

'Biggest honour for our tiny restaurant': Kitchener's La Lola Tapas Bar gets international recognition

Spanish government has officially certified La Lola Tapas Bar for its authenticity

[Aastha Shetty](#) · CBC News · Posted: Mar 30, 2026 6:00 AM EDT | Last Updated: 6 hours ago

From the layout of the restaurant to the layout of the menu, everything is authentically Spanish at La Lola Tapas Bar in downtown Kitchener, Ont.

In fact, the restaurant has done such a good job sticking to its Spanish roots that it recently received official recognition from the Spanish government for its authenticity.

"It's quite a big honour, if not probably the biggest honour for our tiny restaurant," said Vanessa Stankiewicz, owner of La Lola.

The accolade from [the Restaurants from Spain Certification Program](#) was recently hand-delivered by the ambassador of Spain to Canada, Alfredo Martínez Serrano. The program gives some Spanish restaurants outside of Spain a seal of approval for their use of authentic ingredients and recipes.

La Lola is now one of only four in Ontario and nine in Canada to receive such a high honour.

"We were pretty happy to receive it and we definitely didn't expect that the ambassador would come and personally bring it himself. We expected it just to be mailed. So that was quite the big honour for us," Stankiewicz said.

Martínez Serrano many things about La Lola stood out to him during the evaluation process.

"[There are] three different very clear qualities. The first one is that they are offering the diverse cuisine of Spain. So when you look at the menu, you will see dishes that are identified as typical in the different Spanish regions," he told CBC News.

"The second are the premises. They are very authentic and the facilities are wonderful, high quality ones. And the third is the [location] of the restaurant ... it's in downtown Kitchener and at the same time very accessible."

Kitchener Mayor Berry Vrbanovic also shared his excitement for La Lola.

"La Lola brings international distinction to downtown Kitchener," he said in an emailed statement to CBC News.

"This honour reflects both their commitment to authentic and delicious Spanish cuisine and the vibrant, diverse food culture that continues to grow in Kitchener. "

Martínez Serrano said he particularly enjoyed the diverse tapas menu, the quality of the cold cuts and the variety of cheeses available.

Authentically Spanish inside and out

For Stankiewicz and her family, La Lola is a way to help them connect with and appreciate their deep Spanish roots.

With a Polish-Canadian father and a Spanish mother, Stankiewicz's exposure to Spanish food began early, as she moved back and forth between Canada and Spain throughout her life.

"Almost eight years ago, I was living in Madrid and working in Madrid, I met my husband [Miguel Pastor] there. We had our children there ... He is a trained chef, and he makes the wonderful food at La Lola," she said.

"My mom passed away but I'm sure she is enjoying this. I know she'd be very proud."

More than just good food

She said La Lola has become a place to authentically connect for the growing Spanish community in Waterloo region.

"A lot of people come into our restaurant and their first comment is, 'oh my God, it's so small', and there's a reason for that. That's done with intention," she explained.

"In Spain, when you go to any tapas bar, they are small and it's a place of gathering. People are standing, they're not even sitting down, and they're communicating and they're chatting with friends and they're meeting up with family and they're rubbing elbows with neighbors from the community. That's really what we wanted to replicate here at La Lola."

Even the restaurant's name is an ode to a Spanish icon: Lola Flores, an iconic figure in Spanish pop culture.

"She was so iconic and larger than life in cinema, singing, flamenco, dancing. We have admired her heavily in my family and my husband's family," Stankiewicz said.

"We want people to enjoy a true authentic experience."