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RESTAURANTS

From the Jan 12 - Jan 18, 2006 issue

# I Heart Beefheart

Mixtura Brings Ambitious Andean to Kirkland  
by [SARA DICKERMAN](#)

**As a cook** and a critic, I'm supposed to eat everything, and generally I do a pretty good job of it. With the possible exception of turkey balls, I'm not fazed by the organ bits I come across, be they kidneys, tendons, or gizzards. But that doesn't mean I crave them. Still, the beef-heart anticuchos (two skewers \$10) at Kirkland's new Peruvian—excuse me, novo-Andean—restaurant, Mixtura, are, for lack of a better expression, freaking awesome. Paired perfectly with chilies, the ultrameaty little nibbles are so tender and good they almost fail to remind me of the veal-heart-dissection project I did for extra credit in sixth grade.

Mixtura is the new restaurant of Emmanuel Piqueras, who brought his refined spin on Peruvian cooking to Portland with his restaurant Andina. (And if I wasn't impaired by anticucho goggles, he's also pretty foxy.) Mixtura doesn't necessarily look like the kind of feisty place to rock the beef heart skewers. The food is full of personality, but the dining room isn't. Despite a fireplace, it's a little chilly, done up in shades of graphite, with open views of both the kitchen and the expansive parking lot outside. Both times I visited, the space was sparsely filled, which I hope is a symptom of the restaurant's newness and not the Eastside's disinterest in cool South American food.

Although the restaurant serves entrées (deconstructed duck anyone?), we stick to small plates (appetizer portions) and even smaller plates (tapas portions), many of which show a knack for yummy, unexpected little dipping sauces. Even the house-made bread, which is a little too yeasty, comes out with a yummy trifecta of salsas: a spicy oil-and-vinegar mix, a creamy, peanuty green sauce, and a sweet mango chutney. Compared to the antichuchos, the quinoa-crust chicken tenders called chicharron (\$8 appetizer portion) are a little tame, but they do come with more of the green sauce, fluffed up with some tangy passion-fruit foam.

The ceviche, is, as it should be at a Peruvian restaurant, scrumptious. One version is a mix of seafood neatly arranged in a giant scallop shell with delicate tuna slices placed on top to keep them from getting tough in the



JENNY JIMÉNEZ

Mixtura - Hunky chef Emmanuel Piqueras offers his beefheart on a plate.

**Mixtura**  
148 Lake St S, Kirkland,  
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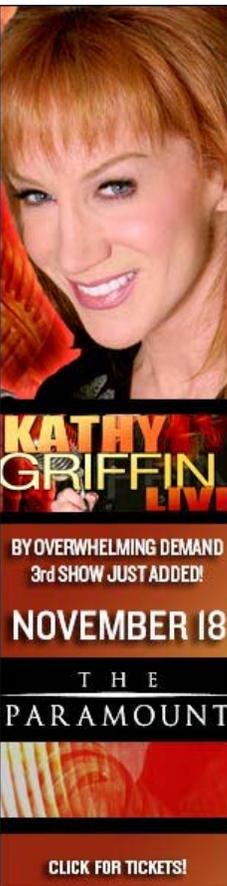
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punchy lime marinade (\$12). On the tiradito plate (\$16), shrimp, octopus, and raw tuna are each obsessive-compulsively lined up on little strips of cucumber; smoked sea salt and emulsions of fruity Peruvian chilies set this sashimi apart from its more austere Japanese counterpart. I also dug a serving of cold mussels (\$6) in their shells with a choclo—Peruvian hominy—and a pico de gallo—like salsa. I want more, more, more of these seafood nibbles: I'd be happy to see this light, bright part of Mixtura's menu expand indefinitely, although I hope any new dishes make it to the written menu. Both times I visited, there were too many spoken-word specials to keep track of.

I'm less sure about some of the menu's more muted dishes. The *causa morada marina* (\$12 appetizer portion) is a striking cylinder of purple potato purée layered with creamy crab-and-shrimp salad and topped with smoked salmon. "It's kind of like cold mashed potatoes with tuna fish salad, in, you know, a nice way," says one friend. I agree: It starts out nice, but something about it gets a little tedious as you keep eating.

Two wedges of potato tortilla (tapas portion \$4.50), the classic Spanish potato frittata—one yellow, and one purple—are both a little slimy and underseasoned. The octopus "crocante" (appetizer \$10), a favorite of our earnest waiter, doesn't suit my octopus-loving fancy—it is neither yielding nor crispy, nor salty enough for my taste. What's more, it's made unnecessarily foppish with a black-olive foam that fizzles and disappears among the tentacles. With foamy olives, purple tortilla de papa, and overripe menu language (duck, deconstructed, anyone?), Piqueras, who trained in Spain, flirts with the high frivolity of Spanish haute cuisine, but many such gestures come across as halfhearted.

Not always, though. I like one dessert that is tropical in flavor but rather Spanish in form: A "lasagna" of shaved pineapple and guanabana mousse (\$8) tastes like a fluffy fruit punch and brings back the light, sparkly touch that shows in the kitchen's best dishes. Let's just hope Mixtura soon conjures some sparkle in the dining room to match. Until then, come, as I did on both visits, with highly animated friends.

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