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Restaurant

HOSPITALITY

MARCH 2013

LATIN HEAT

Richard Sandoval's
Toro Toro Sizzles
in Miami 14

A prolific chef/
multiconcept creator
takes aim at a new
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COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD SANDOVAL RESTAURANTS

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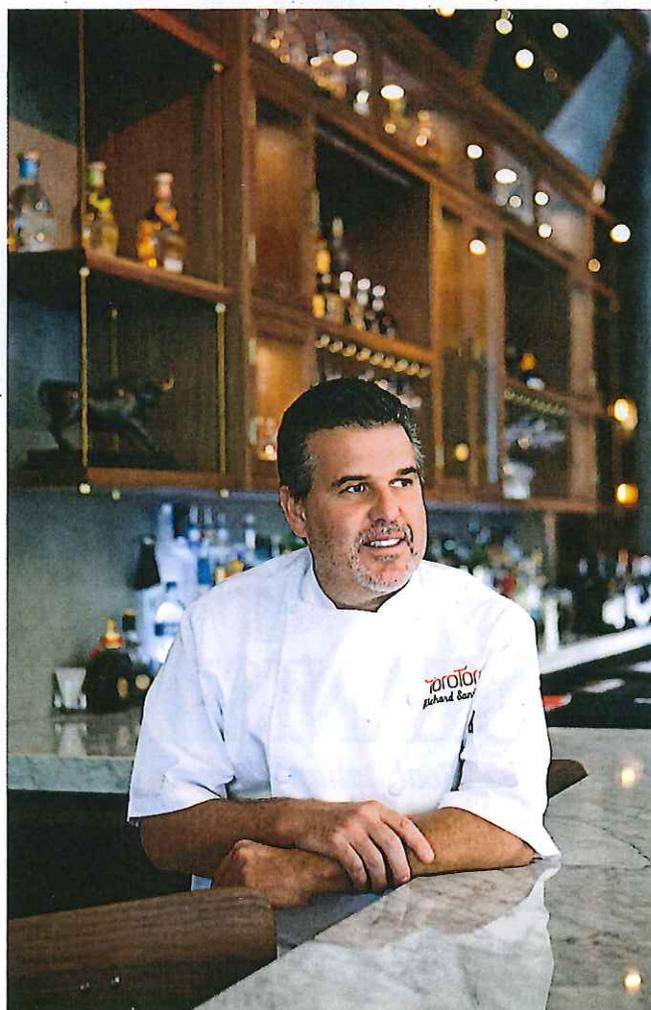
New Heat in Miami

PROLIFIC MULTICONCEPT creator Richard Sandoval's U.S. empire already stretches from Los Angeles to Las Vegas to Aspen to Vail to Denver to New York City and Washington, DC. Internationally, he's found success in both his native Mexico and in the United Arab Emirates. Now this chef/entrepreneur has tackled the South Florida market, opening the upscale Toro Toro in downtown Miami last fall after first taking at a crack at the fast casual business there with Kokoriko Natural Rotisserie last spring.

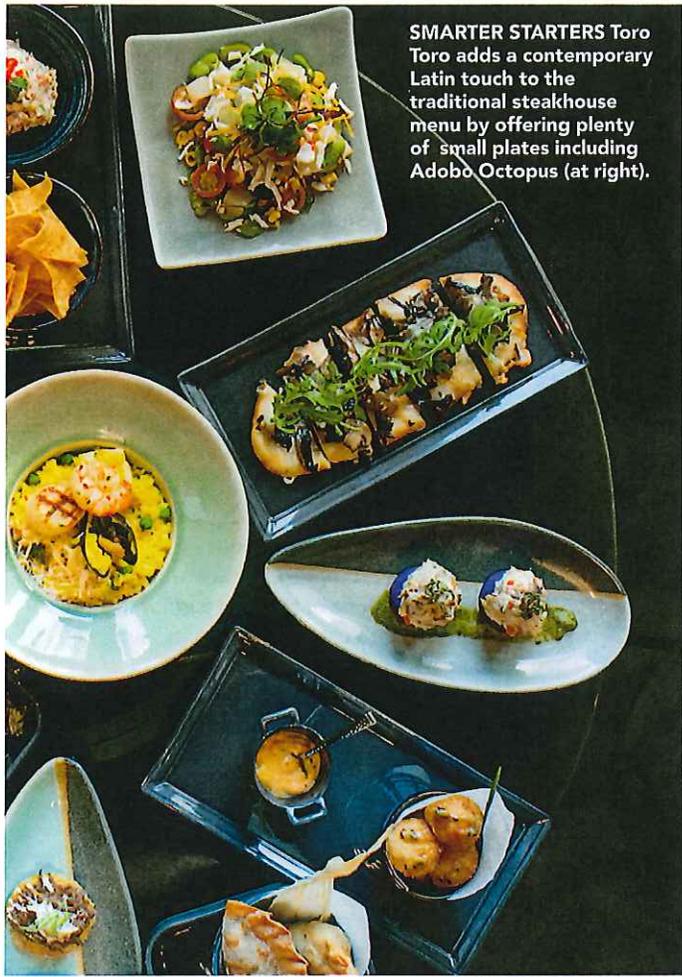
Both concepts are right in Sandoval's culinary wheelhouse. Initially a specialist in modern Mexican cuisine, he's expanded into coastal Mexican food and, lately, Latin-Asian small plates. Toro Toro goes in a slightly different direction. It's billed as pan-Latin interpretation of a contemporary steakhouse.

