

GOOD TASTE

[city bites, spirits]

Kool Korner

An unassuming Vestavia Hills restaurant is a Cuban hot spot.

By Daniel Schumacher
Photos by Jason Wallis

Just after the third bite of my second roasted pork sandwich, a Kool Korner customer sidles up to inform me that he had driven more than two hours for one of owner Ildfonso Ramirez's classic Cubans. I soon discovered that his creations enjoyed cult status in Atlanta and many old customers make semi-frequent pilgrimages to the Magic City to get their fix.

Cuban sandwiches, as I have been told, are nothing without good bread. This pressed, toasted, crusty hogie-shaped roll imparts more texture than flavor and provides an ideal delivery vehicle for succulent roast pork, salty ham, sweet pickles, and a healthy dose of melted cheese. For most of the 1990s Ramirez's classic Cuban sandwich reigned as Atlanta's best, according to *Atlanta* magazine.

Cuban-born octogenarian Ramirez has received a warm welcome since he opened Kool Korner last June, but he has yet to achieve the level of fanatical devotion he enjoyed in his former location blocks away from Georgia Tech. Tucked neatly in the corner of the Vestavia Hills City Center, the shop flies well below the lunchtime radar.

Ramirez oversees operations with the help of his son Guillermo and grandson William, and personally roasts all of the pork, beef and chicken each morning. Of the approximate dozen offerings, be sure to try the Classic Cuban, chorizo-stuffed eye-round steak and, my personal favorite, the roast pork (medium from \$4.95; large from \$5.99). Finish the meal with a bag of sweet plantain chips and an apple-accented Materva Yerba Mate soda.

This month the Ramirezes plan to introduce an expanded menu with fresh-baked guava pastries, beef empanadas and black beans and rice. In addition to their signature sandwiches, customers can also purchase whole pieces of roast pork, chicken and stuffed eye-round. Cost varies by size and must be ordered in advance.

Learn more about Kool Korner on our podcast at bhammag.com.



Roast pork sandwich



William, Ildfonso and Guillermo Ramirez