



CHORIZO TACOS



CHIPS, SALSA, AND MARG



CAMARONES AL CHIPOTLE

# Mixteca Grill & Agave House

By Danny Fairchild

Mixteca Grill & Agave House? What the heck is an agave house? I don't know either. My meager research turns up nothing. If it's a thing, it's beyond my ken. Officially, anyway. But with just a few context clues, however, we can clearly surmise that by agave... they mean tequila. Probably some other agave-based spirits too, but c'mon. We're all speaking the same language, and it translates to "tequila." Ergo, an "agave house" is a sheltered area where you can drink tequila. And let's just follow it to its natural conclusion. An agave house is a sheltered area where you can drink margaritas.

Oh! That got your attention, didn't it?

At first glance, Mixteca seems like the cozy Mexican restaurants you love. Everything from the ice-cold margs right down to being told in no uncertain terms that the plates are very hot, so be careful. And if that's what you're in the mood for, then you've found your place. The food and the drinks are all excellent. It's very family friendly.

But I can't help but pick up that they kind of want you to party there, too. The bar is beautiful and very well stocked. And frequently featured on social media. And separated from the main dining room. Seriously, though. When you first walk in, it looks like there's about four tables and a huge bar and nothing else. But rest assured, there's plenty of seating. So

yeah! Bring your sloppy kiddos for some quesadillas. But also bring your sloppy friends out celebrating someone's promotion. Be responsible, of course, but aside from that, get on your margs, get set, GO!

Because the margs are good! And plentiful! The sizes are regular, jumbo, small pitcher, large pitcher. So... if you want... it can be THAT kind of night. Margaritas are about the only way I can drink tequila. Had a bad night of ill-advised professions of love and pregnancy scares. Anyway, moving on.

So you get your chips and salsa like you do. Isn't it so comforting knowing they're on the way? You know damn well it's so that you'll order something to wash down the salty deliciousness, but so what? I'll walk into that trap willingly. They arrive at your table almost immediately after you sit down: a little tiny carafe of salsa to pour into a wee dipping bowl and deliciously warm and toasty corn chips. I've good things to report on the salsa front. It's not the thin stuff where you'd swear it's just from a can of spicy V8. Nor the superchunk version where it feels like you're eating half a raw onion with each chip. The texture is uniform, but not puree. It clings to your chip without having to scoop it. Unless you want to.

I'd be a fool to not get some guacamole to report to you folks. If you're a guacamole fan, you're in business here. It's not made for you right at the table or any such schtick, but it tastes like it was. Fresh and vibrant with the fattiness of the avocado. Nom! You'd think the serving size was too small for a table, but nope! Lots of flavor packed into that guac. It's perfectly portioned.

Next up, I got a trio of chorizo tacos. Chorizo, in case you've been culinarily asleep, is a type of Mexican sausage. I fell in love with it as a young buck working behind the meat counter at a Fareway. Now I make my own from time to time. And then try not to touch my own eyes for the rest of the day because gaaaaaaah!

These tacos are of the street variety. No sour cream or other such supercillicities. Just chorizo on a tortilla (I chose corn) with onions and cilantro (optional). The problem with corn tortillas is structural. Damn things fall apart so easily that most places double up on the corn tortilla. And if they skimp on the fillings, the whole ratio is out of whack. Somehow... I suspect alchemy... Mixteca made my tacos each with a single corn tortilla. And none of them fell apart in my hands. And I know they did something special because my entrée came with corn tortillas, and those were a bit more crumbly like I'm used to. I think they fry it up a little bit. Just a little. Not enough to make them hardshell, just to... I don't know... cure them? Tan them? Honestly, I don't know.

Shrimp is my favorite thing to get at Mexican restaurants. Throw the word "camarones" on a menu, and you'll catch my eye. It's as fun to say as it is to eat. I chose the Camarones al Chipotle (Chipotle Shrimp) because A. "Chipotle" is ALSO as much fun to say as it is to eat. And, B. Shrimp is so dang easy to overcook. So it was a good test for my purposes. If they don't overcook your shrimp, you can certainly trust them with your chicken or beef. Perfectly cooked shrimp just kind of bursts. Kind of. Know what I mean? Like, one second, it's this thing that has form and potential, and then you bite into it, and suddenly, all that potential is realized on your taste-buds, and that aforementioned form was merely something from which it yearned to be released. That was my experience at Mixteca. Perfectly. Done. Shrimp. And that chipotle sauce just opens things up in your nose and at the back of your mouth. Bringing flavors together that are smoky and tangy and earthy and briny. More, please.

And if that doesn't sound like the fajitas, burritos, enchiladas, etc. you're used to, don't be scared. All those classics are there in force. But even those can get fancy if you want. Take, for example, a fajita dish they call the Molcajete Special. It's skirt steak, chicken, shrimp, and onions served

up sizzling in a lava rock bowl... topped with Mixteca's special sauce, cheese, and avocado. You know how when you're at a Mexican restaurant and you say to yourself, "Who ordered fajitas?! That smells good!" That's not a question with the Molcajete Special. People are going to know who ordered that work of art.

As a more recent business to open, I trusted that the bathrooms would be new and clean. My trust was rewarded. Relieve yourself at ease.

All chewed and swallowed, Mixteca is immediately one of my favorite places for Mexican cuisine around these parts. In a parts where we have no dearth of good Mexican cuisine options. I can drink margaritas closer and therefore safer to home in Dubuque, but I promise you that the food is worth the trip.

Way to be, Mixteca Grill & Agave House! ■

## Mixteca Grill & Agave House

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