

Dining

Bold Fusion

Chef Roldao Carvalho brings Italy, Spain, Portugal and Asia into Bin 100's eclectic menu.

Bin 100

100 Lansdale Ave., Milford. (203) 882-1400. Hours: Lunch Mon.-Fri. 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Dinner Mon-Sat. beginning at 5 p.m., Sun. 3 p.m.-9 p.m. All major CC. •

Before our Friday dinner at Milford's Bin 100, I called the restaurant to get a sense of what I was in for. The voice on the other end of the line struggled to answer what would normally be a straight-forward question. "Spanish-Italian-Portuguese," he said, "with an Asian influence." Well, I thought, that clears that up.

We arrived at Bin 100 hungry from a week of pre-Christmas stress and before long, we'd washed down tiny buffalo burgers primed with a "salty ricotta" and an onion marmalade aioli (\$12), with a complimentary sake milkshake. ("It's my version of the burger and shake," says chef Roldao Carvalho.)

Our palettes had been "stimulated" with a thick smoothie in a sake glass—an amuse-bouche "apple-celery shooter"—that also came compliments of the chef. We'd sampled three kinds of bread, served with a tart, oven-roasted tomato pesto, and a second appetizer, crispy calamari rings (\$10), which were coated in a delicate, flaky mess of hazelnut and dipped in "creamy ponzu."

Open since early December, Bin 100—named for its extensive wine list and its address at 100 Lansdale Ave.—was conceived as a Spanish-Asian fusion restaurant. But Carvalho's native Portugal finds its way into his menu, as does Connecticut's love affair with Italian food. "We have to do a little Italian," he says, "because there's such a demand for Italian food that you can't get away from it."

Popped on a stretch of the Boston Post Road, Bin 100 is a fusion restaurant that walks the strange and magnificent line between the Mediterranean and the Pacific Rim. As such, it can be difficult to define. It's hard to know how the restaurant's eccentricities will play to a Milford audience. Successful restaurants, after all, are like successful people: They understand what they are. They know their strengths, their failings—even the ways they're misunderstood by their detractors. They're self-assured places—wholly themselves in an ocean of pretenders. But if Bin 100 is missing anything, it's that kind of self-awareness. Describing Bin's globe-trotting menu by rattling off countries and continents like so many empty adjectives does an injustice to Carvalho's creativity.

Like many of Greater New Haven's more interesting ethnic restaurants, Bin 100 sits in a nondescript enclave of the suburban landscape, amid used car dealerships and chain diners. Inside, it smells like the chemically-new cars that fill nearby lots. The décor, too, seems cheaper than the menu would

suggest (the red-patterned upholstery reminds me of a Midwestern convention center and the chairs are Ikea-esque).

But there are wonderful touches too, like the geometrical lamp shades and Asian paper lanterns dividing the two sections of the large, but intimate dining room. Soon, I hope, that fresh, chemical odor will be overcome by the smell of seven-hour short rib on mascarpone polenta mixed with seared ahi tuna in a salty bath of miso soup.

These entrees, both remarkable, came heaped in ceramic half-moons—wide, low, off-white bowls of odd, hearty sustenance. The rib (\$24) was a miracle of tender meat in a pool of balsamic glaze, sprinkled with half-inch cubes of pear and pickled cauliflower (a sweet, salty, soft and crunchy compliment). Tim's Ahi special (\$27) was a huge chunk of tuna with a raw, ruby interior propped on a bed of enoki and maitake mushroom in hot miso broth, with seaweed and tiny cubes of tofu.

Carvalho, Bin 100's mad inventor, trained at the French Culinary Institute and has worked throughout the tri-state area (and all over the world) at too many restaurants to name. Among them, is New York City's Picholine and a spattering of restaurants across Spain and Italy. In Europe, he says, he worked for \$400 a month, "getting my feet in any kitchen I could."

The experience has served him well. Carvalho brings an unusual sensibility to his kitchen—and he knows it. "It's a little different," he says, explaining his approach. "I'm a little weird. There's a little madness in me."