

# Large Successes

*Tapas of distinction at Small Plates restaurant and wine bar*



**O**NE TAPA might suffice at lunch, perhaps partnered by a glass of Di Lenardo Pinot Grigio '06 (\$7) and consumed outdoors on the terrace on a soft afternoon. Consider choosing the New Bedford seared scallops surmounting a plop of black “sticky rice,” with caperberries (\$11). The sweetness of the scallops, the nutty flavor of the rice, and the briny crunch of the multitudinous caperberry seeds combine in a culinary medley of tastes and textures that is astonishingly good. This dish is a fair advertisement for what Small Plates means to achieve with all its tapas, each a little symphony of carefully considered orchestration.

At an explorational dinner, two or three tapas may be required per person, so that a table of four might have 10 or 12

**Above, center: Scallops atop black sticky rice; behind, beef satay and baby greens**

plates brought from the kitchen and set before them. The usual drill is to share. Beware. A feeding frenzy may ensue in which everyone forks a piece of every plate competitively, lest it be speared by another feeder—they are *small* plates, remember—and pushes food down the mouth at speed. This is unseemly and leads to complete confusion of the taste-buds. One must choose one's dinner companions cautiously. None must ever have lived in a boarding house.

Proceed gracefully and one will savor 10 or 12 discrete delights. Among those enjoyed on a recent outing were baby greens with eggplant, a slice of roast pear, and a masterly pear vinaigrette (\$6); a delicious mess of mushrooms (mostly oyster, with shiitake and others) in basil

oil, with hits of poached garlic (\$8); thin-sliced summer squash posing as fettuccine, with a thick tomato *romesco* sauce (\$8), served warm, not hot; beef satay with peanut sauce and a few enlivening bites of bright yellow, apple-and-saffron chutney (\$8), which could have been rarer for some carnivores at the table (tell the waitress what's hoped for); spicy grilled prawns and a roast jalapeño pepper, their fires cooled by smoked corn (\$11); and a petit filet mignon with a merlot demi-glace, served with a mash of root vegetables (\$11) and agreeably accompanied for one participant by a glass of Luigi Bosca Malbec '05 (\$7). The steak can be had in tapa size or as an entrée (\$22), as can sesame seared salmon (\$11 or \$20) and grilled lamb chops (\$11 or \$22).

Paella for two is on the menu as an entrée (\$24), and Small Plates offers a cold and a warm platter for two “à partager” as starters (\$12 each)—cold roast vegetables with chèvre, warm brie and port-soaked apricots, and so forth—to get guests in the mood for sharing.

For dessert (\$7 each), how about ginger peach bread pudding, which three out of four of us thought fine, and one too bready; or the good almondy goo of a pear frangipane tart; or a crème caramel that was far, far above average?

Small Plates is off the street, down a passageway between buildings, in a space where Iruña satisfied for decades. The décor is simple: pale yellow walls accented by bold red and gray stripes, big mirrors, plain wood floors. The staff is

friendly. And—a huge blessing—the acoustics are such that one can carry on a conversation, perhaps about the crawfish étouffée in puff pastry (\$11) that one means to try next time. ~C.R.

## SMALL PLATES

56 JFK Street  
Cambridge

617-441-0056, [www.small-platesrestaurant.com](http://www.small-platesrestaurant.com)

Sunday-Monday, dinner only,

5-10 P.M.

Tuesday-Saturday, lunch and

dinner, 11 A.M.-10 P.M.

Terrace dining