



Monday August 20, 2007

It's easy to fall into a Mexican food rut, with every meal delivered by moped from Fresco/Fresh/New Fresco Tortillas (No MSG!). Expand your Mexi-verse: Toloache, opening Thursday.

Helmed by Julian Medina (former exec chef at SushiSamba and 2-starred fish taco mecca Pampano), Toloache is an upscale-festive, two-story Mexican spot that incorporates South American, European and Asian influences -- a rare combo yielding sexually-liberated, socialist tostadas that are also good at math. The tasty starts at the ceviche/guacamole bar, with random avocado additives (mango, quince, Meyer lemon, habanero, Thai basil) and oyster shooters laced with Frida Kahlo Silver tequila, guaranteed to put hair on your...brow. The tacos take things to "eleven" with 12 fillings ranging from Negra Modelo-braised brisket, to caramelized sweetbreads, to dried grasshoppers (which Oaxacans claim are a delicacy, even though everyone knows they just have a grasshopper problem). Entree highlights include enchiladas in dried-fig manteles salsa, and Yucatan-style pork ribs steamed in banana leaf -- a nod to South America, as European-style is steamed in banana hammock.

As for drinks, Toloache's strength isn't innovation, but extensiveness: over 100 tequilas and mezcals -- try them all, and you'll wake up in a rut next to a burning moped, with a headache even MSG couldn't hope to match.

Study the menu, grasshopper