

Title:

Taléo restaurant is something special

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Summary:

Its classic Mexican recipes blend with contemporary California cuisine at the Irvine eatery.

By Andrew Horan

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Article Body:

I could barely get any work done the hour after I returned from lunch at Taléo Mexican Grill in

People kept interrupting me, seeking wisdom about this good food they were hearing about.

In that hour, my lunch companion Brenda couldn't stop telling folks about the fresh ingredients

She just couldn't remember the restaurant name.

Thus the traffic to my desk.

''What's the name of that place you went for lunch?'' Rebecca asked. ''Can you give me the address?

''Hey, Andrew, where did you take our boss for lunch?'' Neil said. ''I'm heading out for a drive

Perfect is a hard label to live up to, but our lunch was certainly grand, and the best of three

In the course of two dinners and that lunch, friends and I tasted our way through entrees and

A ceviché appetizer (\$10) was peppery, but not overpowering. The chicken in my wife's molé poblan

The best entree was my chile relleno (\$12). Wrapped in a light, tempura-like batter, the Anaheim

Oh, and the margaritas (\$7) were pretty good. (Though my personal favorite, for a variety of reasons

These meals weren't all perfect, mind you. The filet meat in the tacos was generally buttery,

Still, you can see and taste that something special is happening at Taléo.

''This is the way we eat in Mexico,'' founder Nic Villarreal said. He wanted a place that was

Villarreal opened Taléo in July after renovating an abandoned Left at Albuquerque location in

He brought along a decade of experience working at Houston's, including its Gulfstream in Newport

It's very clubby, yet open and airy in a very accessible, Houston's sort of way.

Villarreal built a management team with similar experience, and a chef, Jose Acevedo, with whom

They all gathered in Villarreal's Hermosa Beach kitchen to test the recipes. He kept hearing a

'' 'If you do a little more of this, it'll be better,' Jose kept saying. And God almighty, the

Those touches were on display at lunch. Take the seabass (\$15), cooked with a yellow molé -- r
We kept asking our server about it, and he told us about the ingredients, the six hours it tak
Then he surprised us with a smart touch.

''You should taste this,'' he said, materializing after our meal with a ramekin full of red mo
Then we ordered dessert, tres leches (\$7). It's Acevedo's take on the traditional pan de leche
Wow.

White cake infused with condensed milk, cream and topped with hand-whipped cream. Moist, rich,
I asked Neil if he made it out to Taléo for drinks that night.

''We did, and we had food, too,'' he said. ''It was good. Very good.''

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