

# The Drink Tank 455



# Editorial - Everything I do is Fusion

## By Chris Garcia

**Yes, I'm Mexican**, and a few other things. I've always identified as Chicano, but more accurate is to say that I'm multi-racial and multi-ethnic. I've always identified with my dad's side of the family, and that means Ohlone and Mexican.

I also grew up in Silicon Valley in the 1980s and 1990s, and that was a time of food explosions. Indian (which I did not like for decades), Korean (which I loved instantly), Greek, and Vietnamese started popping up, and it was a glorious time.

Me? I ate Mexican food. A *lot* of Mexican food.

Now, when it came to tacos, I had a hierarchy. First was Acapulco, a chain restaurant that was sit-down and delightful for its crispy taco plate. Then was my mom's homemade tacos, where she'd crisp-fry the tortillas herself and serve them piled with ground beef (super salty), cheese, and beans. And then was Taco Bell, whose crunchy tacos are still a favorite to this day, though I've discovered many more taco places in the many years since.

When I got my own place, I discovered that tacos were among the easiest things in the world to cook. Cook meat, maybe some veg, put in a tortilla, and enjoy.

Okay, that's simple, but so am I.

Now, I learned to cook a lot of stuff, three years of food classes in high school, and the pre-Food Network ritual of Saturday morning cooking shows on PBS served me well. While I never understood the whole baking thing, I was in love with cooking stuff, and feeling out the edges of all sorts of international cuisines. Well, dumbed-down versions of things, of course.

I learned Armenian dishes, Russian, German, Chinese, and some random stuff that popped up on cooking shows like Colcannon. Visits to Montreal, and the introduction to the internet in the early 1990s, led me to Poutine.

I clearly remember the first time I made sauerbraten, the famed vinegary German meat dish. It was fall, a perfect time for it, and I spent the day cooking it. It turned out great, and as I was living alone in my little Sunnyvale apartment, I had a ton of leftovers. I had bought noodles to eat with it, but I had also picked up mini-flour tortillas. I think I was planning on doing flautas or something, but it might also have just been because they were cute. The third night I decided that I'd make tacos, and I had some ground beef, but I paused. There was already cooked meat in there, and I had some shredded carrots, some cheese, and a bit of sour cream.

Let's do this!



I cut up some of the sauerbraten into a pan, basically to just warm it up a bit, and then I took it out, tossed a couple of the mini-tortillas in, just to get them soft, and piled the meat on top. Then I added a touch of sour cream, some carrots, and a bit of cheese.

One bite and I was hooked!

I think I finished off the meat that night. This might not have been my first fusion taco, I have a vague memory of using a Whopper as the filling at one point, but it was the one that got me looking in that direction.

There was a food truck revolution in San Jose (and a lot of places!) in the 2005-2010 period. So many started popping up, and locally we had a Korean truck that did bulgogi tacos. I loved the idea and made them myself a few times. The fatty meat, mixed with kimchee and usually a dash of sour cream

and some green onion, or lettuce, made for a very delightful meal. I discovered that Korean pork belly worked just as well. Gochujang chicken makes for a fine taco as well.

I love lamb. It's a delightfully slightly gamey but mostly succulent meat. Lamb tacos started popping up, which were great, but I did a lamb roast for Easter one year for Gen and Evelyn, and I used the leftovers for a couple of days of tacos. My fave was a couple of thick-ish slices of lamb, a drizzle of orange-mint sauce, a bit of shredded carrot and cabbage, and a bunch of green onion. So much flavor!

As time went by, and especially after I got married and had the kids, I was always looking for new dishes that we could all enjoy. Usually, we'd enjoy them asynchronously. For example, I'd make a roast, carve it, and serve the kids and Vanessa with a couple of side dishes, but I wouldn't usually eat until later. When it was time – meat with whatever the side dish was on a tortilla, though I also learned the love of a good quesadilla made with roast beef and peas.

Trust me, if you make sure the peas are well-drained, it's amazing.

Quesadillas were also where I learned exactly how much I love fresh basil. I buy those tubes of chopped fresh basil. I squeeze a bunch onto a tortilla, cover it with Mexican cheese blend, and toss it into the air fryer and it's delicious! Sometimes I'll sprinkle some cayenne onto it for a bit of heat!

