

First Look

Orange Blossom restaurant in Miami Beach has Old Florida feel with New American cooking

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Breakfast, lunch and dinner served at former Charles St. space.



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By Sara Liss 5/16/2014

The who: Nightlife and culture guru **Tatanka Guerrero** taps chef **Nelson Maldonado** to head up the kitchen at Orange Blossom, an homage to Old Florida and market-fresh cooking.

Maldonado is a native of Ecuador (not Equador, as Orange Blossom's website misstates) who got his kitchen start washing dishes at a Chinese buffet in

Miami before graduating culinary school and moving up to cook at **Todd English's** Brasserie Ça Va in New York.

The restaurant's name is inspired by the Orange Blossom Special, the luxury passenger train that ferried the earliest snowbirds from New York to Miami for the first half of the 20th century.

The space: The former Charles St. spot is reinvented with vintage-print wallpaper, warm lighting, reclaimed wood and flower-filled vases. It feels a bit like grandma's dining room — if granny's the type who mixes up **strong gin cocktails**.

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The dishes: New American. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are all served here. There are plenty of familiar dishes — tomato-and-mozzarella salad, NY strip steak — and some things that stand out like ramp-and-ricotta pasta, kale-and-quinoa salad and salmon-belly tartare. Starters are in the \$10-\$14 range, and mains land around \$15-\$34.

Start with the **fava-and-fennel soup**, **baby beet salad** or **fig prosciutto flatbread**. Move on to pastas like garganelli Bolognese or **farro risotto with peas and carrots**. Fish options include seared branzino over lentil salad and a **Florida black grouper with parmesan risotto**.

Desserts are back to the familiar, with choices like Grand Marnier soufflé, **coffee panna cotta** and warm brownie with vanilla ice cream.

The bottom line: A rare South Beach spot where you can start your day with a casual breakfast or end it with a decent steak.