

NETWORK @ N⁹NE STEAK HOUSE

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WINE & DINE

SIP & SUP with Sarah Levy

MIXTECO GRILL



It's always exciting to see what those who have trained under some of the country's best chefs do with their careers. Chicago's own Grant Achatz and Michael Carlson have proved themselves time and time again, but now we have another new one to watch – Raul Arreola, chef and owner of one of Chicago's truly special Mexican restaurants. Chef Arreola worked under Rick Bayless for twelve years, and now he has an impressive restaurant to call his own: **MIXTECO GRILL**. This quaint BYOB restaurant, which opened in May 2008, dishes out authentic, flavor-bursting Mexican dishes that will truly knock your socks off, and is a little bit easier to get

a reservation at than Topolobombo. The Uchepos Gratinados appetizer features two corn tamales with a creamy poblano pepper sauce, Monterrey dry cheese and esquites (fresh corn flavored with epazote, the pungent leaves from the wormseed plant) and seasonings. The tamales are soft and supple, and I loved every bite of them. The Gorditats de Chilorio is another "spot on" starter – two masa cakes filled with shredded pork chilorio (chilorio is a pork dish originating from the Mexican state of Sinaloa), with ancho chile, onions and orange juice. The most popular entrée, and the one that left me wishing there were more (and not because of the portion size), is the Conchinita Pibil. The slow roasted pork is marinated with anchote (a seed which contributes color and flavor) and sour orange juice, served with black beans, pickled red onions and habanero salsa. It's clear that Raul Arreola's career has lead him to the perfect spot, and he has created a delicious menu based on his experience.

MIXTECO GRILL, 1601 WEST MONTROSE AVENUE, 773.868.1601

TAXIM

Wow, did this restaurant catch me by surprise! I went into the dinner thinking it may be yet another hyped up new restaurant that may or may not be around in a year. The small menu, once again, is filled with words whose meaning I don't understand, and in this case can't pronounce (high school Spanish at least got me through the pronunciation of Mixteco's menu) but whose outcome I was thrilled with. Take the Greek word "revithia" – turns out this is a fancy word for what I know as hummus, featuring pureed chickpeas, garlic, lemon and sautéed fresh green chickpeas. This isn't your average hummus, and it's well-deserving of its fancy name. For hot "meze" (appetizers) try the Melitzanes Tigantes with sautéed baby eggplant, house-made yogurt, garlic and dried mint, all cooked and seasoned to perfection. The Rampopita (and I Googled this word, but no Greek definition popped up... I'm starting to think restaurants are making words up) features a phyllo puff pastry pie filled with a type of wild leek called ramps, green garlic, fresh dills, goat feta. For your main dish the duck gyro is a must order – vertical spit roasted marinated duck, pomegranate glaze, fresh mint, walnut yogurt mousse and pontian pita bread. So, I finally just broke down and called **TAXIM** to find out what "pontian" means and was told that "pontian" pita bread is very thin pita made on a petal dome called a "satz." I couldn't resist asking what "rampopita" means and was told, as I thought, "it is a word of our own creation." Taxim can make up as many words as they'd like, as long as the food continues to be real. Lastly, you must order the Greek coffee. I don't drink coffee (but due to the 70 hour work week behind me and a long night of a friend's birthday celebration ahead of me) I decided to order one, and then another, and then another. The Greek coffee is amazing – with cardamom, sugar and a single estate Ethiopian coffee from Chicago's own Metropolis to boot! **TAXIM**, 1558 NORTH MILWAUKEE AVENUE, 773.252.1558

A MANO



wood burning oven where they're baked. Traditional combinations like the wild mushroom are an obvious choice, but for those of you feeling a bit more adventurous, try the clam pizza – prepared with clams still resting in their shells. The whole roasted fish of the day is a nice and light summer entrée. The fish comes to the table staring right at you, and then the server de-bones it, leaving only its tender meat. The lasagna is outrageous, and I'm not usually a big lasagna person, but Chef John Caputo balances the homemade Bolognese sauce, pasta, meat (beef, pork and veal) and cheese perfectly. Save room for the homemade gelato with flavors like pistachio, chocolate and mascarpone, or for something lighter, try the sorbet – the tangerine is absolutely refreshing.



A MANO, 335 NORTH DEARBORN STREET, 312.629.3500,
WWW.AMANOCHICAGO.COM

Sarah Levy is the president and founder of Sarah's Pastries & Candies, 70 East Oak Street, 312.664.6223, and 111 North State Street, First Floor, 312.781.3004, www.sarahscandies.com. If you have a sip tip or favorite restaurant you'd like reviewed here, email Sarah at sarah@sarahscandies.com.

The team behind the oh-so popular BIN 36 Restaurant Group will win you over once again by offering guests classic Italian dishes in a lively and warm atmosphere. **A MANO** features an open kitchen located right in the middle of the restaurant, appealing to the voyeuristic side in us all. Brian Duncan crafts an excellent wine program, featuring over a dozen wines by the glass and over 100 bottles, as well as a lively drink menu (I had something with tequila in it, which is probably why I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was awesome nonetheless). Start with one of my favorite courses, the salumi and cheese – the tallegio and parmesan tartufo are outstanding. The pizzas are great, due in large part to the

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