That translates to a concept that offers meats carved tableside rodizio-style plus small plates and an a la carte selection of steaks and seafood.

"Toro Toro Miami pays homage to the warmth of Latin American hospitality and the tradition of lively, family-style dining," says Sandoval of a restaurant he tells *HispanicBusiness.com* cost \$4 million to create. "I think it's a great concept for a city as unique, vibrant and colorful as Miami."



SMARTER STARTERS Toro Toro adds a contemporary Latin touch to the traditional steakhouse menu by offering plenty of small plates including Adobo Octopus (at right).



BULL BY THE HORNS: The InterContinental Miami wanted a sexy restaurant in its lobby (above). Richard Sandoval (l.) provided one.

[**NEW HEAT IN MIAMI**]

Toro Toro should indeed play well for a customer base with a cultural mix like the one Miami has. But it's already a proven commodity, with the first iteration of the concept doing well at a location inside the Grosvenor House Hotel in Dubai.

Sandoval is a top-flight chef, of course, but he's always been careful to incorporate a lively bar scene into his restaurants. The Miami location, where the lounge concept is built around Latin spirits, continues that theme. Its liveliness belies its location on the ground floor of the InterContinental Hotel. Toro Toro's bar is worthy of a man whose La Biblioteca concept in New York City offers 400 different brands of tequila.

Because of this expertise, a new Sandoval concept creates an instant party scene whenever one opens, even in the United Arab Emirates. But his restaurants endure because the food gets equal attention. Patrons at Toro Toro can pick and choose among three styles of dining made accessible by Sandoval's wide-ranging menu.

Guests who desire a pass-'em-around small plates sharing session have plenty to choose from at Toro



Toro. The cold small plates lineup offers a dozen choices, most priced between \$10-\$13. Options include Smoked Swordfish Dip with pickled chiles aioli, tomato and plantain chips (\$12); Scallop Tiradito, leche de tigre, shaved red onion, Peruvian corn (\$13); and Causa of the Day, a chilled pureed potato cake with daily topping that goes for \$9. Being Florida, Stone Crab Claws are available, served with rocoto-cocktail sauce and lemon aioli and sold at market price.

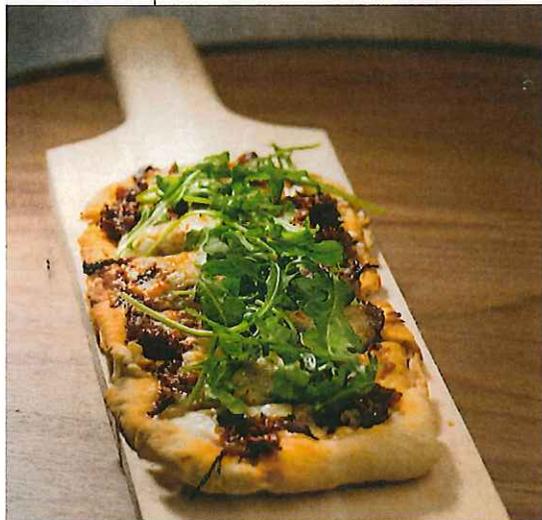
Hot small plate options, 16 in all, include Arepas, crispy corn cake, short rib, guacamole, crema (\$10); Choclo Empanada, aji Amarillo, mozzarella,

sweet corn, chimichurri (\$10); and Shrimp Anticucho Skewers, tajin spice, peanut, citrus sauce (\$10).

