

Luis Melendez

Executive Chef, Gigi

Luis Melendez does not take offense at being called a “Jack of All Trades.” Having worked in some of the most influential kitchens in Philadelphia and beyond, with the likes of Cibollette’s Bruce Lim and The Striped Bass’ Christopher Lee, Luis has refined, re-learned and experimented in cuisines that range from classical French to world fusion; and Creole to Mediterranean.

As the executive chef at Gigi Restaurant & Lounge in Philadelphia, Luis’ array of cooking styles has created an exciting and bold menu of global-influenced new American cuisine.

Luis Melendez received his education in the kitchen, not in the classroom. Growing up Luis’ father cooked primarily Puerto Rican food, and his mother passed down to him a love of all types of cuisine, from wholesome, traditional American, to exotic and fiery South East Asian to rich and hearty Latin staples. Thus inspired, at the age of five Luis was already experimenting in the kitchen alongside both parents.

Years later, Luis followed through on his belief that the most direct route to becoming an executive chef was to work his way up through a myriad of positions that included front and back of house duties.

Luis began as a dishwasher at the Dock Street Pub and worked his way to prep cook. At the Philadelphia Fish Company he was a raw bar shucker. At Stephen Starr’s Café Republic and the Continental Luis was a cook. Under the tutelage of executive chef Patrice Rames, he became sous chef of Bistro St. Tropez. Luis subsequently gained experience as sous chef at La Boheme and the Latest Dish respectively. Luis remembered and catalogued the very best of what he learned over this twenty-year period in anticipation of the day when he would run his own kitchen.

Luis’ love of international food has contributed to his multicultural world-view and love of travel. He takes frequent trips to Mexico and the Dominican Republic where he explores the local markets and food stalls and enjoys chatting up the locals in Spanish, in search of traditional foods, which he will then re-create with a modern flair in his kitchen at Gigi.

His tapas-centric menu emphasizes small bites and vibrant flavors. He specializes in the French techniques of searing, reducing and sweating ingredients to create concentrated sauces and flavors.

When he is not pouring through cookbooks or studying exotic cuisines, Luis can be found perusing Philadelphia’s Italian Market and the outside stalls and underground markets of Chinatown for the best and freshest produce, spices, meats, and fish. Luis also enjoys playing pick-up games of soccer and sampling the fares of new restaurants in the burgeoning Philadelphia dining scene.



restaurant + lounge

Concept:	Gigi seamlessly merges new American, Latin, Asian and Mediterranean cuisines in a hip, sophisticated yet inviting ambiance.
Location:	319 Market Street - Philadelphia, PA
Phone:	215.574.8880
Website:	www.gigiphilly.com
Proprietor:	George Markakis
Executive Chef:	Luis Melendez
Date Opened:	November 2005
Menu Style:	Bold, tapas-centric menu of Latin, Asian and Mediterranean influenced new American cuisine.
Décor:	Café windows open out onto the street. Spacious and sleek dining room accented with burnt sienna banquettes and deep brown tabletops. The walls are tones of sand and warm beige, which set off the black speckled granite-topped bar that runs the length of the dining room.
Seating:	55 in the dining room, 15 at the bar; seasonal outdoor seating for 80 along the sidewalk and on the patio.
Hours:	Lunch: Monday through Sunday, 11-4pm Dinner: Monday through Sunday, 4-11pm Late Night: Sunday through Thursday, upon dinners end until 12am Late Night: Friday through Saturday, upon dinners end until 1am Brunch: Sunday, 11-3pm
Private Parties:	The entire restaurant may be reserved for private events.
Price Range:	Dinner entrees range from \$12 to \$19; Tapas range from \$3 to \$8 Lunch ranges from \$3.50 to \$13; Brunch ranges from \$3 to \$13
Credit Cards:	All major credit cards accepted.