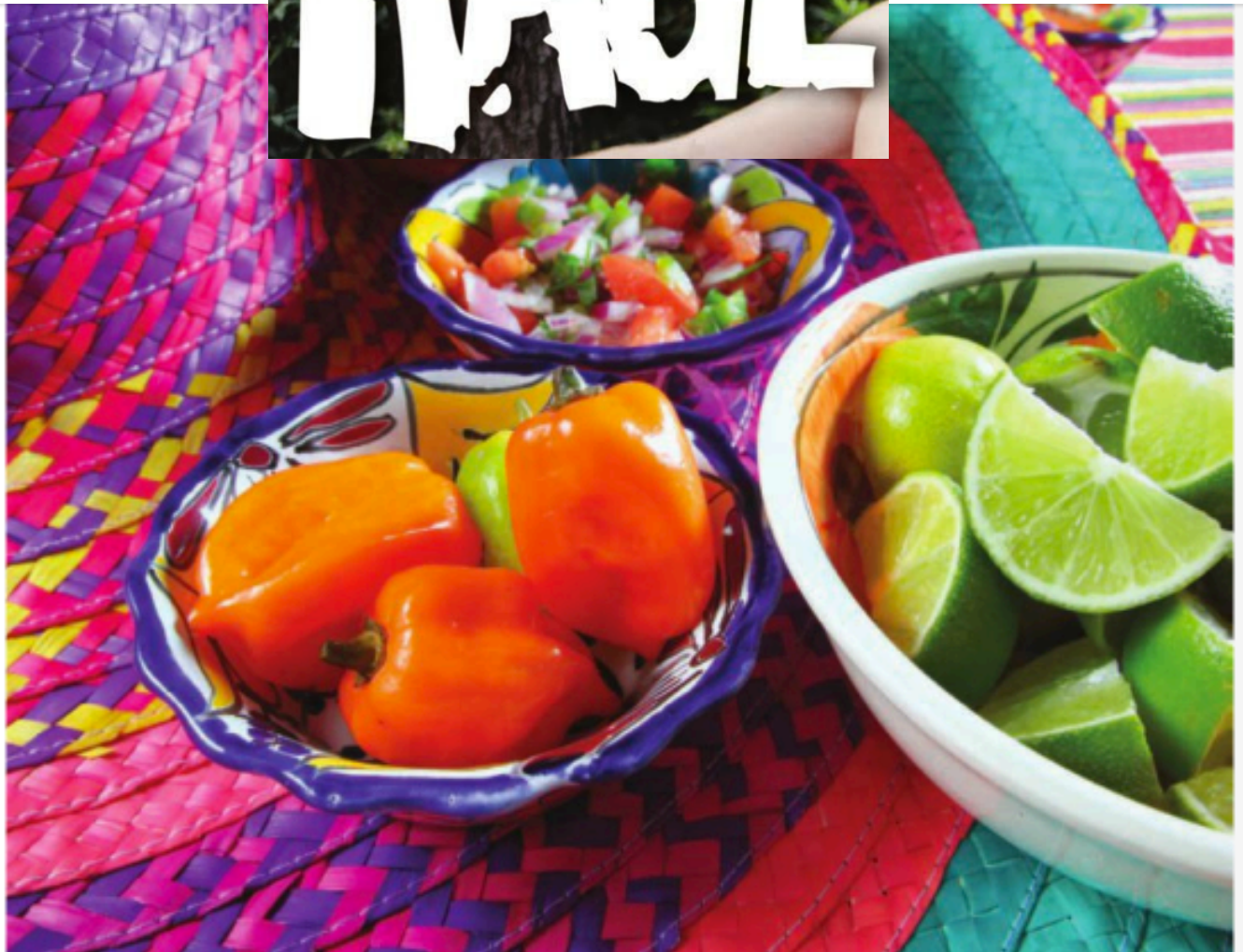


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MEXIMUM EXPOSURE!

by tony reverditto

Los Angeles and Orange County provide an overabundance of LATIN CUISINE, from authentic to classic Americanized Mexican, through the flavors of the Caribbean Islands and South America; an exciting explosion of cultures right at our fingertips—I found three on far corners of our counties. In addition to presenting amazing exotic food, they are successful because of excellent management and a team spirit amongst the crews. Combine those elements with great ambiance and you pretty much have the ultimate getaway dining experience.



