



Report: Michel Cruz Photos: KH Photography

RUPERTO DE NOLA

ELEGANT DINING IN THE HEART OF MARBELLA

While some restaurants seem new and contrived, others have the ability to almost immediately establish a reputation as one of the finest in town. What's more, they seem so well-established that it's hard to imagine they haven't been there for years. Ruperto de Nola is such a restaurant. In just two years' time, it has become firmly entrenched among the most elegant and sophisticated restaurants in Marbella, a favourite of those who enjoy dining in style. Indeed, if it is true what they say about choosing a restaurant where the locals dine, then Ruperto de Nola needs no better endorsement than the fact that it is frequented by many of Marbella's most eminent lawyers, bankers, businessmen and artists.

The reason for this is simple; while the restaurant is only two years old, its owner Santiago Dominguez is one of Marbella's longest-established restaurateurs. As the owner of Santiago's, the fish and seafood restaurant that has become a Marbella icon, his reputation was established many years ago. It is this that explains the ready acceptance of Ruperto de Nola by a demanding clientele, for whereas the two restaurants are very different in character, they are both built on the charm and know-how of Santiago, who still greets his guests personally.

Enter the stylishly decorated restaurant, with its classical décor and intricately painted murals, and you are greeted by a Maitre'd. This is the kind of restaurant where your coats are taken and you are shown to your table, but it is done in a welcoming way, without any sense of ceremony. We were offered a

smooth fino devoid of the sharpness you sometimes find in these dry sherries, and were presented with a delightful trio of snacks: a *chupito* (tot-sized glass) of cream of red pepper with herbs, a gentle potato salad and a delicious apple and goat's cheese blend that really works well. If the menu offers a rich choice of especially fish and seafood delicacies, the wine list is a veritable bible of Spanish viticulture. Arranged per region, it offers a description of each area's characteristics, followed by a list whose depth and detail I have not seen elsewhere. I would have loved to have taken it home to read, but if it is all a bit too much to digest there and then, you can simply ask the sommelier, Fernando Boto, who will offer his expert advice and present the wine with the aplomb it deserves.

Fernando suggested a full-bodied Ribera del Duero Alidis 2001 Crianza to accompany our choice of courses; a skilfully shredded and prepared spider crab on a bed of ruculla and watercress, and as for myself, the potage du jour. Good solid winter food, consisting of a small stew of beans, chickpeas and partridge, it illustrates beautifully the diversity and choice that Santiago and his chef, Fernando Martín, offer in their menu. The main courses again varied, with one of us choosing a brochette of monk fish, scampi and squid on beautifully flavoured black vermicelli noodles and aioli au gratin. In contrast to the perfect balance of this seafood speciality, my steak with spinach, pine nuts and raisins was faultlessly prepared, and lightly covered with a sweet and richly flavoured foie sauce.

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Needless to say, the sommelier had been spot on with his suggestion, as indeed he was when offering a glass of Monteagudo, a sweet wine produced from the sun dried *Pedro Ximenez* grapes of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. It went very well with the gorgeous sabayon of pear with strawberries and mint cream, while the white chocolate soup with powdery watermelon ice and brown sugar jelly was described as 'heavenly'. We are fortunate to have a great many fine restaurants in Marbella, but if you want to combine excellent food with first class service and dine in real style, Ruperto de Nola is the place to go.

Restaurante Ruperto de Nola

Avda. Antonio Belón, 3, Marbella.

Tel: 952 765 550, Web: www.rupertodeno-la.com

Opening Hours: From 1pm-5pm and 8pm till late, seven days per week.

Average Price per person: €70 for a three course meal with wine.