignon, beef short rib and portobello mushroom.

Also worth trying are the empanadas, made with either a chipotle shrimp or chorizo with goat cheese filling. You'll need a knife and fork for these delectable meat pockets, which are sauced and served

softer than a fried empanada that you might eat with your hands.

Lisa

explained that some items that might not have done so well on the larger El Sol menu, such as lengua, are finding a new audience on the La Noche menu thanks to the restaurant's more adventurous eaters.

"It's a very popular form of meat in Mexican cooking," Lisa explains.

The thinly sliced beef tongue is currently featured on their tapas menu, where it's cooked in a tomatillo sauce with fresh cilantro, onions, jalapeños and a guacamole dressing.

Since there's always room for dessert, you'll want to try the Gelato Bomba – a divided sphere of vanilla and chocolate gelato joined together by a cherry and sliced almonds, sprinkled with cinnamon and covered in a dark chocolate shell.

The SoMa area of Third Street offers diners a quiet respite compared to the bustling activity found on Second Street.

"I love this street," says Lisa. "It's a little bit off the beaten path, but I think that in some ways that works to our advantage."

24 South Third Street, Harrisburg;  
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and 4-10 p.m. and Saturday and  
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