

## TONY MANDOLA'S GULF COAST KITCHEN

1962 W. Gray, Houston Texas 77019

This wonderful restaurant – located in the River Oaks Shopping Center – gets it right every time. Choose from a surprisingly varied menu, which includes rich gumbo, plump, delectable raw oysters, cioppino (San Francisco style Italian seafood soup), calamari fixed several ways, numerous pasta dishes, generous filets of grilled fish with various toppings (most including lump crab meat), soft shell crabs, and many other dishes, always fresh and correctly served by Tony's staff. We usually start our dining experience with a Cajun martini, large and chilled within a degree of freezing, and dominated by one spicy pickled Louisiana okra! An extensive selection of fairly priced wines by the glass or bottle is available to complement the lunch and dinner menus. Tony knows food, and his extended family is responsible for many of Houston's better restaurants (his wife is the late Mama Ninfa's daughter). Tony Mandola's is not fru-fru, nor is it "power dining" like, say, the Post Oak Grill. Rather it is 'old Houston money' quietly dining at reasonable prices-people who know good food when they find it, and have the good sense to return over and over again

---

## RIOJA – SPANISH TAPAS RESTAURANT

11920 Westheimer at Kirkwood (Northwest Corner), Houston Texas 77077

Word of mouth directed us to Rioja, named after one of Spain's premier wine districts. The moment we stepped inside, we were greeted by Ignacio Fonseca, chef and owner, and for the rest of our dining experience, we could well have been in Cuenca, Fonseca's hometown, halfway between Madrid and Valencia. We had scarcely been shown to our table before lovely young servers began bringing us a rich and palate-stimulating selection of tapas (small appetizer-size plates), ranging from thin sliced smoked Spanish ham to green olives to mussels in a steamy white wine broth, to torta espanol, a baked potato and egg dish popular all over Spain. And, a full bottle of rich golden Spanish olive oil was placed on the table, always handy for dipping purposes! Chef Fonseca came to our table with a sampler plate of paella and personally recommended an appropriate wine (Spain produces more wine than any country in Europe). He suggested an after dinner drink in the other half of the restaurant, which is a supper club-like dining area, complete with a sultry Cuban songstress who belts out old favorites of the regulars who dine stage-side. Rioja has a quality feel, the owner certainly 'knows his way around the kitchen,' and we predict this Spanish restaurant will be around for a long time to come.

---

For more information on Hankamer Commercial or any of our current listings, please visit our website at [www.hankamer.com](http://www.hankamer.com), or call Ray Hankamer at 713.789.7060, ext.1205. Your comments are welcome: [rhankamer@hankamer.com](mailto:rhankamer@hankamer.com)

*Note: By way of qualifications for reviewing restaurants, Hankamer has owned and operated numerous restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, discotheques and banquet halls over the last forty years; he has travelled to over 70 countries and has studied and lived in Europe for over three years; he was co-owner of a home delivery wine of the month club and imported his own wine labels for years.*

*The opinions expressed in Hankamer Commercial RESTAURANT UPDATE are the opinions of Hankamer only and these opinions may not be shared by RED News or any other advertising medium in which UPDATE appears.*