Eventually, I learned to love Indian food. It wasn't until 2010 or so that I got there. I started making versions of chicken tikka masala and using chutneys in all sorts of things. I also started making a pork dish that used a lot of Indian flavors, but you don't see much pork in Indian cooking.

One of them is chunks of pork stew meat, tossed with coriander, fennel seeds, celery seeds, cloves, mustard powder, hot smoked paprika, mace, nutmeg, cumin, yellow curry powder, cardamom, harissa, salt, and pepper. It's not strictly Indian, but you can see there are certainly some flavors you'd find in Indian cooking. Pat the pork dry, toss it with the mix, put it on a grate (nowadays I put it in the Air Fryer on the wire racks), and cook at about 350 for 25-30 minutes. Pull it out, heat some oil in a pan, and toss in some celery, onion, carrot, maybe diced mushrooms, and cook for a bit. Then add coconut milk, simmer on medium-low heat, and toss the meat in with a little more of the spice mixture. Heat it for a bit and let it reduce a bit. Sometimes, I add cornstarch to make a thick sauce if I'm in a hurry.

The meat chunks are amazing in tacos, and if you chop the pieces of meat smaller, they're great in quesadillas, if you make tamales, they can make a great filling.

Nowadays, the kids love Mexican, though they tend towards carnitas and pollo asado. I love me a good chile verde and have discovered tacos al pastor from the place that opened up in town. I do like to cross my streams as far as styles of cooking, and tacos make it easy!

**“Papa, I want Tacos and chips and pico de Gallo, and for you not to make it.”**

**- JP Garcia**







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# One of the Good Things About Houston: Kim's Chicken Mole Casserole

by Kim G. Kofmel

In 2003 I moved to Houston, Texas as a more-or-less direct result of going to Chicon in 2000. There were upsides to this move and there were downsides. Most of the upsides involved people, and many of them involved food. Shrimp and crab are pretty amazing this close to the coast, for example. Avocados are way more common, and crawfish run wild in the fields (and are farmed, but that's another story). Overall, Houston has a vibrant and diverse food culture. Not surprisingly, a big part of that diverse food culture is a whole range of South American, Latin American, Mexican, and Hispanic cuisines, foodways, and influences. Growing up in Ontario in the 1960s & 1970s did not lend itself to wide exposure on that front, so there was a lot to explore and opinions that I never knew I had to discover.

One of the things I discovered (and that I discovered I had opinions about) was mole. Or molé, depending on who is doing the spelling. There is a whole sidebar possible about the name and the spelling, but it comes down to this: the Mexican word is *mole*, from Nahuatl *mōlli*, and the *molé* spelling sometimes seen in English is a likely hypercorrection intended to indicate that the e is pronounced, though the actual emphasis is on the o. There is also the suggestion that the hypercorrection is to distinguish between the sauce and the animal, but since mole has at least four non-sauce meanings in English already (rodent, skin discoloration, physics measure, chemistry measure), all distinguished by context, that seems a bit spurious to me. Around here (Houston), it's mostly spelled mole.

It means sauce. And there are multiple claimants to the invention of mole, and – no shocker – multiple regional variants of mole. I believe the same thing about mole as I believe about curry: there are as many ways to make mole as there are abuelas (grandmas) making mole.

To be honest, neither of my grandmas made mole, so I had to borrow someone else's grandma. Thank you, Veronica's mom!!

Not long after discovering mole, I started developing opinions about mole, because there is a great diversity in preparation, and I have a taste frame. What fits in the frame is important. I can recognize that a dish is fresh, well-made, and uses quality ingredients, but if it doesn't fit my taste frame, it's not going to be for me. It is not the fault of the food or the maker; that is all on me. Objectively, I can see something is good; subjectively, I'm not the audience.

So relatively rapidly, I learned that there are moles I like and moles I don't. I generally like them spicy and sweet, with a thick, rich mouth feel. I like red mole, black mole, and some mole poblanos. I like it on duck, on chicken, and on enchiladas. I learned to make mole at home, though not from scratch, and I learned to make enchiladas.

And that is where the journey to the casserole started.

Because it turns out I suck at making enchiladas that will hold together.  
I don't know why. I just can't. I tried. I tried.  
And I, repeatedly, failed.

