

Fiesta Time: Take a Tour Through Cantina Laredo

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Once the cooler weather kicks in and it starts getting dark by 5 p.m., I've got one thing on my mind: a warm-weather vacay. When jetting off to paradise isn't an option, try escaping to a new dining destination in town; margaritas abound. Texas transplant [Cantina Laredo](#) (508 N. State St., 312-955-0014) recently opened its first Illinois-based location — and who would have guessed we were on the list after the UAE and UK. While Cantina Laredo is a chain, its "modern Mexican" cuisine is anything but the Chi Chi's food of yesteryear. See for yourself — and taste later.



Designed by Weiss Architects, Cantina Laredo was built from the ground up on the corner of State and Illinois in the River North neighborhood. With the first floor taking over 12,300 square feet and the second floor 6,100 square feet, the space is large enough to feed a Mexican army — or a pack of hungry Chicagoans. Sadly, we'll have to wait until next year to take advantage of the outdoor patio and rooftop deck.

Passionate about Mexican cuisine and culture, executive chef Larry Sinclair found his niche after working as the culinary partner for P.F. Chang's China Bistro for seven years. Sinclair transferred from Cantina's Nashville location to lead the kitchen here in Chi-town. He sources many of his ingredients locally from 5 Rabbit Brewing, Goose Island, North Shore Distillery, City Fresh Market, Pastoral, and Fox and Obel.



Not your average taco stand tacos, there are six distinct selections to choose from. The tacos de pescado (\$13.99) are made with mahi mahi, marinated vegetables, queso fresco, and chipotle aioli.



A slightly healthier twist on a traditional favorite, the enchiladas de avocado (\$12.29) are made with avocado and artichokes topped with tomatillo sauce and served on a bed of spinach. Don't worry. For all you nonveggie fans, there are heartier meat and seafood options too.

For a more traditional dish, try the carnitas (\$20.49), braised pork shanks topped with a chipotle-wine sauce. Along with a bevy of margaritas (casa rita, cinco rita, mango, pomegranate), Cantino Laredo also offers mojitos (from strawberry to superfruit), specialty cocktails, and a variety of beer, wine, and tequila offerings.



Late night out with friends or not in the mood for a large meal? The small plate lounge menu is unique to the Chicago location, boasting over 20 choices such as top-shelf guacamole, ceviche, mini tacos, and flatbreads with a Mexican twist.

Cantina Laredo is open for lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch (think chicken fajita omelet and huevos rancheros).