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By Peter M. Gianotti
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weekend picks | Tapas are tops in St. James

Colorful as autumn leaves, **España Tapas & Wine Bar** in St. James serves food you'd like to eat right now.

The Spanish restaurant specializes in tapas, those addictive snacks that add up to a very satisfying meal. And if you want huskier fare, the spirited, cozy spot does that with flair, too. It's prepared with care, and served by an attentive, friendly staff.

On a chilly evening, you'll savor caldo gallego, the Galician soup loaded with kale, white beans, potato, chorizo sausage and Serrano ham.

Then, move on to the tapas. Easily recommended: tender octopus spurred by paprika, Serrano ham on toast with a tomato-and-garlic spread, Sherry-fired fried chorizo, and light, crisp cod croquettes with béchamel sauce. Shrimp in green sauce also stands out, a

lively affair fueled with garlic and parsley.

Patatas bravas, or spicy potatoes, have some spark, here finished in a zesty riff on sauce rémoulade. The chicken- or beef-stuffed empanadillas, however, are on the dry side, as are the pinchos morunos, skewers of pork, veal and chicken, with onions and peppers.

But España prepares a generous, full-flavored paella with sausage, chicken, squid and

shellfish. Likewise, juicy pork chops with peppers.

Poached pears and crema Catalana are among the sweets.

The house's sangria, red or white, is an easygoing partner for almost everything. And a glass or two of malbec will brace you for winter.

España Tapas & Wine Bar, 655 Middle Country Rd., St. James, 631-656-1564, espanatapasny.com

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España is a colorful spot.