One thing growing up in Ontario in the 1960s & 1970s *did* lend itself to was learning the virtues of a casserole. Casseroles extended the budget. They used up leftovers. They made the third appearance of last Sunday's roast into something completely different (so did curry, by the by). They stretched smaller amounts of food into larger amounts of food. My mom made casseroles to do all those things, and one of my dad's specialties was lasagna, which is just a very specific casserole with a fancy name that gave my mom a day off from cooking for the family. Casseroles were good, robust, practical fare, and they rarely failed.

As I looked at yet another pan of failed chicken mole enchiladas, it occurred to me that if I stopped trying to roll my meat in my tortillas, and just layered everything in the pan, I'd get a better outcome with (maybe) less effort, and it would taste just as good. Maybe it would taste better because the distribution of the parts would be less random, and less dependent on exactly how the failure occurred each time.

So I tried it. And the chicken mole casserole was born. I'm sure I'm not the first person to have arrived at this makeshift, but this version is *my* makeshift, and I love it.

I have no traceable Hispanic heritage (though family legend suggests a tenuous tie to Spanish sailors washing ashore in Ireland after the sinking of the Armada), and I'm reluctant to say that this casserole is Mexican food. I have no qualms in calling it Anglo-failing-at-making-Mexican-food.

If you have read this far, thank you for your attention and patience. Here is how I make it.



## The Recipes: Important Notes Before You Begin

o MOLE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART. Without mole, all you have is a chicken casserole. It will be tasty, but it will not be chicken mole casserole.

o MOLE PASTES MAY CONTAIN VARIOUS ALLERGENS, particularly NUTS and sometimes SESAME. Always check the label and always inform any guests/family members you plan to serve this to. This is also true if you follow my recipes regardless of what mole paste you find because I use PEANUT butter in the preparation.



## **The Recipes: Commentary**

### *My Experience Making Mole*

- I cannot overstate the extent to which I have not made mole from scratch. That is a major production. I am not that person. But I do “make my own mole” as far as most of my friends are concerned.
- In Houston, mole for the home market comes in three basic forms requiring differing levels of tinkering to achieve sauce: paste, liquid, and ready-to-use. I’ve mostly used pastes of various types.
- The first mole paste I bought was actually from Zingerman’s, in Michigan. Go figure. But it was a fabulous, jarred paste based on Oaxacan traditions. The only problem was that it didn’t have any instructions. Which is where Veronica’s mom comes in. Because I was at a potluck, and so was Veronica, and she brought enchiladas in mole that her mom had made. So I asked Veronica, “How do I make mole from a paste?” And she asked her mom, and told me how her mom did it, and then I did the best I could with the relayed verbal instructions, which amounted to, “broth, peanut butter, and cocoa until it looks right.” And it turned out pretty darn good.
- The base recipe given below starts from 2 cups of broth/stock. I think that ends up making about 1 to 1.5 cups of mole. When I make the casserole in a 9” x 13” pan with 4 cups of meat, it takes about 5 cups of mole, so plan and adjust accordingly for your casserole. I will say that 5 cups of mole makes a very sauce-heavy casserole, but that is how we like it.
- For chicken broth, I often make my own from chicken carcasses and freeze it for later use, but the broth in a carton or a can works too.
- For peanut butter I generally use bulk ground, either stock salted or honey roasted, but I have also used commercial jarred peanut butter.
- For the mole paste, I generally use a red mole paste. I prefer the kind that gets used a tablespoon or so at a time to the ones that use the whole jar at once. YMMV.
- I find that making mole is kind of by-guess-and-by-gosh and tends to be iterative: I do what looks right, then add more peanut butter, and/or cocoa, and/or mole paste and/or seasoning if needed, letting it boil and thicken between rounds of addition. Sometimes I get it right the first time, sometimes I need to tinker with it.
- Leftover mole freezes well and is not a tragedy. Mole is never a tragedy unless you drop the pot on the floor. Then I would cry.

*It’s a Casserole, So of Course It’s a Fridge Cleaner*

- I started making this casserole to use up leftover cooked chicken or leftover rotisserie chicken. I have made it using leftovers, with chicken bought pre-cooked, and once (accidentally) with leftover cooked duck. If all else fails and I have a yearning but no leftovers, I poach or pan fry boneless chicken breasts or boned thighs with various seasonings. I have not made it with turkey (yet), but I expect I will in the future, and I expect it to be delicious.
- If using rotisserie chicken meat, always test for taste before adding salt.
- To make the casserole in my 9" x 13" pan, I start with 4 cups of shredded chicken meat, and portion all my veg based on that. I like a lot of onions, so the most recent time I made it my veg portions were ~1½ cups cooked onions, ~¾ cup cooked peppers, and 8oz raw mushrooms (by weight). YMMV.

