

Several Peruvian rotisserie chicken restaurants have joined Charlotte's culinary scene in recent years. Costa Rican rotisserie chicken, however, has been a staple in the Montford neighborhood for decades. The Roasting Company — more commonly known as **RoCo** — opened its doors at its original location in 1991 and hasn't looked back since.

"A friend of mine was traveling to Costa Rica a lot and fell in love with its rotisserie chicken," **RoCo** owner Doug Bell told CharlotteFive. "He wanted to bring it back to Charlotte, but he wasn't in the restaurant business. I had the restaurant experience, so we teamed up and The Roasting Company was born."

As it turns out, Bell — who grew up in Charlotte — had quite a lot of restaurant experience. "I worked in restaurants throughout high school and college. After college, I was managing a restaurant in Atlanta, but I wanted to come back to Charlotte and open my own place," Bell said.

"Our space was small and people loved us off the bat, but it took a while to grow. The Observer's food critic, Helen Schwab, gave us a good review, and that really helped," Bell said. "Our original menu was simple: chicken, tacos and a few sides." Schwab's article from December 1991 agrees: "The Roasting Company focuses on the basics, not the frills, and in this case the basics are rotisserie chickens and fresh vegetables," she wrote.

Roasting Company has been serving Charlotte since 1991. The restaurant menu has grown over the years from chicken, tacos and a few sides to include wings, chicken salad, wraps and bowls.

Growing the menu

More than three decades later, The Roasting Company still serves plenty of chicken and sides — but the menu has grown extensively. The Carolina Pork Bowl offers rice, pulled pork, baked beans, slaw, hot honey and chicharrones, while the Kale & Avocado Salad consists of kale, arugula, cotija cheese, avocado, grape tomatoes, toasted walnuts and cucumbers.

Some menu items, such as the Chicken & Black Bean Combo, were inspired by customers who ordered items a la carte and mixed them together. Bell's favorite dish is the Monterey Wrap (pulled rotisserie chicken, rice, black beans, onions, pickled jalapeños and queso in a sundried tomato tortilla), however that's not his biggest temptation. "I love anything with queso on it," Bell said. "I developed that queso recipe when I was running a restaurant called the San Antonio Taco Company in Nashville."

RoCo-08712.jpg Jaco Wings at Roasting Company are barbecue-teriyaki flavored.

Bell is particularly proud of **RoCo**'s sauces, including jaco sauce, a barbecue-teriyaki sauce named after picturesque Jaco Beach in Costa Rica. There's also tico sauce, which is akin to the Costa Rican Lizano sauce — tico is a nickname for a Costa Rican. "We developed these sauces back when they were hard to find — before Amazon was widespread," Bell said.

A dozen years ago, **RoCo** expanded its drink menu, as well. "About the time Montford became a popular night spot, we added a full bar. But we wanted to remain a restaurant first with a bar," Bell said. Now, **RoCo** offers more than a dozen beers on tap, as well as a fully stocked bar.

Gaining popularity

About 10 years ago, The Roasting Company started rebranding as both The Roasting Company and **RoCo**. "The Roasting Company was a mouthful, and I learned from my nieces and nephews that the younger generation was calling us **RoCo**," Bell said. "It was entirely organic and customer driven."

Turns out, **RoCo** has attracted the attention of some well-known Charlotteans, too. Author Kathy Reichs

mentioned The Roasting Company in one of her books. Retired Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly ate the Buffalo Chicken Wrap every week of the team's storied 2015 season — and the one week he missed, the Panthers had their sole loss of the season. "We sent tico sauce to Denver so that the team could have a taste of RoCo before the Super Bowl," Bell said.

RoCo-06912.jpgThe indoor dining area at Roasting Company on Montford.

In recent years, **RoCo** has opened locations in Plaza Midwood and Rock Hill. The Plaza Midwood location was forced to close in 2021 due to development in the area. Bell is interested in opening a new Plaza Midwood location, but isn't in a rush. For now, he's content marinating and rotisserie locally raised, hormone-free chickens and serving fresh food to old fans and newcomers alike.

The Roasting Company

Location: 1521 Montford Dr, Charlotte, NC 28209

Neighborhood: Montford/Madison Park

Location: 122 S Oakland Ave, Rock Hill, SC 29730

Neighborhood: Rock Hill

Menu

Cuisine: Costa Rican rotisserie chicken, Southern, Tex Mex

Hours: Monday through Sunday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m.

To order: dine in or order online for takeout.

CITATION (APA STYLE)

Freeman, P. (2022, September 12). RoCo's Costa Rican rotisserie chicken remains a hit three decades later in Charlotte. *Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC)*. Available from NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current: <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy141.nclive.org/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/18C7C7D437CB4B70>.

Copyright (c) 2022 The Charlotte Observer