SUPERB LATIN FUSION IN THE O.C. **CHA CHA'S LATIN KITCHEN**

Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen is the whole package and one of my new favorites. A fun and tasty dining experience can be had at this treasure, nestled in a wonderful urban village in North Orange County, Brea to be exact. This is one of those times when I can honestly say that everything in this Latin kitchen was pretty much flawless and worth your time venturing to North O.C. for a refreshing adventure in dining. Everything in this wonder is polished; from its lively, yet soothing décor, to the attentive professional staff, right through to the modern fusion cocktails and culinary delicacies.

The dining room was abuzz, everyone was smiling and laughing and it stayed that way the entire time that John and I were there. Our friendly server Sylvia greeted us, who with the rest of the staff did a great job presenting the samplings that were to come—and wow did they come. Cha Cha's has an open kitchen with a clear view into the heart of the restaurant where much of the food is prepared in a brick wood-burning oven and a classic spit-roasted rotisserie. The homemade fire-roasted salsas are quite refined; I thought that the tomatillo was a stand-out. The **Guacamole** had a nice snap, thanks to Serrano chili and lime. **Wood-Fired Queso Fundido** is the ultimate for cheese lovers and the **Chicken Flautas** were muy bueno. We tried a medley of Tacos; carnitas marinated in Coca-Cola—yum, a colossal Mexican shrimp and an awesome portobello mushroom—each mighty in their own right!

Cha Cha's co-owners are true restaurateurs; the adorable Don Myers who opened the first El Torito Grill 20 years ago, among dozens of others and the striking Chef Peter Serantoni, also with a long-standing history in the industry. The two have taken traditional Latin cuisine to a new level and utilize quality seasonal and organic ingredients, transforming them into distinctive thoughtful dishes.

Cha Cha's also has a vast selection of premium tequilas and their top Latin mixologist, Serantoni has created an array of mouth-watering specialty-handcrafted cocktails—some of which I sampled through the evening (see *Tequila with a Twist* for recipes). We started off with the **Sangria Tradicional**, red wine infused with fresh citrus and tropical and orange liqueur fruit; it was so beautiful with a taste to match. There is also an enticing selection of central coast, Spanish and South American wines.

Don and Peter orchestrated every detail of our dining adventure and it was blast. Chef de Cuisine Joseph Martinez kept the magic coming with the succulent **Crab and Shrimp Enchilada** with pesto-habanero sauce—giving fusion a whole new meaning. “**Wood-Oven**” Carnitas were beyond description, but my favorite of the night was the **Fresh Seafood Caldo**, consisting of mahi, shrimp, clams and squid, in saffron-tomato broth with herbs over angel hair pasta. For dessert we indulged in the seductive **Vanilla Bean Flan** and **Chocolate Banana Taquitos**.

Within walking distance to Edwards's multiplex cinemas, Brea Improv and a variety of specialty retail, among other popular downtown destinations.

Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen, 110 W. Birch Street Brea. For reservations call 714.255.1040 or go to chachasbrea.com.



TEQUILAS WITH A TWIST

Quality is often rated as the most important factors in choosing tequila for the perfect margarita, in addition to selecting 100 percent agave tequilas, quality is made also made up of sub-categories: years aged, composite score (awards won & popular reviews), smoothness rating & taste rating. Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen is the winner of “Critics Award” for Best Margarita in Orange County. They house a vast selection of tequilas in the categories of Blanco, Reposado and Anejo united with special handcrafted homemade infusions made with fresh squeezed seasonal fruit juices...

CHA CHA MARGARITA made with Siete Leguas 100 percent Blue Agave, elderflower liqueur, fresh lime and ruby red grapefruit juice.

MANGO-HABANERO MARGARITA, Pueblo Viejo 100 percent Blue Agave, Cointreau, mango, fresh mint and habanero infusion.

PINEAPPLE SMASH Herradura Anejo 100 percent Blue Agave, fresh pineapple juice, Tuaca Vanilla Liqueur and cinnamon.

PRICKLY PEAR MARGARITA, Jose Cuervo Tradicional, prickly pear juice, agave nectar and a float of Gran Marnier.