

Eating Colombia at Queareparaenamorarte

By Karen Catchpole - November 25, 2013



Eric Mohl

“Colombians don’t know about their own food culture,” says **Julian Estrada**. “In **Colombia** we know about Mexican food and European food and North American food. We think foreign is best.”

Estrada (right) knows better and that’s what gets him out of bed and into his boldly patriotic restaurant every day. Estrada opened **Queareparaenamorarte** seven years ago after studying anthropology, hospitality, and cooking overseas. He was homesick and returned to Colombia on a mission to preserve his country’s culinary heritage, one recipe at a time. To do it he traveled the country collecting recipes and finding more than 40 purveyors of regional, artisanal, traditional products like sausage and cheese.



Today, Queareparaenamorarte—which means “What do I have to do to make you love me?” and comes from a song by beloved Mexican actor and singer Jorge Negrete—is a stand-alone source for sampling Colombia’s best dishes in one stylish place. Expanded over the years, the restaurant, which is located near the town of El Retiro about 15 miles/45 minutes from Medellin, is as traditional and rustic as the food. Choose a table on the front porch, in front of the inspiring open-air kitchen or in one of the more intimate nooks around the herb garden in the back.



The place feels like a chic friend's *granja* (small farm) house and the open layout seems designed to fuel the natural gregariousness of Colombians. Conversation flows, waiters hustle, meat sizzles. A sign by the bar that reads "Here there is no Wi-Fi. Talk to each other" seems utterly superfluous.

Anthony Bourdain filmed part of his 2008 "No Reservations" episode about Colombia at Queareparaenamorarte. In 2013 eIBulli creator and Ferran Adrià also visited Queareparaenamorarte. Colombian politicians, artists, and VIPs are also frequently spotted here, including sculptor and painter Fernando Botero. So many VIPs drop in that Estrada created a kind of outdoor living room for them to pass the time in while they wait for a table to open up. For the rest of us, reservations are a must.

On weekends a rotating *Plato del Dia* (plate of the day) is added to the extensive weekday menu (\$7 to 25) which includes *Tamal de Guapi*, a Pacific coast tamale stuffed with fish and shrimp; a platter of freshly grilled chorizo from three different regions of the country; scrumptious empanadas served with house made salsas; rustic cuts of meat; many types of *arepas*; hearty soups; and copious and creative use of beans and pork.

All dishes are prepared by Lucia, a local woman with no traditional culinary training. All of the staff is from the local area as well and so is Estrada who can always be found at Queareparaenamorarte, working hard to make you fall in love with Colombian cuisine.