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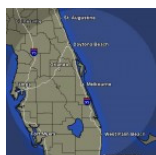
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Restaurant Review: Mexican dishes dazzle at Cantina Laredo

Heather McPherson | FOOD

April 12, 2009

Just when you think they couldn't squeeze any more restaurants on Orlando's Restaurant Row, the Dellagio complex rises to the occasion along Sand Lake Road.

Indeed, when you enter along the back side of the development your car heads up a slight incline into a concentrated venue of shops and eateries. Many businesses are still a work in progress, but at the top of the curve you will find the entrance to Cantina Laredo. Put the car in park and prepare yourself for some of the best gourmet Mexican food to hit Orlando.

Start with the top-shelf guacamole (\$9.49). It's prepared tableside with fresh avocados, tomatoes, red onion, seeded jalapenos, cilantro and spices. While your server mashes and mixes, sample the two salsas on the table. The tomato salsa is fine and dandy, but the roasted tomatillo concoction is fabulous, from the aroma to the way it plays off the crisp corn chips. There's nothing like fresh guac, though; this preparation was easily shareable among four diners.

We also tried the Oaxaca quesadillas *con hongos* (\$12.99), a cheesy pressing of wild mushrooms and peppers in a flour tortilla.



Heather McPherson

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For entrees, the enchiladas Veracruz (\$12.29) came lightly stuffed with chunks of tender chicken breast, fresh spinach and Monterey Jack cheese. It was topped with tomatillo sauce and a bit of Cotija cheese. The individual flavors were well-defined; it was my favorite of the entrees.

Pescado del dia (\$25.49) is the fresh-catch choice — we caught sea bass on our visit. Nicely seared, the large portion of fish was sweet, juicy and perfectly cooked. The tacos *cascabel* (\$14.79) featured sauteed chicken dressed and tucked into small soft corn tortillas. The marinated onions and Cotija cheese cooled the potent kick from these tacos. *Cascabel*, which means "little rattle," gets its name from the sound of the seeds in the dried chili at the heart of this medium-heat condiment.

The enchiladas *de espinaca* (\$10.99), mushroom enchiladas with sautéed spinach and Monterey Jack

cheese, were topped with velvety sour cream poblano sauce.

The sauteed vegetables served on the side with most entrees deserve a mention. They are no casual afterthought — so eat your vegetables. The chef's choice mix of fresh veggies (green beans and sweet peppers on one visit) are crisp-tender with just a hint of olive oil.

For dessert, the apple crepes (\$5.99) were topped with cajeta sauce (a luscious ribbon of caramel), Kahlua, Grand Marnier and toasted almonds. As the vanilla ice cream on the side melted a bit, a wonderful liqueur-laced sauce for the crepes was created as well.

But the Mexican brownie (\$5.99) is a showstopper. The 2-inch brownie is served in a hot skillet in a sizzling brandy butter that eventually caramelizes on the iron surface. Scoop brownie, ice cream and go for the burn.

Everything on the menu is available for takeout, but I can't imagine not wanting to take a table and enjoy the ambience and excellent service.