



# Loving spoonful

Hoboken's divine Cucharamama serves South American delights

## EATING OUT

### Cucharamama

233 Clinton St., Hoboken. (201) 420-1700. Dinner: 5-11 p.m. Sundays and Tuesdays-Thursdays; until midnight Fridays-Saturdays. Closed Mondays. Full bar. No smoking. Major credit cards. Casual attire. Reservations recommended.

BY S.J. GINTZLER  
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

*Cucharamama* — “mother spoon” — refers both to the largest spoon in the house and to the kitchen matriarch. Cucharamama in Hoboken offers an inspired taste of home cooking from Ecuador, Peru and Argentina.

**Ambience:** Earthy and sophisticated. The inconspicuous corner spot is the brain-child of executive chef Maricel Presilla and Clara Chaumont, who own Zafra, the Cuban/Latino café a block away. Presilla traveled extensively in South America to gather traditional recipes and ingredients she has interpreted for contemporary tastes.

An enormous antique ladle bolted to the entrance doubles as a doorknob. Utensils and bright canvases of women in the kitchen

painted by Presilla's father decorate the space. A stunning *horno* (wood-burning oven) is the centerpiece from which many of the dishes emerge.

**Staff:** Attentive, though more knowledge of the details of the dishes is necessary.

**Food:** Our spirited dinner began with regional drinks such as a tart pisco sour (a Peruvian cocktail made with grape brandy, \$9). Oven-fresh flat bread showered in hot pepper came with fresh honey-spiked butter served in a spoon.

Appetizers were a meal in themselves. A baked meat empanada (\$7) was sparked by an Argentinean hot red pepper chimichurri sauce, as was a smoky, roasted Argentinean sausage (\$9) slathered with onions and peppers. A Peruvian-style *tamal* packed with fresh corn masa came topped with moist braised duck (\$9). A creamy Ecuadorian corn-plantain soup (\$10) enveloping sweet, meaty shrimp was garnished with a corn salsa.

Entrees were excellent. Tender braised short ribs in a red wine sauce (\$22) sweetened with brown loaf sugar and tangy with mustard arrived with stir-fried quinoa and Swiss chard. A Peruvian-style roast leg of pork (\$19) in a *aji amarillo* adobo (a hot,

fresh yellow pepper sauce) had slices of crackling-skinned, moist meat sided by white rice and stewed canary beans. *Picante de camarones* (\$19) featured plump shrimp in a spicy Peruvian pepper sauce soothed by *queso blanco* (“white cheese,” here a low-salt French feta). An intensely flavored *fabada de horno* (\$12, available Fridays and Saturdays), a Latin cassoulet of white beans, sausages, smoked bacon and kale slow-cooked in the wood-burning oven, was lovely, though we expected a thicker casserole, rather than a soupy stew. (Also available: roast suckling pig for four or more. Order five days in advance.)

Save room for the fabulous desserts: dulce de leche ice cream, spiced chocolate flan with hibiscus caramel, a raisin and cashew-studded chocolate bread pudding in a warm *café con leche* sauce.

You haven't tasted it all until you've dined at the divine Cucharamama.

**Food:** ★★★★★

**Ambience:** ★★★★★<sup>1/2</sup>

**Service:** ★★★

**Overall:** ★★★★★<sup>1/2</sup>

*Eating Out* appears weekly in *Ticket*. Send comments or suggestions to S.J. Gintzler at [globalgour@aol.com](mailto:globalgour@aol.com).



PHOTOS BY WILLIAM PERLMAN/THE STAR-LEDGER

Patrons enjoy the food and décor at Cucharamama in Hoboken, where some of the South American specialties include *Cebiche à la Piedra* (above) with a drizzle of cilantro and lime juice and starters (top) like fried calamari and beef empanadas.

