

Left Coast Siesta

A clipped Mexican-American menu lacks distinction

On a sunny day, the patio at Left Coast Siesta is nearly irresistible. The food, however, a little less so.

Either way, you've got to go inside to order. The converted house is festively dressed, with chili peppers everywhere and corrugated tin siding on the ceiling, and it's ringed by hundreds of bottles of hot sauce. Indeed, hot sauce delivery almost seems to be Left Coast Siesta's *raison d'être* — it's how the food wakes up.

Before the counter, a menu board appears to offer more than it really does. With a lot of words and categories it boasts only a few items: burritos, tacos, a taco salad and enchiladas. Save for chips and salsa and a simplified children's menu, it's really just those four — all of which essentially are reconfigured versions built from the same pool of ingredients.

"I'm going to ask you a million questions," said the jovial counterperson.

"A million questions?!" I joust.

"Don't worry," she said. "It's going to be worth it. It's amazing."

In terms of customization — and caring for the dietary needs of my dining compatriots — she was right. In terms of taste, well, again, a little less so.

I ordered two enchiladas (\$6.75), and we began going through the options. I went for red sauce (as one of the genetically cilantro adverse, green was out of the question). I'd have one with spicy chicken,

one with shredded beef, and one of each tortilla, white and blue corn. On top I'd have everything: cheese, sour cream, olives and onions. With it I'd take an order of chips and guacamole (\$3.50).

I took my number and headed back to the patio, but not before lingering over the grand collection of hot sauces. There are bottles and bottles of them, from the well-trodden Cholulas and Tabascos to small-run craft rarities to the atomic varieties. Indeed, a good number of those on the rack were flat out nuclear — forget habanero, think ghost chilies. (Many such bottles featured an extra "hot" label added by the house, but I can't help but wonder how many meals have been decimated by a few drops of these absurd sauces by unsuspecting teens with grinning intention.) And though in my civilian life I am a veteran collector and voracious consumer of hot sauces, as the Mouth I make a point to abstain

— I feel it's best to taste the foods as prepared by the kitchen, with as little outside tinkering as possible.

The enchiladas at Left Coast, however, cried out to be spiced! The red sauce was dark and smoky. Combined with the cheese and sour cream, it needed something bright (lettuce and tomatoes would've helped in this regard). Underneath the red sauce, the color of the tortillas was unimportant, as they tasted similar. So too did the chicken and beef. Each was shredded at the same consistency, and featured the same spicing — with chile peppers, garlic, onion, cumin, oregano and other spices. That list might lead you to believe that the meats at Left Coast were delicately labored over. I found the opposite to be true: They were very simply prepared, with little or nothing to make them stand out.

And that's kind of the story of Left Coast writ large: At no point in the menu did I find a singular, outstanding taste. Sure, the restaurant professes to use untainted ingredients — the back of the menu goes into detail about the organic sources. But just because ingredients come from pure or sustainable places does not mean their mixing is finely tuned. In a lot of cases, I felt as if the offerings were sim-



The Mouth thought the enchiladas at Left Coast Siesta needed more spice.

ply the product of pairing slightly more expensive grocery store cans. Missing was something — anything — to make the recipes their own.

Left Coast Siesta isn't quite traditional Mexican-American fare, and it doesn't pivot toward anything new. It just is. And the little spicing to be found is duplicated across the menu. A mix of chile powder, cumin, garlic, onion and sometimes cayenne can be found in the chicken, the

beef, the beans (both the black beans and the "refried," each made without any lard or animal products) and the salsa. All that adds up to a great deal of sameness. I guessed what the Taco Salad (\$6.75) would taste like beforehand and hit it right on the nose. The veggies were fresh, and the beans had that familiar (but not particularly enjoyable) profile.

The guacamole was highly disappointing, which is odd, because just mashing up a fresh avocado without adding a single thing would've been better than the extremely salty green paste we received.

Still, for all my kvetching, there is some value for health-conscious vegetarians (who don't mind their food a bit on the bland side), as well as for starving bellies. Left Coast Siesta's Big Burrito (\$6.50) is truly enormous. The size of a football, it weighs somewhere in the neighborhood of a pound-and-a-half. I tried one with tequila-lime chicken, and while the zing of the lime was mild, the addition of lettuce and tomato felt like bits of treasure in comparison to my dark enchiladas. Adjacent to me, a table of teenagers devoured the entirety of their burritos. And that made a whole lot of sense. But those seeking Mexican food a little more delicate, balanced and memorable are going to have to find a different patio.

mouth

OF THE COLUMBIA

COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photo by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • mouth@coastweekend.com

Left Coast Siesta

Rating: ★ ★ ★

288 Laneda Ave., Manzanita

503-368-7997

leftcoastsiesta.com

HOURS: 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday to Saturday, and 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday.

PRICE: \$ — Everything on the menu is less than \$8

SERVICE: Smiling faces and quick turnaround

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: Plenty

DRINKS: Bottled soda, beer

KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ poor
- ★★ below average
- ★★★ good & worth returning
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region