

# The Zest S7E19

**Lee Karlins:** [00:00:00] The thing about coming to eat in a, in a tapas restaurant, it's all about sharing. It's all about the experiences, and it creates conversation. People aren't on their phones in this restaurant. They're, they're not looking at Instagram and things like that. They're actually having conversations and talking with each other.

So it's different.

**Dalia Colon:** I'm Dalia Colon and this is The Zest, citrus, seafood, Spanish flavor, and southern charm. The Zest celebrates cuisine and community in the Sunshine State. Today on the pod, it's tapas time. Learn why Spanish style small plates are perfect for Florida's warmer months. And find inspiration to host your own tapas get-together.

As the weather heats up, it's the perfect time for tapas Spanish style. Small plates are unfussy, shareable, and can be served hot or cold. I recently visited [00:01:00] Ceviche Tapas Bar and Restaurant in St. Petersburg. You'll hear some of the pre-lunch bustle in the background. There, I met up with co-owner Lee Karlins and sommelier and beverage director Jackie Eash.

In our conversation, Lee and Jackie describe how tapas are traditionally served in Spain, explain how tapas encourage conversation around the table and suggests accompanying drinks. Throughout the interview, they throw out lots of tapas ideas for you to try at home, including kid-friendly, plant-based, and more.

Jackie speaks first.

**Jackie Eash:** St. Pete is really a destination, not just for locals, but for people from all over the world. We have a lot of events here. We have a lot of world class events. We have the Grand Prix here, which kicks off the IndyCar season. So it appeals to people that are out commiserating, and I tell everybody, you can tailor your experience.

You can come in and have a couple of tapas and be [00:02:00] on your way, or you can come in with 20 people or 10 people and just fill your table with food and beverages and everybody shares and commiserates and has a great time.

**Dalia Colon:** It is always a good memory when you're sharing food. Mm-hmm. Lee, what is the restaurant known for?

**Lee Karlins:** Experience? You know, when you talk to people about Ceviche. They all have some memory or some experience about something in their life that happened with them. Either they had a wedding and then they came to ceviche or they got engaged in ceviche. Or when I tell people I work for ceviche, oh my God, I got engaged with the one that was in Tampa years ago.

And we love it. We keep going. So somebody always has a story or memory about coming to ceviche and that's really what like tapas is about with how, kind of how it started in Spain.

**Dalia Colon:** Let's talk about that because what is it about tapas that lend themselves to this sort of fun, nostalgic party atmosphere?

It's almost like it sticks with people. Whatever you're doing when you're eating tapas is gonna be a good [00:03:00] memory

**Lee Karlins:** Because I think in Spain it started in Spain obviously, and, and I think that people had conversations around tapa and it was always with close family and close friends, and there's all these memories and experiences that you remember out of that.

And I think that that's kind of how tapas really kind of got started.

**Dalia Colon:** Jackie, for people who have no idea, who have never come here, never been to Spain, what are tapas?

**Jackie Eash:** I mean, I guess the most simplistic way to uh describe it is small plates. And as Lee was saying, it started in Spain and if you go to Europe, people dine much differently.

And, uh, they were served originally for lunch. But keep in mind, in Spain that means three o'clock in the afternoon, they're meant to be shared. And of course, that just encourages that kind of convivial experience.

**Dalia Colon:** I love that. That's fun. And whenever you're sharing food, it's automatically a good time and a good memory.

So Lee, if we were to travel to Spain, in our minds, let's all close our eyes, unless you're driving. How would [00:04:00] they be served in a restaurant in Spain?

**Lee Karlins:** If you go to Spain, there's roads or alleys, I guess you would say, of tapas restaurants. And it's very common that they do like tapas crawls, where they're just going from, from tapas restaurant to tapas restaurant to tapas restaurant, and each one specializes in like certain tapas dishes that you can't get at other ones.

So there might be, you know, 15 of 'em on one street, but everyone serves something different.

**Dalia Colon:** Oh, I love that. The Spanish word tapar means to top or to cover. So how does that come into play when we're talking about tapas?

**Lee Karlins:** The server or the bartender, they're usually, it's a bartender and there's no server. You walk up to the bar, you get it there.

They, they have your glass with your cocktail or sangria or sherry with a, with like a coaster over it. And then there is a tapa that's put on top of the coaster. It's usually on the toothpick, almost like a pincho style. And, and, and it's goes on top of the glass to cover the glass.

**Dalia Colon:** Okay. So it's almost an accessory to the drinks.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Okay. Let's, [00:05:00] we'll get into the drinks, but let's talk about the actual tapas. What are you serving here at Ceviche? What are some popular tapas in general?

