

# Mexican cafe serves country-fresh eats heaped with local vegetables, meat and poultry

## RESTAURANT REVIEW

By Lee Braymen-Cleary  
The Southwest Portland Post

Last week I overheard friends say Southwest Portland lacks a restaurant up to their “eat-locally” standards. That’s not true, I yearned to blurt. Instead, I suggested Hillsdale’s Verde Cocina (Green Kitchen). “Spring’s not here yet, but they’ve put out their sidewalk tables. Get some early March sun,” I enthused.

Recently named one of the top 25 Mexican restaurants in Portland, this café has offered three succulently healthful Mexican/Northwest fusion squares a day, not to mention a happy hour and Sunday brunch for several years now.

Located at Bertha Station (6446 SW Capitol Highway) emphasis is definitely on the “verde” because Chef Noe Carnica of Ganajuato,

Mexico, embraces the “farm to fork” movement.

Verde Cocina serves country-fresh eats heaped with vegetables, meat and poultry raised by Oregon and Washington growers including Gathering Together, Spring Hill, DeNobles, Egg it On, Dancing Chicken, Raymond Kuenzi, Sweet Briar Farm, and Happy Cow farms.

Take, for instance, Carnica’s resourceful *Chorizo y Queso Fundido* appetizer. Waiter Abdon Carnica, the chef’s brother, served me a homey and large mélange of locally made chorizo, melted Oaxaca cheese, pasilla pepper strips, onions, corn, and sweet potatoes alongside trademark handmade *masa tortillas*.

The encased *chorizo* was only moderately spicy. Nor did it resemble harder Spanish *chorizo*. The eatery cured these themselves. It was soft and smooth, like no other sausage I’ve tasted stateside.

Their racier *ceviche* starter boasted a rainbow of faintly marinated carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes and red onions to accompany its lime finished tuna, fresh greens and tortillas.

If a hot and truly spicy appetizer is just the ticket, there is *Panzita del Puerco con Fuego*.

The menu puts it this way: “Chunks of pork belly, sweet and russet potatoes, and onions over greens in our



Sarah Allen and her daughter Lizzie soak up mid-March sun at a Verde Cocina's sidewalk cafe. They are regulars. Sarah, who always orders the cheese quesadilla accompanied by veggies and a bean-garbanzo mash, said "I love Mexican food. This place serves food that's healthy and delicious." Lizzie selected the menu's Paleo Verde with its wide selection of proteins. She specified the chorizo and bacon option for her salsa and wide array of veggies. "This place offers a lot of variety," she said. (Post photo by Lee Braymen-Cleary)

famous Infierno salsa. This dish is HOT!" All of Verde Cocina’s food is moderately priced. This blazer is \$11.

I must say the entire gluten-free menu is not extensive but even offers vegan and Paleo diet options. It include specially blended mole gracing a couple of dishes as well as variations on *carne asada*, *chile rellenos*, *quesadillas*, even hot *chicarrones* made from sautéed tofu.

That menu stretches daily, however, with specials often including seafood. I tried their simply served seafood medley. It was chock full, of course, of vivid veggies as well as clams, salmon, white fish, and shrimp.

The scrumptious, warm-but-not-too-spicy sauce was perfect for sopping up with those handmade tortillas. A small smattering of brown rice leant a *paella* soup effect.

If you want to introduce yourself to this road house nosh by nosh, you can try that indoor/outdoor happy hour from 3:30 to 5 p.m. Garnica’s cocktails

are like no others I’ve tasted.

Take the strawberry margarita: the berry taste predominates but borders on the savory, not sweet. Scrumptious. Then there’s the spicy tamarind margarita with an orange slice. Again, it’s rich, well balanced with tequila but not sweet.

All of my Verde Cocina meals have been served in the upstairs dining area. There streamed and modulated Latin music performed by the likes of Ry Cooder and the Buena Vista Social Club set the scene. The downstairs bar and sidewalk music is louder, bouncier. Take your pick.

Verde Cocina is open from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Mondays through Thursdays and from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Parking and the absence of dinner reservations could pose small bumps in your road to dining pleasure. If you don’t take in happy hour, try dining before 6 p.m. or after 7:30 p.m. Incidentally, if you want early information about a day’s specials, you can phone 503-384-2347.



A modified Paleo creation offered on the day's specials list features New York steak and multiple vegetables including mashed Yukon gold and sweet potatoes. (Post photo by Lee Braymen-Cleary)



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A black and white photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark cardigan over a white top, holding a large handbag.

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