

TABLE TALK

# A Kaleidoscope of Dining ON AMELIA ISLAND

story and photos by LEIGH CORT



Leigh Cort

When a romantic, barrier island has perfected an incredible collection of dining destinations between Coastal Georgia and Jacksonville

don't ignore your appetite for a vacation centered around food. This vast beachy Amelia Island has become a cornucopia of restaurants for culturally adventurous diners. Wake up early and cart your coffee cup to watch the sunrise; wander to an open-air deck or dress-up for a 5-star chef's dinner. Don't forget Amelia Island for a getaway or a leisurely drive for dinner. Each season, restaurants are making appearances and enjoying the limelight. Eventually they blend into the culinary excitement. Even if you only have a tiny window of time to visit, you'll enjoy my curated suggestions that capture the spirit of Islanders!

## Burlingame — The Masterpiece



Chef Chad Livingston

Proud of its location in historic Fernandina Beach and nestled inside a charming 1947 "cottage," Chef Chad Livingston's Burlingame Restaurant is a masterpiece of fine dining. Dreaming

about being invited to a chef's home for a special dinner, it's happening every night when you step in. Opening in 2016 after an illustrious culinary career that began at the Culinary Institute of America, he returned to his hometown



Red Snapper

of Amelia Island, one of the youngest chefs at the Ritz-Carlton. Today, Chad is like a symphonic maestro of a seasoned ensemble — all deeply versed in his vision — managers, bartenders, servers, chef and cooks. His menu is concise, laden with luscious, layered refinements bringing together the highest tier of local fresh ingredients.

His authentic American cuisine highlights classical gastronomic techniques, woven into a distinctive style. There are beautiful surprises on every plate that take endless days of testing and tasting, assuring guests outstanding dishes they appreciate! If you're still hunting for the ultimate shrimp and grits, Chef's appetizer features Anson Mills grits, fried marinated goat cheese, balsamic reduction and capers. Chef's love of handsomely detailed, formal and precise cooking balances with his island-y upbringing. It's obvious in the gorgeous red snapper with beechwood mushrooms, chive and crème fraiche potatoes, asparagus, uni beurre blanc and English pea puree that's breathtaking.

Over the years, Burlingame has



Shrimp and Grits

gained the trust of guests even when the sophisticated menu changes seasonally. They arrive for an exceptional adventure. This begins at the bar with a craft cocktail authentically Burlingame. Growing their own potted herbs for cocktail garnish, they make every libation better. A tiny sprig of rosemary, a mint leaf, Polynesian bitters or a drop of rose water heightens your senses and the anticipation of dinner. Each intimate dining room, windowed porch and private outdoor courtyard claim their own charm for discerning diners. At Burlingame, you don't need to second guess this chef. His skill and resourcefulness are embedded in every minute of your visit.



Chef David Echeverry

## David's Restaurant & Lounge — The Global Journey

Chef David Echeverry has finally become the owner of David's Restaurant &

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Bread Box

## DINING

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Lounge, bringing his vibrant global fusion influence to the reinvention of David's (formerly a fine steak-and-seafood destination). Throughout his world travels and youthful career, he was influenced by each country's exhilarating diversity of flavors and panache.

Colombia, Miami, Australia, Orlando. Each was a giant step toward his current new proprietorship in historic downtown Fernandina Beach. There's no fanfare on Ash Street in what began as the red brick telephone company building decades ago. However, when you enter the couturier-designed wine cellar tasting and dining room, you know you're in a very special place.

ICE. WIND. FIRE. WATER. Begin by reading the menu that sets the scene for a wonderful experience of excellence. It's a luxurious main dining room with a subdued dramatic ambience that is unlike another restaurant on the island. Impeccably attired staff know how to introduce you to the evening's dining as the themed categories unfold on David's menu. Return to the golden age of dining on the dining adventure.

ICE: Caviar (Osetra, Siberian or Kaluga) with classic accoutrements from blini pancakes to whipped crème fraiche

WIND: Irresistible appetizers created to steal your heart: beef carpaccio, Chilean seabass risotto croquette, grilled octopus or David's escargot

FIRE: Quintessential aged steaks, including Frenched rack of lamb with sweet potato puree

WATER: Seafood "collection" featuring classically crafted Dover Sole Meuniere and Seafood Gnocchi Bouillabaisse

wine dinners meticulously planned in the private "cellar" at a 12-guest grand table. Renowned wine connoisseurs select from the curated collection to match Chef David's six-course gastronomic feast. At David's, even if you're just taking a midweek break from the ordinary, you'll feel as if you have slipped into a rare space and time. David brings out your hidden sophisticated appetite for the unusual!

## 1928 Cuban Bistro – The Real Deal



Rebecca Gonzalez

Savor the warm feeling of family when you select 1928 Cuban Bistro for an authentic Cuban meal or take-out from Rebecca and Adrian Gonzalez' newly opened island bistro. Their fifth restaurant/location opened in only four years. It's through hard-work and proud dedication to their Cuban/Spanish heritage that you enjoy the aromas from this bustling kitchen. Paying homage to Rebecca's grandparents, who fled Cuba, giving up everything to enjoy freedom in America, this dynamic young couple also possesses "taking a chance" in their blood. With



Lamb Chops

NOTE: It's not an easy decision especially after you've been served a delicate amuse bouche to tease your palate and a "secret box" with warm-from-the-oven dinner rolls! David chose an international team to work alongside him from Columbia, Thailand and the USA. Don't miss the

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## -diner-

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## DINING

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her Abuela and Abuelo as inspirations, Rebecca convinced her businessman husband to take a chance on her dream of a family restaurant. Adrian's grandmother from Spain (now 96) is a marvelous cook who sealed Rebecca's destiny with an iron-clad commitment to 1928 Cuban Bistro!

What is the formula? Generations of love, good food and hard work! There are days when the lines are long to place orders at the counter before taking a seat and being served. A complimentary coffee or pastry makes your wait more than bearable, especially if you're lucky enough to receive a sweet churro or guava pastry. The Platos Fuertes are enough to share (abundant rice plates with the best black beans and conгри rice plus a choice of steak, roasted pork, pollo or ground beef). More than a dozen huge sandwiches fill your plate, too, with The Cuban or Medianoche (roasted pork, ham, Swiss, pickles on sweet bread). For the hearty desayuno (breakfast) appetite



The Cuban

order Desayuno Caballo — Palomilla steak, two eggs, salad and Cuban tostada.

Ah, the empanadas! Handmade pastry stuffed with beef, chicken, ham, pork or banana and Nutella. Whatever you choose, one will never suffice. I guarantee another one will follow. Here it's always time for café — a long list that has my favorite, “La Rebe” with espresso, steamed almond milk, brown sugar and secret ingredient. HINT: Plan on taking some items to go. I'm dreaming about “El Guajiro” (the old farmer) with chorizo, roasted pork, onions, fontina cheese and sweet plantains on Cuban bread.

It won't be long before 1928 Cuban Bistro will be stopping traffic in historic Fernandina Beach. Visit with your friends and begin with a large order of Magu's Yuca Fries (named after Rebecca's mother) and those sweet Maduros, along with whatever soup of the day has been planned. And do not put dessert off until tomorrow!

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