

# Capital dining *Tequilibrío*

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Perhaps inspired by Tita, the earthy heroine of Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, matriarchal chef Rosalba López of Tequilibrío Bar & Restaurant says love and tenderness are her secrets for successful cooking. Open just a few months, this inviting restaurant in La Floresta offers authentic Mexican specialties the owners hope will broaden people's perception of Mexican cuisine.

"We don't want to offer customers the typical combo platters found in most Mexican restaurants in Caracas," says Francisco Ramírez, Rosalba's son and a partner of Tequilibrío. So while Tequilibrío offers the *burritos* and *tacos* that Venezuelans have come to believe typifies Mexican food, customers will also discover a delectable world that includes *pellizcadas*, *panchos*, *molcajete*, *tampiqueñas*, and *cachetadas*—authentic dishes seldom seen around these parts.

"Many of our dishes are totally new to people, and they usually order something familiar the first time they visit," Ramírez says. "But then they see dishes being served at other tables and they ask, 'What is that?', 'That looks good', and suddenly they're trying all kinds of new things."

On one of my visits, I brought along a Mexican friend to verify the menu's authenticity. We ended up gorging on *panchos* (nachos with roasted beef), several varieties of mini *tacos*, the mouth- and eye-watering Aztec soup (chicken consommé with tortilla strips, cheese, avocado chunks, onion, cream, and chili), and an order of *cachetadas*, rounds of squash topped with seasoned ground beef and

## Tequilibrío Bar & Restaurant

Ave. Francisco de Miranda in the Banco del Orinoco building, in front of C.C. Centro Plaza and beside Burger King, La Floresta. (212) 285-4210.

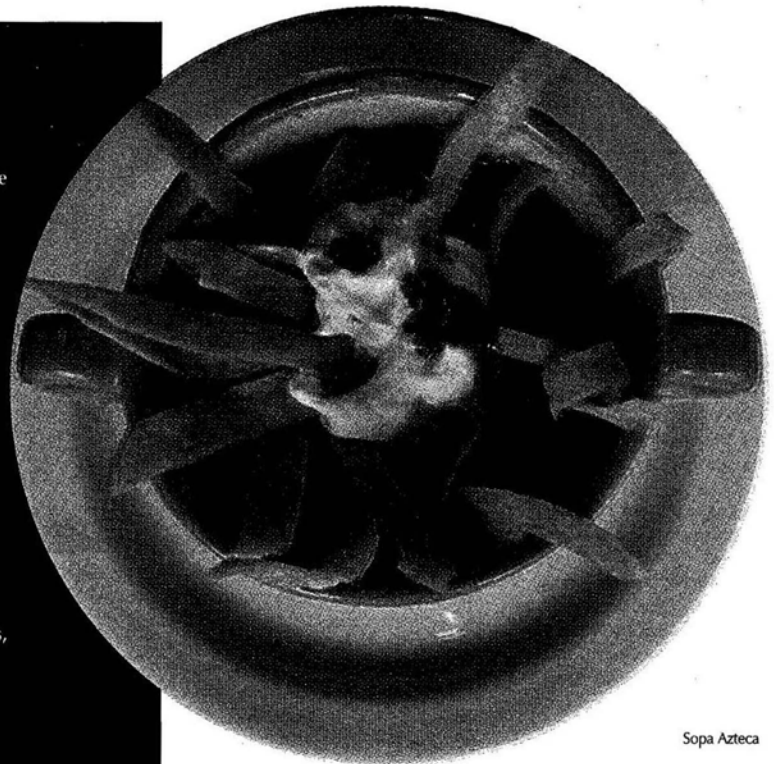
Atmosphere: Authentic regional Mexican fare in a bright, informal setting.

Hours: Monday through Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 2 a.m.; Saturday, 1 p.m. to 2 a.m.; Sunday, 1 to 11:30 p.m.  
Kitchen closes at midnight Thursday through Saturday.

Price range: Assorted appetizers, Bs.2,750 to Bs.7,300; entrees, Bs.7,200 to Bs.11,300.

Valet parking: Yes

Forms of payment: Visa, MasterCard, American Express, debit cards, cash, dollars, Mexican pesos, traveler's checks, Cestaticket, and Sodexo Pass.



Sopa Azteca

with a sauce made from bitter orange, tomato, onion, and annatto—I did swoon over the *molcajete mar y tierra*. This house specialty served in a stone mortar has strips of beef, chicken, shrimp, octopus, squid, onion, peppers, and cheese.

The combination of so many different land and water creatures struck me as odd, at first, but the flavors complemented each other beautifully and the presentation drew curious stares from nearby tables. To really get the most out of your visit, turn yourself over to the suggestions of the serving staff, try the daily special, or choose something from the menu you've never heard of before.

The owners imported most of the rustic-style furnishings and decorative accents of carved fruit and religious icons directly from Mexico, and vibrant splashes of color keep the atmosphere festive without erring on the cliché side of the decor spectrum.

And as if good honest cooking weren't enough of a draw, mariachi bands and live music spice things up at Tequilibrío Thursdays through Saturdays, turning the restaurant into a full-tilt fiesta with tequila-fueled patrons shimmering between tables.

Tequilibrío can be reserved for special events, Christmas parties, birthdays, and more. The prices are quite reasonable, and no visit would be complete without a taste of the restaurant's signature cocktail, a fruity, tequila-spiked concoction that's as dangerous as it is delicious.

## Recipe for *Molcajete de Mariscos*

(Two people)

### Ingredients:

50 grams red snapper, cut in small pieces  
50 grams fresh peeled shrimp  
50 grams octopus, cooked and cut into pieces  
cilantro  
olive oil  
salt and pepper to taste

### For the red sauce:

5 small tomatoes, whole  
1 small onion, chopped  
1 head of garlic, whole

### Preparing the red sauce:

Boil the onion, tomatoes, and *unpeeled* garlic in a pot with just enough water to cover them. When soft, remove the skin from the tomatoes and garlic, and liquefy them in a food processor or blender with some of their own juice. Strain and return to the pot.

Add salt and pepper to taste and cook until the mixture thickens.

In a separate skillet, sauté the shrimp, octopus, and red snapper in olive oil. Add the red sauce and cook until the seafood and snapper are thoroughly cooked and the sauce reduces somewhat. Serve in a stone mortar and garnish with chopped coriander, accompanied by white rice and steamed vegetables.



Molcajete de Mariscos

melted cheese. Now my friend didn't exactly start crooning a *corrida* right there at the table, but the happy tears in her eyes gave me the distinct impression the meal met with her approval.

We soldiered on through the main courses, and though I was less than dazzled by my order of *pollo pibil*—chicken breasts