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A LATIN TOUR AT YERBA BUENA

Yerba Buena, 23 Avenue A; East Village; (212) 529-2919.

Yerba Buena punches above its weight. This tiny pan-Latin spot in the East Village has the swagger, service and potted palms of a restaurant three times its size, and on a recent Tuesday, Giovanni Campos, the affable owner, glided between the tables in a dapper suit, pouring a round of fizzy moscato for the entire dining room at the end of the night.

The chef, Julian Medina, is also the chef at To-loache, the modern Mexican bistro in Midtown, where he once worked with Mr. Campos. Here the menu floats across national borders.



A Poquito Picante cocktail at Yerba Buena on Avenue A

The satisfying pizza Cubana (\$12), a Cuban sandwich reassembled as a pizza with a spicy chipotle sauce, shares a page with diminutive Colombian arepas (\$12) filled with shredded beef. And Argentine empanadas (\$12) are stuffed with Mexican cheese and huitlacoche, the corn fungus (it's a delicacy), or so the menu said: there wasn't much flavor to what was inside.

It feels as if the kitchen is still finding its footing. Some dishes live up to their billing, like the luscious suckling pig (\$22) with yucca purée, but others miss, like the under-seasoned grouper (\$24). Some do both, like the beef short rib (\$24). Braised in malbec, it's topped unnecessarily with a truffled sauce, but the pile of shoestring fries is dotted with a zesty chimichurri, an inspired pairing (which can be ordered as a side dish for \$5).

But the cocktail list is a knockout, and everything tastes good while sipping a Poquito Picante (\$12), a citrusy gin drink with cilantro, cucumber and jalapeño.