**Lee Karlins:** So the most popular one we serve is Patatas Bravas. Which is, uh, uh, basically a potato wedge that is covered in a spicy aioli. We call it a house aioli, but it's a spicy aioli.

It's definitely the most popular one that we serve here. Probably the most well known tapas around the world. I, I would think so. We say our menus a little bit more Spanglish. It, it's traditional. The recipes here are as old as the company. I mean, there's some dishes here that we, that started with the company 25 years ago, but the recipes have never been changed.

In fact, our chef. Horasio has been with the company for well over 20 years.

**Dalia Colon:** Oh wow. Okay. So patatas bravas, and you actually sent us that recipe. My mouth was watering and I wanted to make it for dinner last night. People can find that recipe on our website, the zest podcast.com. What are a few other popular

**Jackie Eash:** tapas? [00:06:00] For me, I would say one that really comes to mind and uh, keeping in mind that tapas, you know, there's a lot of parts of Spain that try to claim tapas, but I most agree that it's Andalusia, which is southern Spain, which is very seafood heavy.

It's traditionally accompanied with Sherry that's also made in that region and the gamba, which is basically just a shrimp seared with olive oil and garlic. That's one of the most. Popular common little bit of red chili flakes. You get, get a little bit of zest and pow on the pallet.

That's one that, uh, really regionally and traditionally correct. If you wanna say, and that's a really popular one here,

**Lee Karlins:** Paellas. I know that's not a tapa, but it's a bigger, you know, a paella is obviously a very traditionally Spanish. We serve four different types of paella here. So we do a seafood, we do a pork and chicken.

We do a vegetable, and then we do a, a, uh, It's called the negra, which is a, it's used with a black squid ink. So the rice comes out, it's black, and then there's, we serve it with, uh, popo, which [00:07:00] is octopus.

**Dalia Colon:** Wow. Okay. I was gonna ask you how you fit paella on a skewer. Yeah, that's not very carefully.

**Lee Karlins:** It's another, you know, the thing that, the thing about coming to eat, uh, in a tapas restaurant, it's all about sharing, it's all about the experiences and, um, it creates conversation.

When you walk around in here, like we get to walk around and watch people obviously, because we're, we're managing, people aren't on their phones in this restaurant. They're, they're not looking at Instagram and things like that. They're actually having conversations and talking with each other. So it's different, you know, and that's really how, why it's so popular, obviously in around the country now.

And it's really been driven by the millennials because of the way they eat.

**Dalia Colon:** Interesting. Okay. I'm an elder millennial, so say more about this because you're right. At most restaurants, people are staring at their phones half the time. But what is it about tapas that creates that atmosphere of conversation?

**Lee Karlins:** You know, it's hard to, it's hard to explain, but it's about sharing. So [00:08:00] I think when, when you come into a regular restaurant, you get an entree. If you come with other people, everybody gets their own food and they, they don't share it really here, the whole, the way the environment is here and the it is for sharing, so everybody can get different menu items and they're small, and then everybody can taste and share off off of them. So when there's a party of five or six in here, you'll see they'll get 10 different plates and they're passing them and sharing and they're talking about it. And that's what the tapas kind of creates is a conversation.

**Jackie Eash:** Well, and I think just the ordering process that Lee's talking about, that in and of itself is a conversation starter. You have to talk to the people at the table like. Well, what do you this? You want that? Or let's do the ribs. And then that starts, oh my gosh, I may have the best rib recipe. You never, it just people, again, people start talking and communicating and it's just, it's like a family sitting around a table.

**Dalia Colon:** That's so fun. And I think a lot of families sitting around the table maybe would want to try to create their own tapas night at home, whether it's a [00:09:00] party, a bridal shower, guy's night, whatever it may be. So do you ever make tapas at home? And do you have any tips for the rest of us?

**Jackie Eash:** I think everybody makes tapas at home.

I, we board tapas. Yeah. Right.

**Dalia Colon:** Really?

**Lee Karlins:** Okay. It's a basic form of tapas is a charcuterie board..

**Jackie Eash:** Sure. Because you're, there's just a little bit, you, you load up your plate. I, I feel like any food and beverage cultural are, they're kind of, they, they go over boundaries because, We're all human and we all kind of do the same thing.

So maybe just even like a potluck that, that you have could be considered. Tap is cuz you're putting a little on your plate here, a little on your plate there. Anything that you can share and have more than one or two bites of, I think

falls into that category. So there's, there's no rules. Just, you know, tell every, bring something that you like.

