



PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER

Home Is Where the Fresh Guacamole Is

MAMÁ MAYRA'S KITCHEN
SERVES UP MEXICAN CUISINE
FROM THE HEART By Ben Ricker

Hands wrist-deep in *masa harina*, Mayra Medina thinks back to when she was little and her mother worked in a cramped kitchen behind a tiny eatery in Morelia, the city in central Mexico where Medina grew up. The modest *comedor* was so small it didn't even warrant a name. Though the place was a lonely hole in the wall, Medina's mother cooked with the same ardor she applied to preparing meals for her family at home.

After Medina's mom took over the kitchen, more customers lined up every day. The nameless comedor fast became the barrio's favorite, Medina says.

Mamá Mayra's Kitchen, the sunny orange food truck parked on the empty lot at the corner of West 11th Avenue and Grant Alley, is in many ways Medina's tribute to her mother. Six days a week, Medina serves traditional Mexican food (as well as burritos) from a kitchen very much like the one she remembers from her childhood.

Like many restaurants in Eugene, Mamá Mayra's pledges to use local and organic ingredients whenever possible. Where recipes call for animal fat, Medina substitutes coconut and olive oils. But ingredients tell only half the story.

The second half she learned watching her mother. It's simple, Medina says: Cook at work as you would at home.

Tortilla chips pulled fresh out of boiling hot oil seem

CHICKEN
TACOS
WITH MAMÁ
MAYRA'S LIFE-
AFFIRMING
CHIPS AND
SALSA

to bite back with a rewarding crunch. Instead of ladling guacamole from a premade vat, Medina halves an avocado and mashes it to paste with a tablespoon before squeezing lime over it and stirring in fresh-cut cilantro, chopped onion and tomato. Her *tacos al pastor*, served on handmade tortillas, light up your parietal lobe with their citric tang.

It isn't *pastor* without pineapple, Medina says.

Barely audible *ranchera* songs float from somewhere inside the repurposed trailer to tickle the back of your head. Flowers, lawn ornaments and hanging cacti add cheer to the somewhat ruined terrain.

Scrawled on the back of the menu, a message from Medina herself reads: "*Queremos que se sienta como en casa y le pedimos su paciencia cuando estamos preparando su orden.*" (We hope you to feel at home here and we ask your patience as we prepare your meal.)

Any dish can be made to order. Every meal Medina serves up is one of a kind. Try the same dish twice, on the same ticket even, and the two plates still won't taste quite the same, suggesting the recipes from which she works are more intuited than scripted.

Medina's place has character, which helps underpin the sneaking suspicion that you're a guest in her home, eating food she's proud to serve you, her friend. ■

Mamá Mayra's Kitchen, at 1845 W. 11th Ave., is open weekdays 10:30 am to 6:30 pm and noon to 7 pm Saturday. See its Facebook page for more info.