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Home > Entertainment > Dining

## A stylish approach enchants at La Encantada

### Topics

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Special to the Tribune  
January 3, 2008

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First impressions: La Encantada's friendly storefront and mustard-colored awning is a welcome sight along a busy strip of North Avenue. Exposed brick, paintings and photographs hip the place up, giving it the look of a gallery. Walls painted mustard and a vibrant blue warm the large dining room.

On the plate: Mexican cuisine, but with a slightly different take, and chefs who make an effort to plate the dishes in an attractive way. Several salads feature produce beyond basic lettuce and tomato, such as a spinach salad dressed with flour de jamaica (hibiscus) dressing and a side salad done with romaine and bright bell peppers dressed with a choice of avocado, guava, mango or vinegar dressing. Appetizers include flautas and picaditas (small masa patties topped with salsa, cheese and avocado), queso fundido (with Mexican sausage, mushrooms or peppers), seafood cocktails (including shrimp ceviche) and a variety of quesadillas. Traditional enchiladas (sauces with mole, verde or roja) are offered with a choice of chicken, spinach or cheese. Chile en nogada, a house specialty, features a poblano pepper stuffed with ground beef, fruit and nuts then topped with a creamy nut sauce. Mexican standards such as chile relleno are on the menu; so are tacos, enchiladas and burritos. Entree platters include beef and chicken options, some grilled, some done with poblano pepper, mole, chipotle or ranchera sauces. Entree platters are served with an interesting selection of side dishes, including sauteed cactus or fresh zucchini with onions, tomato and cheese. The side portions are healthy. A few steak and seafood items top Cheap Eats' budget. At your service: Wait staff was courteous. Our server was eager to

answer any questions, and described the dishes with a hint of pride.

Second helpings: Our party agreed that the quesadillas de huitlacoche (a delicacy made from the fungus that grows on corn) are worth a return trip. The tortillas were crispy, but not overly so and the cheese, corn and mushroom filling melded into quite a buttery-tasting good bite. Pollo asado Oaxaca (moist grilled chicken with chipotle sauce and melted cheese) offered great spice that wowed at first, but eventually mellowed for quite an enjoyable dish. We chose the calabacitas con queso (sauteed zucchini with onions, tomato and cheese) for our side, which amounted to a huge portion of fresh-looking bright zucchini, which was just on the verge of being overcooked but still had a hint of crunch left to it. Our mole dish was served with chopped, grilled skirt steak, which was moist. The dark brown mole was well rounded, with the right amount of spice. We chose beans to accompany this dish, but found the beans lacked any complex flavor.

Take a pass: So sad to report that the baked tortilla chips and salsa were in dire need of salt. The chips were served warm and we welcomed the idea of baked chips, but ended up wanting a little more from them. The freshly prepared mango sorbet soothed the heat from our spicy entrees, but lacked a strong mango flavor.

Thirst quenchers: Choose from margaritas, sangria, beer, wine, pina colodas, mojitos, tequila, Mexican sodas, hot chocolate and tea. Or bring your own bottle of wine for a \$20 corkage fee.

Extras: Delivery and catering service is available. The space also hosts private parties.

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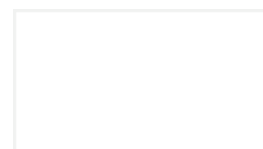
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Price range: Appetizers, \$3-\$10; salads, \$3-\$6; main courses, \$8-\$18; side dishes, \$2-\$4; desserts, \$4-\$6; coffee and soft drinks, \$1.50-\$3.

La Encantada

(3 forks)

3437 W. North Ave.

773-489-5026

Hours: Lunch, noon-3 p.m. Tues.-Sun.; 6-10 p.m. Tues.-Thurs.,

6-11 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 6-9 p.m. Sun. for dinner.

Noise: Conversation-friendly

Other: Meter parking available on North Avenue.

Ratings key: 4 forks, don't miss it; 3 forks, one of the best; 2 forks, very good; 1 fork, good

Reviews are based on anonymous visits; meals are paid for by the Tribune.

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