And I mean, meatballs are great for tapas cuz it's a couple little bites. So that's a good guideline is something that maybe is two or three bites. So you can try a lot of different things, [00:10:00] but like, it's pretty easy.

**Lee Karlins:** Doesn't have, doesn't have to be Spanish food to be tapas. Oh really? Yeah. Okay.

I like, like you go to a wine bar.

Okay, and they, and they serve a small plate. It's an Americanized form of tapas. A wine bar. That's a good point.

**Dalia Colon:** Finger foods. Yep. Or cocktail party. Right. A

**Jackie Eash:** cocktail party. I mean, even for that part, really, if you look at tapas, that's kind of the forerunner to what we look at as the modern day, happy hour, which we still have here in Florida.

You know, you come in and you have a beverage, and of course you don't just want to drink on an empty stomach because it's happy hours kind of at the end of your day, much like it is in Spain, kind of in the middle. And so you, you order a couple little bites to eat. Usually there are smaller portions and you have your glass of wine and your beverage, and it's, you know, it all kind of morphs into the same type of philosophy.[00:11:00]

**Dalia Colon:** Okay. Let's throw out some ideas because I could see someone planning a book club meeting or a holiday party or a even a date night maybe, and wanting to experiment with tapas. You mentioned meatballs and some of the more Spanish inspired tapas. What are some other, maybe unconventional, ingredients we could include?

**Jackie Eash:** I love seafood, so any kind of like, shrimp is great because you can get one nice size shrimp and that would be a great little starter to tapas. You know, here in this area we have stone crab, which we all love, and that's, that's really a great option crab. Um, and also vegetables too. I'm a, I'm not a vegetarian, but I eat.

Have a very vegetable heavy diet. So, you know, we have Brussels sprouts on our menu here, but also, um, glazed carrots are a very traditional tapa that served in Spain. [00:12:00] So you know, it's everybody's included.

**Dalia Colon:** I love that. And I am a vegetarian, so that's right up my alley. I want you to paint a picture for me, like.

Are we eating this with our hands? Are we eating it with a tiny fork? Hot, cold? People like directions.

**Lee Karlins:** So traditionally, if it's a pincho, it's served on a stick, a wooden pick, like from a bar. Mm-hmm. And they're bite size. That's what will come on the, the lid, the tapa. But here, I mean, you know, here you're sharing.

So it's more, there's either tongs in the dish where you can share and you can pass it around, or you're using a fork. For your hands. I guess you could use your hands if you're using

**Dalia Colon:** your hands. But you're really family.

**Lee Karlins:** We serve. Here's, here's a non-traditional, going back to the question you asked Jackie.

We do, we do ribs here and we call 'em Spanish ribs because of the way we dry rub 'em. And so using your hands to eat those, but they're like fall. They're baked in the oven for like six hours and they're like, just fall off the bone and they're super popular, but that's a very uncommon tapas.

**Dalia Colon:** Yum. A rib.

And you mentioned pinchos. My husband was born in Puerto Rico, and [00:13:00] he, as a college student at USF, sold pinchos outside of a barbershop. So you see pinchos all over Florida, and I never really thought of the Spanish origins of that,

**Lee Karlins:** but it could also be, well, that destroyed me. I mean, it could be a sandwich.

So like a bikini sandwich is a famous sandwich in Spain. It's really a grilled cheese with hamman. Or biota, you know, the, a ham. Okay. And the crust is usually cut off of it and they're served in quarters of triangles. And a, a non-traditional one. You can put

**Dalia Colon:** other stuff in bacon so you can maybe like a ardine.

I'm sure it's tomato. Oh, sines. There we go. Okay. Now, okay, I've got kids. How can I get them in on this? Actually, I'm planning both of their birthday parties right now, and I could see doing some finger food tapas style menu items, because kids aren't gonna sit down and eat a three-course meal.

**Lee Karlins:** So every kid that come in here will eat the patatas bravas Oh my gosh.

Cause it's like french fries. It's like french fries. And a lot of times we'll do 'em with no sauce because they don't know how [00:14:00] spicy they are. So we'll serve the sauce on the side and they'll, they'll kind of dip it in there like a bikini sandwich would be great for kids. Because it's a basically grilled cheese.

**Dalia Colon:** Is it called Bikini because of the triangles?

**Lee Karlins:** It's called bikini because in Barcelona there is an arena, and it was famous for. They would have food vendors out there and it has something to do. The bikini has something to do with the name of the arena. Oh. In the location of where it is. Interesting. And it was named or dubbed the bikini.

