



Clockwise from above: Pico's beef sirloin; hams hang over the bar; scallops wrapped in Serrano's finest. Photos: Felix Wong

Marquez is also proud of the paella, done the Valencian way. Served in a giant pan, it looks intimidating, but isn't that filling because the whole dish takes on what the Spanish call *socarrat* – the caramelised crust that is the hallmark of paella perfection.

There are some cultural differences that have to be overcome. Devahive Tolosa says they have to use less salt in Hong Kong and more chilli in Singapore. Cold soup such as gazpacho is something that neither Hongkongers nor Singaporeans understand.

But Jose Torres of Pico in Tsim Sha Tsui says that the love of sharing food appeals to both Chinese and Spaniards,

and that this will give the cuisine its staying power. Opened earlier this month, Pico's name comes from the breadstick seen on tables in restaurants in the south of Spain, where owner and general manager Torres hails from.

Torres wants guests to experience a relaxing ambience that harks back to bars in Spain in the 1950s, and enjoy the food that Spaniards eat at home.

"[We] Spanish are not very far from Chinese; we share all the different dishes on a table. Tapas is like dim sum,

the same idea. We want people to interact and try each other's dishes. We have a dish of scallops. You have one and I have one. And then the steak. You have a piece, and I have a piece. We all have a few things each," says Torres.

"I want to give the feeling that you're eating with your family around one table with different dishes, and you're eating with your fingers.

"You come here to have honest food – the way my mum cooks, the food we eat at home. Chefs are going to hate me, but any housewife in Spain can probably cook better than most

chefs, including mine."

Torres, who also owns a food trading company, knows where to source good ingredients. He visits farms and wineries around Spain, but he's not afraid to use ingredients from other countries if they cost less than the comparable ingredients from his home country.

Vieiras con jamon Serrano, for instance, features scallops from Japan wrapped with Serrano ham. The chargrilled US beef tenderloin is served with a traditional sauce of Cabrales cheese, and sides that include sautéed onions, a whole bulb of baked garlic and some sea salt. Many of the dishes were taught to Torres by his mother.

"Our dishes are not fancy or sophisticated, and we have a very rustic presentation," he says. "I want to go back to authentic, basic Spanish food.

"I wanted to bring a small piece of Spain to Hong Kong. We have many people who have been abroad for many years [here]. I miss my country, my culture, my food, so I want to put together a place that I feel at home."

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including mine

Jose Torres, Pico

A taste of España

22 Ships

22 Ship Street,
Wan Chai, tel: 2555 0722

BCN

37 Peel Street,
Central, tel: 2811 2851

Boqueria

7/F LKF Tower,
33 Wyndham Street,
Central, tel: 2321 8681

Catalunya

Guardian House,
32 Oi Kwan Road, Wan Chai,
tel: 2866 7900

Fofo by el Willy

20/F, 2-8 Wellington Street,
Central, tel: 2900 2009

Iberico & Co

18 Shelley Street,
Central, tel: 2752 8811

Mesa 15

6/F Grand Progress
Building, 15-16 Lan Kwai
Fong, Central,
tel: 2530 1890

Numero 15

15 Hollywood Road,
Central, tel: 2362 0881

Ole Spanish Restaurant

1/F Shun Ho Tower,
24-30 Ice House
Street, Central,
tel: 2523 8624

Pico

Empire Centre,
68 Mody Road,
Tsim Sha Tsui,
tel: 2366 8355

Quemo

5/F QRE Plaza,
202 Queen's Road East,
Wan Chai,
tel: 2836 0699

Tapeo

Au's Building,
15-19 Hollywood Road,
Central, tel: 3171 1989.
Lei King Wan, 55 Tai Hong
Street, Sai Wan Ho,
tel: 2513 0199

Vi Cool

Shop 2101-2, Gateway
Arcade, Harbour City, Tsim
Sha Tsui, tel: 2735 7787

View 62 by Paco Roncero

62/F Hopewell Centre,
183 Queen's Road East,
Wan Chai, tel: 2574 6262