

# Restaurant Review

By Andrew Valente

● "This is an unusual restaurant in that they grow their own organic greens and root vegetables in the nearby family orchard. They even make their own olive oil."

## Weekly Feature

**A** COUPLE of weeks ago I was writing about the excellent cooks who do a five-year course at a hostelry school, then work at a few top restaurants before opening their own place while still in their 20s.

But there are also many first rate cooks on the island who have never been inside a hostelry school and have never even had a formal cooking lesson. They are the self-taught cooks with a natural ability to turn a list of ingredients into a delectable dish. Some of these natural born cooks run my favourite restaurants.

One of these eateries is Ca Na Toneta in Caimari which, a few years ago, was one of my greatest discoveries. Toneta, a Majorcan woman who did superb dishes with a local slant, ran it in those days.

Five years after opening the restaurant, Toneta decided it was time for her to hang up her apron and handed over the business to two of her daughters, María and Teresa Solivellas. At that time (this was three years ago) María was working in theatrical production in Madrid but gave it up to return to Caimari and take over the kitchen at Ca Na Toneta.

It's not exactly true to say that María is a self-taught cook, because she had learned a thing or two from her mother, both at home and in the restaurant. So had Teresa. Although Teresa is out front in charge of the tables, it is she who makes the desserts. And she does some real beauties, so cooking is obviously in the genes of the Solivellas family.

When María took over at Ca Na Toneta she gradually introduced changes in the restaurant's short menu. She moved away from the strictly Majorcan recipes, or else kept them but added a few modern touches.

She continues to make the chicken croquettes for which her mother was famous but, once again, did it her way. She gets incredibly good results by doing the croquette paste in a blender that also cooks, thus achieving an extremely smooth consistency. She also uses a high portion of free-range chicken meat specially cooked for the occasion. In other words, she never uses leftover chicken. Her croquettes are among the best I have ever eaten.

Ca Na Toneta is an unusual restaurant in that they grow all of their vegetables. The family has a house with a big orchard about five minutes from the restaurant and it is there that Toneta and her two daughters cultivate a wide range of organic greens and root vegetables.

María likes to cook with what is available in the orchard, so that means her dishes are seasonal. "That's the way I like it," she says. "It's very practical and it means I don't have to think too much about the dishes I am going to make. What I have in the orchard is what I cook in the kitchen."



■ MARIA and Teresa Solivellas of Ca Na Toneta.

**"María has produced an absolutely stunning dish that is so new it isn't on the menu yet. It is gambas in a Greek pastry coat, one of the best dishes I have eaten in decades."**

María is not an idealist when it comes to growing organic vegetables. It's just that she dislikes the idea of eating anything that has been treated with chemicals of any kind. She doesn't advertise that her vegetables are organic nor does she even go out of her way to let her customers know. She knows, and that's the main thing.

**T**HEY even make their own olive oil for use in the restaurant. And you get to taste it right at the start of the meal. It comes in a little dish with another dish containing salt and a basket of exceptionally good country bread.

You break off pieces of bread, dip them in the oil and enjoy the rich flavour of a homemade olive oil. There is also a bowl of extremely good bitter olives, which are also grown in the orchard and prepared by the family. The charge for the bread, oil and olives is 1.50 euros per person.

White is the predominant colour in the three small dining rooms on three floors at Ca Na Toneta. The walls are painted white, the tables are fully draped with white cloths and the chairs are also covered with a white material.

But there are splashes of colour on every table in the form of fresh flowers. On the top floor where we ate, two tables were decorated with almond blossom and the third had a magnificent bird of paradise. When you go into Ca Na Toneta, the welcome you get is extremely warm - in every sense of the word. Apart from the amicable smiles you receive from Teresa and her helpers, there is an especially warm wel-

come lurking under the tables.

As you sit down and pull the floor length tablecloth up on to your lap, you discover the comforting heat of a braser. This is a kind of brazier filled with charcoal embers that send up luxurious waves of heat to warm one's legs. Brasers are a traditional source of heat in Majorcan homes, but this is the first time I have seen them in a restaurant. It's a great idea for a restaurant in winter, because as you come in off the cold street the braser provides an instant source of heat and you immediately feel warm.

**A**LTHOUGH María's chicken croquettes are highly popular, she has no qualms about taking them (and other dishes) off the menu to give them a rest. There were no croquettes the night I was there but there was something else that was a spectacular success.

Since I last ate here about a year ago, María has gone in for a bit of fusion cooking and she has produced an absolutely stunning dish that is so new it isn't on the menu yet. It is gambas in a pastry coat that is one of the best dishes I have eaten in decades.

The coating is made with kataifi, a traditional dough which the Greeks and the Turks use for kanofa, one of the great sweet pastries of Middle Eastern cuisine. This dough, which looks exactly like fresh spaghetti before it is cooked, is always used for sweet dishes. But María entwined the strings of kataifi round peeled gambas and then deep-fried them. The effect is stunning, both to the eye and the palate. The heat pro-

duces tiny fine fibres on the surface of the pastry. These are crisp and brittle and the contrast with a softish interior is an Epicurean delight.

María serves four good-sized gambas on a mound of salad greens and diced tomatoes and the price is 10.50 euros. We shared this dish but I would have preferred a double portion all to myself.

My main course was a variation on the well-known Majorcan dish called lomo con col - loin of pork wrapped up in cabbage leaves and slowly casseroleed. María does the same dish but uses flaked fish instead of pork.

This is an idea that works beautifully. You get two big cylindrical rolls of cabbage well stuffed with tasty white fish (13.65 euros). The cabbage wrap isn't overcooked, so it is of a bright fresh green colour and with a nice consistency.

The dish comes with a big floret of broccoli and an artichoke and it was here that María slipped up: both were overcooked. This was the third time I've eaten María's dishes and it was her first blunder. When María asked what I thought of the stuffed cabbage leaves I told her about the soft broccoli and artichoke. She's the kind of conscientious cook who learns from mistakes so I'm sure she'll never ever serve another overcooked vegetable.

As a rule I don't eat desserts except when they are cooked in the restaurant and to a high standard. That is what you get at Ca Na Toneta, so I always have one of Teresa's creations.

This time it was a wedge of cake made up of thin layers on sponge bathed in pineapple juice and served with a raspberry sauce (3.95 euros). The cake was beautifully moist and had an intense pineapple flavour that was very moreish.

## THE VERDICT

**T**HIS is one of the most delightful restaurants on the island. The place has great charm and charisma, the service is laid back and friendly but also efficient and the food is memorable. The menu is short and select and all of the vegetables are homegrown and organic. They even make their own olive oil. Not many restaurants can say that. It all adds up to a splendid evening that you'll want to repeat as soon as possible.

## THE PLACE

**C**A Na Toneta, Carrer Horitzó 21, Caimari. Tel: 971-515226. In the winter they are open for dinner on Fridays and for lunch and dinner on Saturdays and Sundays. They also open for lunch and dinner on holidays and for dinner on the eves of holidays. Be sure to reserve a table. Not the easiest of places to find. Drive through the village until you come to a bar on your right with a street directly opposite. Take that street, park as soon as you can. Horitzó is one of the streets on the right.