

## Bull's eye

### Centro targets the union of Latin and domestic

by Clay Fong

**H**anging above the front door of Boulder's **Centro Latin Kitchen & Refreshment Palace**, there's a striking pop-art painting. Part of this illustration depicts a number of revolutionary types, including one fellow resembling Subcomandante Marcos, the enigmatic and masked Mexican rebel. In stark contrast, another figure bears a striking resemblance to everybody's favorite comic book capitalist, Richie Rich. The juxtaposition of these ideologically opposed figures prompted the disturbing thought that Richie Rich would likely be the first against the wall if revolutionaries ever got their hands on him, and restaurant reviewers would likely follow close behind.

As my friend Andrew and I leafed through the brunch menu, I hoped Centro's pairing of Latin American influences with domestic standbys, such as eggs Benedict, were a more successful pairing than that of Zapatista and comic strip billionaire. Given that it was a brunch crowd, we espied more families than one might see on a Friday evening when potent mojitos and caipirihnas are flowing more freely. The bright earth tones and eclectic music selections, including a cut from Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*, contributed to an elegant, but comfortable atmosphere. Our attentive servers further added to this sentiment.

The weekend day menu consists of appetizers, tacos and both lunch and breakfast plates. Appetizers fell into both sweet and savory categories, including such selections as a mango, banana and kiwi fruit cocktail or Caesar salad. I began my meal with one of the savory choices, a \$4 cup of black bean soup.

Centro's refined interpretation differs from more rustic versions, but this isn't to its detriment.

Hearty and velvety smooth, the product of careful cooking and pureeing, this soup had a consistently peppery flavor. A garnish of plantain chunks and tangy house-made crema added welcome taste and textural contrast. Meaty habanero-dusted shrimp, both spicy and meaty, provided a final note that elevated each element of the soup.

Andrew and I also shared an order of the chunky avocado salsa. Less constructed than an artfully prepared guacamole, this salsa consisted of hefty bits



**Centro Latin Kitchen & Refreshment Palace**

950 Pearl St., Boulder / 303-442-7771

of perfectly ripe fruit and the familiar onion and lime. We had to enlist the help of a fork

to break down the avocado into manageable pieces that we scooped up with the plentiful and crisp tortilla chips.

Where this dish appears to differ from a typical guacamole is found in the fact that in the usual preparation, indifferent avocado can be doctored up with citrus juice, peppers and spices. However, Centro's version, which puts the generous portions of avocado squarely in the spotlight, won't permit other ingredients to mask the quality of the fruit. Fortunately, the avocado's fla-

vor and texture were exceptional, and evoked a summer's breeze on a dreary winter afternoon.

For a main course, I had the \$8 enfrijoladas, also known as enfrijoladas, a Mexican speciality most commonly associated with Oaxaca. Like the red or green salsa-infused chilaquiles, this dish features tortillas soaked in a liquid medium — in this case, black bean sauce. When our server came by on one of her many checks to see how we were doing, I asked about the sauce. She informed me that it was actually the same as the soup. As one can guess, this was filling fare, and the addition of an egg and a slab of salmon, cooked to a perfect medium-rare, made it capable of satisfying the most voracious appetites. While this dish is not the apex of sophistication, it's a winning interpretation of Latin comfort food, humble yet satisfying.

Returning to the idea of juxtaposition, Andrew had the \$11 poached eggs with masa cakes. A Latin-inflected eggs Benedict, this dish came with smoked salmon instead of Canadian bacon, and the Hollandaise had the bite of smoked chipotle peppers. Spinach provided a vegetable riposte to the entrée's richness. While this dish won't make die-hard Benedict fans swear off the original, it's still a successful melding of influences.

Centro, unlike the jarring painting above its door, skillfully blends influences both foreign and domestic when it comes to its weekend brunch menu. A cheerfully inviting ambience, moderate prices and selections that would appeal to both the sophisticated sensibilities of Richie Rich and the humbler aspirations of Subcomandante Marcos make this a destination worth exploring. ②

Respond: letters@boulderweekly.com