**Dalia Colon:** Okay. Cuz I'm like, if you're trying to fit into your bikini, you probably don't wanna be, be smashing grilled cheese sandwiches. I was like, what I was looking for was, it depends on the

**Lee Karlins:** bikini. You can actually put, you can put, you can put truffles on that sandwich also. Oh, and elevate that sandwich to a, you know, a different type of grilled cheese.

**Dalia Colon:** You could do a whole grilled cheese party. Oh, yeah.

**Lee Karlins:** You could do, you can do five different sandwiches that are totally different.

**Dalia Colon:** Oh my gosh. Okay. Let's, let's go there. What would be, what would be your sandwich? Throw one out for me. I think I would, I'll start, I would probably do [00:15:00] something with Nutella in it.

I don't know. Maybe that's like a dessert. Oh, you're going straight to

**Jackie Eash:** dessert. Yeah, but that's fine. I love nettella. Life

**Dalia Colon:** is short. You dessert. Yeah. Right. Maybe like Nutella with strawberries.

**Lee Karlins:** Okay. What would you do? I think I'd do, um, manchego cheese biota, which is the, uh, aged ham and some truffles.

**Dalia Colon:** Mm, that's very high.

You went high and I went low. Jackie, what would you do?

**Jackie Eash:** I would definitely do like a nice piece of crisp bread with a maybe, a little bit of a softer cheese and probably some tomato and spinach. A little bit of garlic and olive oil. That's right, that's right in my wheelhouse. A nice glass of crisp white wine or a glass of kava. I'm good.

**Dalia Colon:** Okay. I'm coming to your tapas party. Yeah. Let's hop into the beverages. Okay. Because this is your area of expertise. What are we drinking with all these fabulous tapas?

**Jackie Eash:** Well, traditionally it's Sherry, but sherry is a little tricky for the American palette. We serve a lot of kava here, which is the traditional sparkling [00:16:00] wine from Spain, and it's, uh, made very much in the same method as champagne, depending on.

On the quality level of, of the wine. You know, some will be aged longer than others. That's a whole different conversation. But also Spain is known for it to red wines. You know, there's, depending on the time of year, sometimes people get more towards the white wines, but we've got Tempranillo, which is the king of grapes in Spain.

It's kind of Spain's answer to Cabernet. But then also you get up into the northwest part of Spain and you have some really beautiful Albarino, which have a lot of maritime influence and. Just some real salinity and bright flavors from those gorgeous white wines.

**Dalia Colon:** Oh man. Now I wanna just grab my passport and head to Spain.

But the climate of someplace like Andalusia is. Not that different from Florida. It's hot. It is hot. So we're eating in a similar way. I wish we could take a siesta every day. That would be amazing. Do either of you have a memory of

[00:17:00] enjoying tapas? We've talked about how they bring people together and how it's this family or party atmosphere.

Can you think of a time when you were enjoying tapas either at ceviche or someplace else that remains with you?

**Jackie Eash:** I think, and this really is an honest answer, I think anytime for me, because I've been in this industry for so many years, that I'm able to actually sit down at a table and enjoy a meal with someone and not have to serve it.

That's always kind of a memorable experience for me, and I'm fortunate that I work in an establishment that, um, I enjoy. So it is fun to come down here and sit out on our sidewalk and watch the people go by and have a nice glass of cava or maybe a cocktail and just. Have a few small plates and just relax and just make a memory.

**Dalia Colon:** I love that. What about you Lee?

**Lee Karlins:** Um, the one I think of is, so my, my son just got married this past year and he actually married a wonderful girl from Spain. Wow. Yeah. Um, so we

**Dalia Colon:** [00:18:00] actually have Happy's my story Yeah. You, and

**Lee Karlins:** interview over. So we actually had the night before the wedding here.

**Dalia Colon:** Oh, at the restaurant? Like a rehearsal dinner.

**Lee Karlins:** Yeah. Sort of rehearsal dinner with close family and, and friends. And it's really it, you know, we don't come to the restaurant and eat a restaurant a lot. When you do, you're you, you forget how special it's to come in here and sit and eat with family and friends and how the whole tapas experience does make memories.

**Dalia Colon:** It really does. And I think that's a great way to mix it up, especially the day before a wedding when you'll be having probably a formal sit-down dinner. Yep. To just kind of relax, let loose. Get your hands dirty.

**Lee Karlins:** I like watching everybody kind of what they, people start talking about the food and that's where the conversation comes into place.

You know, when you're, oh, let me try that. What'd you think of that? You know, lemme try that one over there. What is that? That's what's exciting about it.