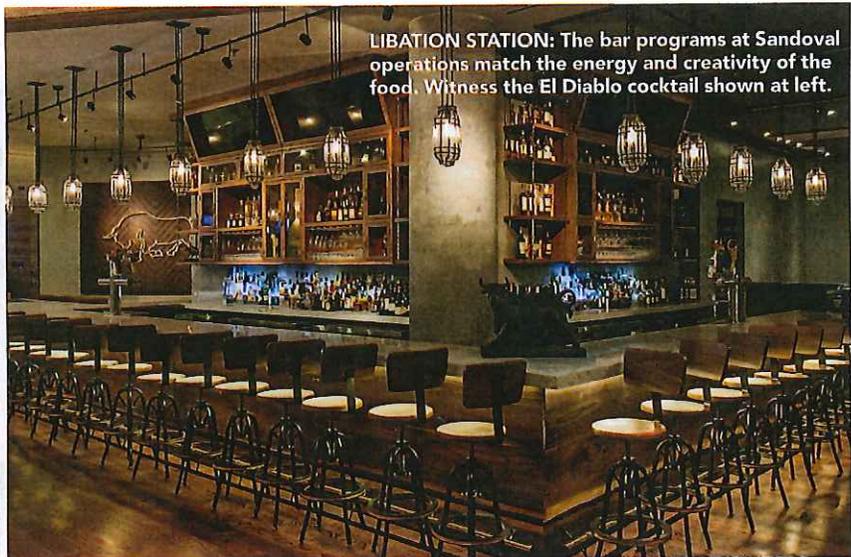
Guests who prefer the straightforward steakhouse experience can order all the traditional cuts of beef plus Latinized entree options such as Achiote Chicken (\$22) or seafood items given a similar treatment (Pan Roasted Florida Grouper, roasted corn salsa / warm citrus vinaigrette / boniato puree / tempura pickled chiles, \$28).

True carnivores will likely opt for \$65 per head

MEAT OF THE MATTER: Beef-loving Toro Toro patrons can have it carved tableside, rodizio-style (above); as a small plate, like this \$13 Short Rib Coca Flatbread (at left); or simply grilled like this 14-oz. Omaha Ribeye steak that costs \$39 (below).



[NEW HEAT IN MIAMI]



LIBATION STATION: The bar programs at Sandoval operations match the energy and creativity of the food. Witness the El Diablo cocktail shown at left.

The energetic Sandoval, whose company has a hand in 30 restaurants around the country and the globe, plans to keep his concept development pipeline full.

"The Rodizio Experience," unlimited picanha steak / Omaha ribeye / lamb chop / chorizo sausage and achiote chicken carved tableside / served with sides. It's also available for two people at \$62, with no seconds on the meats.

No matter what customers choose, their food has the lively Latin flavors for which Sandoval is well-known. It's quite a skill to get guests and locals excited about eating in a hotel lobby, but that's what this concept-savvy chef has done here.

Downtown Miami residents and visitors aren't the only people excited to eat Sandoval's food. So are the patrons of Kokoriko Natural Rotisserie, a fast casual chicken chain that has 110 units in its native Colombia and is now making headway in Miami.

Early last year, Kokoriko's owners partnered with

Sandoval to help their chain gain traction in the U.S. His job was to bump up the sauces and flavor profiles of the chain's food to better fit customer expectations in the U.S.

Two earlier iterations of the concept in the Miami market hadn't really caught on. The Sandoval version has.

"Chef Sandoval developed a menu that honors our history of 45 years and also adapted modern concepts that make it effective for the American public," says Kokoriko c.e.o./president Eduardo Robayo. The fast casual operation opened last spring in the nearby Brickell area of Miami.

The always-busy Sandoval's empire numbers 30 restaurants. He's owner of many and has menu development deals with others, but the pace of his



QUICK CHICKS: The dining area at Colombian fast casual spot Kokoriko Natural Rotisserie, Sandoval's other Miami restaurant.

restaurant development activities is as impressive as their collective quality. Does this chef, who lives in Los Angeles and whose restaurant group is headquartered in New York City, intend to keep going?

"People always ask me, 'When are you going to stop?'" Sandoval says. "And my response is, 'I'm an entrepreneur, and until the day that I don't enjoy it anymore, and cannot produce a great restaurant anymore and I'm opening restaurants just because people want me to do them, and it isn't in my heart anymore, then I will stop.'" **R**