



# ***SUBA SUSHI*** **& TAPAS LOUNGE** *Genre defying seafood cuisine*

WRITTEN BY ERIC WIENER  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUBA SUSHI



nnovation within the restaurant business seems to have an ever increasing degree of difficulty. Concepts built around health consciousness and local produce have gone from trendy to dominant across Southern California, as Asian fusion once did. And haphazardly mixing varieties of ethnic dishes most often results in gastronomical disaster.

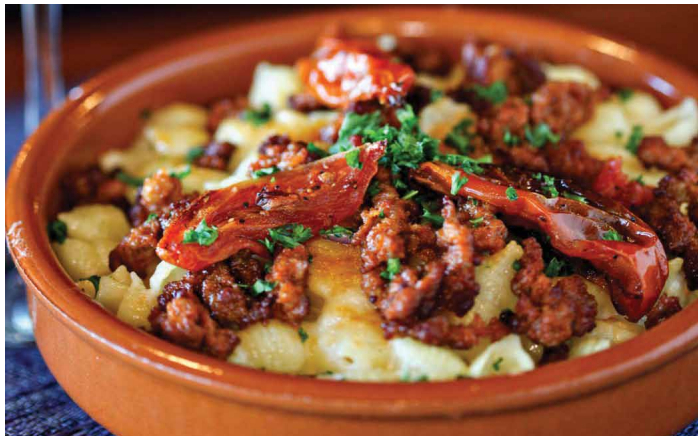
With this in mind, Suba walks a fine line integrating Japanese and Spanish cuisines with a measurable dose of New York City influence. The Suba concept and Executive Chef David Santiago Sr. both originated in New York, where he worked as a consultant at the original location. Having negotiated the dual culinary styles from his Puerto Rican and Italian heritages, Chef Santiago is a natural fit and perfect choice to manage such an unfamiliar blend.

This melting pot of influences explains how twice fried plantains get

paired with spicy sautéed shrimp, and cool avocado, tomato, and lime in tostones rellenos tapas; and why wild octopus is boiled in Spanish herbs and spices, before being salted, grilled, and finally tossed in a homemade tomato sauce from his own mother's recipe.

Tapas plates of assorted Spanish olives marry homemade sangria and another platter of Machecho, Cabrales, and Mahon cheeses, until a literally flaming "Light My Fire" sushi roll comes rushing out to disrupt the brief moment of harmony. Spicy tuna, cream cheese, and tempura jalapeno await within the blazing ring of fire. Caramelized onions slither over blood sausage, crisp and slightly charred on the exterior, in a timeless dish found in some shape or form around the world.

Loud, fast-paced electronic music follows Spanish guitar and bossa nova, furthering the atmosphere already present among the friendly backlit bar, bamboo backdrops, and Japanese caricature art. Equal quantities of energy pulse from the environment and each bright, animated dish.





Baked wild Atlantic salmon and unagi sauce cover a California roll to form their Baby Shiraz roll, christened after an actual baby named Shiraz. Ceviche De Camaron explodes with coconut milk, seared and shredded shrimp, red onion, garlic, tomato, cilantro, olive oil, and blood oranges. Concentrating on the fruitiness, it's seemingly destined to go with their equally tropical white sangria.

Though Chef Santiago and his partner, Sushi Chef Shane Hollinger, have only had Suba up and running for four months, they've already committed to transitioning into a more spacious location on Atlantic Ave, where custom built sushi and olive bars await. The rapid crowds speak to the imperfect, exciting art taking place at Suba every day and night.

Steaming, lusciously moist empanadas constructed by Alex Garcia, their Tapas Chef, represent Suba well. Likewise, dense, clumpy paella features Bomba rice flown in from Spain, along with free range chicken, chorizo, mussels, clams, squid, shrimp, and a small blend of roasted peppers, English peas, and onions. Dry-cured Spanish ham proudly sits on display for feather-like slices across Tapas plates. A tower of sweet and spicy ahi poke opposes stacked jalapenos, crisscrossed alongside plump caramelized onions.

"Food is my passion. It's what I live for," Chef Santiago said in quite convincing fashion. He strikes you as the type of man who could spend half his day discussing a sandwich, someone unequivocally disappointed every time he goes to eat at a stranger's establishment. "I can't build houses," he added, "but I can make a beautiful mess in the kitchen."

Ironically, that's a fairly accurate description of what goes on at Suba. It is startling, disharmonized cuisine that's strangely gorgeous – and sybaritically alluring.

Suba's menu and style go far beyond categorization. Dining there feels like being on a dervish of a roller coaster: so much fun that when it's over, you immediately want to get back in line. ●

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