**Dalia Colon:** So much fun. Okay. Is there anything else either of you would like to mention about tapas? We're heading into summer, this is the perfect time for a tapas party.

Did we talk about whether they should be [00:19:00] served hot or cold, or does it not matter? Well, there's, there's both.

**Jackie Eash:** Yeah. And I think that's a fantastic segue because we didn't mention that we actually have ceviche here at Ceviche. Yeah. And I, you better have ceviche. And, and I will, I, for me, that's one of my favorite warm weather dishes because it's bright, it's chilled.

You've got some vegetables in there, you've got that beautiful seafood. And it, you know, it's, it pairs of a number of different beverages and. But ceviche is always a great choice.

**Dalia Colon:** Hmm. What are you drinking with ceviche? At Ceviche?

**Jackie Eash:** I'm probably gonna, if I'm staying in Spain, I'm gonna put a nice glass of kava with it because it's got that, it's got the effervescence, it's got the acid that'll stand up to that dish.

I also might put a nice sancerre or a Sauvignon Blanc with it, cuz those herbal notes in there are very complimentary to what you have going on in that dish as well.

**Dalia Colon:** Nice. Perfect for summer.

**Lee Karlins:** And sangria. I mean, you know, so, so we like selling wine, right? Because that's what really [00:20:00] what, that's what we want to do.

And Jackie's done an amazing job with the wine program, really elevated it, and from wines all, not just Spain, but you know, everywhere, all over the world. But sangria is a big. A big seller for us.

**Dalia Colon:** Oh, that's my drink. I can't believe we, we've made it this far without shame. Eyes. Sangria. Never too late. Yeah.

**Lee Karlins:** So actually here's a, here's a, here's a tip, a fun tikit about ceviche. So we actually hold the Guinness Book of World record for the largest sangria pitcher ever produced, 2013.

**Dalia Colon:** Wow. Okay. I love sangria. Do you have any tips, I don't know if it's your specialty, but do you have any tips for making sangria.

**Jackie Eash:** I think just keep it fun if you can keep it seasonal. I, I have a seasonal sangria right now that's sparkling wine based. Uh, sometimes last year I did one that was rose based. As we get into the wintertime in the warmer months, I'll do a red wine base and maybe put some cinnamon and some warm spices in there.

But you can really, as long as you, the basic [00:21:00] formula is wine, you've got a little bit of, um, orange liqueur, and then you've got some brandy. But you know, you can switch out that orange liqueur for say, a passion fruit liqueur, or. Just make sure your flavors are blending together. Get some fruit, and get some ice and have fun with it.

**Dalia Colon:** Mm. Party time. We interviewed, uh, Justin Gray, who's a Tampa bartender, last season, and he had some good tips for preparing punch mm-hmm. And making like a large block of ice. Same thing. Yeah. Yeah. And he was saying to make freeze like one of those disposable coolers, fill it up with water. And freeze that.

So it's this ginormous ice block that doesn't just melt immediately. Mm-hmm. And your sangria stays Yeah. The way you want it. Wow. Okay. I might need to have a tapas party for myself.

**Lee Karlins:** So I, I just actually just looked it up. So it was a, it was 1,022 liters. Stop it. Which beat the old record. I think the record was a thousand.

**Jackie Eash:** I wanna know who drank it.

**Dalia Colon:** Three people drink it. [00:22:00] It was quite the party. Well, Jackie and Lee, thank you so much. You're welcome. This was really fun. You're welcome. Thank you. Is there anything else you wanna add that we didn't talk about?

**Jackie Eash:** Just, you know, I think we, we, we've talked a lot about that experience of, you know, getting people together over small plates and beverages, and I think that that's, that's kind of what, what is addictive about this

business for people like myself and like Lee is we love making that experience for you. It's, it's not all about, um, you can't always be part of the experience, but it's kind of greedy on our part that we get to be part of people's experience and make that moment for them, and I think tapas really lends itself to that.

**Dalia Colon:** I hope you get to sit down and enjoy. Some tapas, so thank you. Thank you, thank you. That was Lee Karlins and Jackie Eash of Ceviche Tapas Bar and Restaurant in downtown St. Petersburg. They shared the restaurant's recipe for Patatas Bravas, Perfect for your own tapas party, [00:23:00] and you'll find it on our website, the Zest podcast.com. I'm Dalia Colon. I produce the Zest with Andrew Lucas.

Our digital team includes Alexandria Ebron and Chandler Balkcom. The Zest is a production of W U S F Public Media copyright 2023, part of the NPR network.