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With its latest venture **Mi España**, Gretalia Hospitality Group takes diners on a tabletop tour of Spain.

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European Vacation

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WITH ITS LATEST VENTURE MI ESPAÑA, GRETALIA HOSPITALITY GROUP TAKES DINERS ON A TABLETOP TOUR OF SPAIN.

Giovanni “John” Procaccini, partner of the Gretalia Hospitality Group, wants to help his guests explore the world through cuisine. With an ever-growing culinary empire set to include 20 restaurants in New Jersey by the end of this year, Procaccini credits much of his success to this commitment to sharing flavors from all over the world.

“Nothing is traditional anymore, and I think having diversity is a good thing,” says Procaccini, whose portfolio includes pancake houses, Italian eateries, barbecue spots, seafood houses, and more. “We love to offer a variety, and we believe that’s what got us through [the pandemic]. Someone can have breakfast with us on Monday, pizza on Tuesday, pasta on Wednesday, and barbecue on Thursday. We saw people every day of the week because of our diversity.”

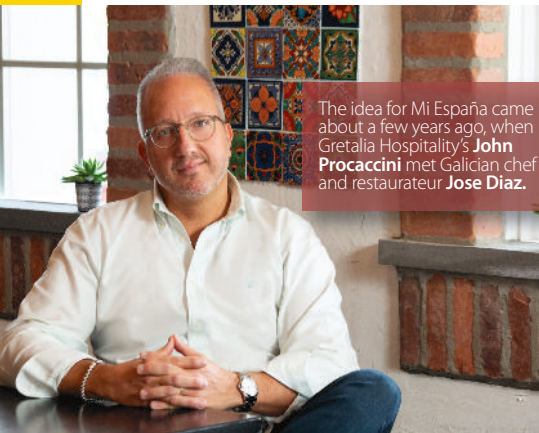


were booked every night. Fast forward about a year, and I got another call—this time about a space in Robbinsville. We opened up a second Mi España, this time offering street food as well as full entrées.”

This larger incarnation of the restaurant bursts with Spanish flair, from the stucco walls and terracotta soffits to wrought-iron light fixtures, bright ceramic tiles, and outdoor pots sourced from Spain.

With Mi España, the stars aligned a few years ago when Procaccini met Jose Diaz, a Galician chef and restaurateur who left 11 of his own restaurants behind in Spain to come to America. Fate intervened once again when Procaccini got a call regarding an open space in the Princeton Shopping Center and the first Mi España was born. Only 600 square feet and seating for 16, the concept focused on accessible Spanish street food like bocadillos (a type of sandwich), empanadas (hand pies), churros (sweet fried dough), and the like.

“Sure enough, it exploded,” Procaccini says of the restaurant’s instant popularity. “We expanded and started a dinner service with more traditional Spanish entrées. We



The idea for Mi España came about a few years ago, when Gretalia Hospitality’s John Procaccini met Galician chef and restaurateur Jose Diaz.

“When you look at the Robbinsville location, it’s a little like a beautiful Spanish outdoor courtyard,” Procaccini says. “It’s gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous.”

The menu itself shares a great deal with the Princeton location. Both offer cooked-to-order paellas and favorite tapas such as *Gambas al Ajillo* (shrimp sauteed with garlic and olive oil), *Croquetas* made with serrano ham or chicken and bechamel, and *Patatas del Chef*, a take on the classic Spanish *patatas bravas* that includes lightly fried potatoes tossed with chorizo sausage and Manchego cheese under a blanket of spicy tomato-based sauce.

The Robbinsville location does offer a variety of dishes not available at the smaller location, including *Paella Negra*, which features calamari, grouper, shrimp, and mussels in a black squid-ink rice. Another dish unique to Robbinsville: *Rabo De Toro*, featuring oxtail braised in Rioja red Spanish wine served with fried potatoes.

Broadening Horizons

Though the newest Mi España in Robbinsville opened less than six months ago, Procaccini is already hard at work on a slew of new concepts.

“I have four restaurants under construction now that will probably open this year,” he shares. “One is Nimbu—that will be Indian street food. We’ve hired a great chef from Dubai, and the food is going to be really authentic, with handmade samosas and a lot of other fantastic dishes, chaats, things like that.”

Set to open in Pennington, Nimbu will have about 40 seats and open as a full, sit-down restaurant. Also coming soon to Pennington will be another Union Boil, a seafood concept meant to evoke the communal dining feel of traditional seafood boils from up and down America’s coasts. This restaurant, named “Union” for its intended purpose of bringing people together, will have approximately 200 seats and 30 TVs, with a menu that focuses on boiled seafood but also includes options such as steaks and burgers.

Pennington will also welcome a hip new after-work spot in the form of Aperitivo Bar, based on Procaccini’s beloved and frequent trips to Italy.

“I go to Italy every year, and when I was there this past summer, I noticed, more than any other year, this trend of people post-COVID really waking up to smell the roses,” he says. “People want to enjoy life. Even in Italy, when places used to close from 1 p.m. to about 4:30 p.m. for people to go home, cook, or sleep, I noticed people instead going to local bars for an *aperitivo*. It was really cool because, back in the day, you’d go home and have your mom or wife cook a massive meal, then you’d sleep from 3 to 4 p.m. Now, you see people going to the bar to be with friends.”

Procaccini seeks to bring this new Italian

tradition stateside with his concept, which will be “strictly small plates—the Italian way.” The space itself will be small, with all high-top tables and limited seating to achieve a true European vibe. He adds, “We’re only going to serve prosecco, Aperol spritzes, Negronis, wine, and aperitifs. We envision a lot of people coming after work to hang out before they go home.”

His fourth and final concept to round out 2023: “I’ve always wanted to do a mom-and-pop coffee shop,” Procaccini says. His dream will come to fruition as Lyberry, a name that’s fitting for a number of reasons.

“Obviously coffee comes from a berry, we’re located in Cranbury, New Jersey, and we wanted to create a library atmosphere with nooks, shelving, and books,” he says. “We want the space to be very cozy, with leather ottomans and coffee tables, so you feel like you can go there and do some work. There will also be real books all over the place, so you can grab one to read while you’re having your coffee.”

Even with all these projects, Procaccini shows no signs of slowing down. This, he says, comes down to a true passion for

the business.

“I love everything about food, dining, and cuisine,” he says. “I love to introduce people to new things. Nothing traditional is really for me. I love the challenge of building restaurants, and I enjoy what I do—otherwise I wouldn’t do it. I just love the challenge of making something different work.” ■



I love to introduce people to new things.”

—John Procaccini, Gretalia Hospitality Group



To learn more about Mi España or the other restaurants in Gretalia Hospitality Group, visit [getforky.com](https://www.getforky.com).