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Left: Wendy Munetake, HR Dir. of Kaanapali Beach Hotel, Right: Harris Nakamoto, GM, HMA/Summerlin Life

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Entertainment

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Posted on: Friday, March 16, 2007

THE NIGHT STUFF

Cuban cocktails with a lot of Soul

By [Derek Paiva](#)
 Advertiser Entertainment Writer

SOUL DE CUBA

- **Where:** 1121 Bethel St.
- **Evening hours:** 5:30-10 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays; 5:30-10:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays
- **Phone/Web site:** 545-2822; <http://souldecuba.com>
- **Got parking?** No. I parked at the Chinatown municipal garage off Beretania Street.



Laura Santi of Waimanalo and Dean Des Jarlais of Kailua enjoy dinner and drinks at Soul de Cuba on Bethel Street.

Photos by REBECCA BREYER | The Honolulu Advertiser



Bartender Matt Bedard prepares a mojito for Lindsey Stouffer of St. Louis.

- **The appeal?** A refreshing fresh-ingredient- and premium-spirit-infused "Cuba-inspired" cocktail menu, import sipping rums and homestyle Afro-Cuban eats in a smallish, urban cool, yet warmly homey setting.

- **The crowd:** On the Thursday we dropped in 'round 8 p.m., a comfortable gathering of about 25. Among the downtown post-work dressy: a table full of

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raucous twentysomethings celebrating a birthday, a couple of chatty fiftysomething women at the bar growing chattier as their pitcher of sangria emptied. Post-9 p.m.: a much quieter Soul.

- **Interiors:** Warm, earth-toned walls softly lit by discreet spots; tables and bar seating illuminated by votives and ceiling-suspended lamps. A collection of otherworldly entities circling Soul's high ceilings are giclees of orishas — Santeria spirits — created by Miami-based, Cuban-born artist Luis Molina. Framed wall photos are of owner Jesus Puerto's relatives, dating back to the mid-19th century. Puerto's collection of 50- to 100-year-old labels from now shuttered Cuban and Tampa, Fla., area cigar factories also serve as framed artwork. Havana city life, residents and architecture — circa 2003, yet seemingly decades old — captured in a series of strikingly composed photos by Washington, D.C., artist Shawn Davis, loop on two suspended flat screen monitors.



Stouffer, along with Ginni Van Cleave and Robert B. Stouffer, both of Mo'ili'ili, check out Soul de Cuba's offerings.



From left, Tabitha Zimmerman, Juliet Barnes and Eric Knecht chat at the bar.

- **Cuban soul food:** Puerto calls the menu of family recipe appetizers (between \$7 and \$10) and entrees (\$9 to \$24) "simple home-cooking." (Menu online.)
- **The soundtrack:** Piped-in classic Cuban, Afro-Cuban and Latin music (Beny Moré, Buena Vista Social Club, Ibrahim Ferrer, Cesaria Evora) on weekdays; a mostly salsa-flavored beat (Celia Cruz, Los Van Van) on Fridays and Saturdays. On occasion, live solo guitar musicians/vocalists. No dance floor.
- **About the bebidas (mixed cocktails):** A few are originals. Others are classic Cuban tourist favorites with a Puerto-family twist. Soul's rum cocktails use only wicked smooth Matusalem Platinum. (The Dominican Republic brand was born in pre-Castro Cuba.) They're not the most inexpensive cocktails you'll have downtown — or the most quickly made — but some of the best. Among them are ...

- **The expected tourist classics:** A house-recipe Matusalem-powered soul mojito with fresh lime and mint leaves (\$7), a rum and grenadine-infused el presidente with a clean bite of pineapple juice and fresh lime juice (\$7).
- **Cachaca!** Unlike many local bars — which substitute vodka or rum for a more tempered taste — Soul crafts its caipirinha (\$8) with the woody, bold-flavored Brazilian sugar-cane distilled spirit.
- **Dad's sangria:** Puerto's father crafted the very secret recipe for Soul's smooth, refreshing and flavorful sangria (\$6 glass/\$27 pitcher). "My father wasn't born in Spain, so it's a very Cubanized version of sangria," Puerto says. Ask what's in the popular, wickedly potent recipe — besides three unnamed wines, fresh fruit and ice — and Puerto doesn't budge. "Ancient Cuban secret!"
- **Amarula!** The creamy South African liqueur made from the fruit of the marula tree brings a caramel-like sweetness to the brandy- and Kahlua-infused signature cocktail soul de cuba (\$10) and Cuban coffee-blended cafe social (\$8).
- **Try the rums:** Puerto loves sipping rums. So Soul stocks more than a dozen from Guyana, Guatemala, Anguilla, Trinidad, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, St. Croix and Mexico. My favorite? A glass of caramel-flavored Matusalem Clasico over ice (\$6), which goes down smooth and invigorating.

Reach Derek Paiva at dpaiva@honoluluadvertiser.com.