### *Putting It All Together*

- You can either make your mole or there are ready-to-use moles available. Regardless of which you use, warm it first, so it will be pourable. My homemade mole tends to gel slightly when cold.
- I use chihuahua cheese when I can get it and a Mexi-mix bagged shredded cheese when I can't, but your preferred cheese or cheese blend is the way to go. All told, for my 9" x 13" pan, I used about 2 lbs. of shredded cheese and 1 cup of soft cheese.
- I use corn tortillas for the casserole, mostly out of habit, I think. Different brands vary a bit in size, so how many you will need will depend on what size you can get. In theory, you can use flour tortillas to make this casserole. I haven't tried that yet. I suspect it could be made with a cornmeal batter (like cornbread or similar) substituted for the tortilla layers, but I have not done that yet either and I think it would be a completely different casserole at that point. But maybe if any of y'all try it, you can let me know how it turns out.

## **The Recipes: Ingredients and Methods**

### *My Basic Mole*

#### Ingredients

- Chicken broth
- Mole paste
- Peanut butter
- Cocoa
- Seasoning to taste (I use varying amounts of the following: Penzey's Pico & Salsa Blend, Penzey's Chili 9000, cumin, salt, pepper, chipotle Tabasco (I skip this



- o when the mole is already caliente from the paste)
- o Agave or honey (if needed/desired)

### Method

- o Heat broth until boiling
- o Add mole, peanut butter, cocoa, and agave.
- o Stir until well mixed. Season to taste.
- o Continue stirring until thickened. This may take a while. The mole needs to have the consistency of a light-to-medium cream sauce when warm; it should be pourable when warm. If it is too watery, it will not work well in the casserole.
- o I like my mole strong-flavored and just a bit sweet, but not too, too hot. Make it to suit yourself.
- o When it suits you, turn off the heat.

### *My Meat Mixture*

#### Ingredients

- o Onions sliced and/or diced
- o Mushrooms sliced
- o Red/green/orange/yellow peppers diced
- o Garlic (fresh or dried or powder)
- o Cooked chicken shredded
- o Seasoning to taste: I use Penzey's fajita mix, Penzey's Pico & Salsa Blend, cumin, salt and pepper

#### Method

- o In a large enough pan, heat oil and sauté onions, then mushrooms, then peppers, adding oil if necessary, and moving each veg out of the pan when done.
- o Add a bit more oil to the pan and then sauté shredded chicken with garlic until meat is reheated and garlic is soft.
- o Return veggies to the pan, mix well, and season to taste.
- o Turn off the heat and stir a small amount of mole into the meat to bring it together (for 4 cups of meat I used 2/3 cup mole). You can also add a little shredded cheese to get a more

“together” effect. Not a lot. Just a little (little is relative to the amount of meat: for 4 cups of meat I used a scant  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of cheese).

### *Assembling and Baking the Casserole*

#### Ingredients

- o Meat mixture
- o Mole
- o Cheese, shredded
- o Cheese, crumbled soft (goat or cotija)
- o Veg oil
- o Corn tortillas, enough to fill the pan three times (three layers)

#### Method



o Spray or oil your pan (how big a pan will depend on how much meat you have)

o Spread a thin layer of mole in the bottom of the pan. For my 9”x13” pan, I used about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup mole.

o Lay as many tortillas as it takes to cover the bottom of the pan. I tend to cut a few into halves and/or quarters to make things go straight along the sides and ends and fit into the corners. For my 9”x13” pan, I used 6 6” tortillas for each layer; 2 whole, 3 halved, and 1 quartered.

o Spread about half your meat mixture over the tortillas, and lightly press down.

o Add a layer of mole. For my 9” x 13” pan, I used  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups mole.

o Sprinkle (I do a heavy-handed sprinkle) with cheese, and then add another layer of tortillas

o Repeat with meat, mole, cheese, and one more layer of tortillas. This layer took about 1 cup of mole.

o Spread top with mole (about 1 cup for this pan) and some cheese

o Bake at 325°F until it looks all bubbly and hot and cooked through, about 40 minutes (adjust for the size of the pan).





- Remove from oven and add a heavier layer of shredded cheese, dribble some mole down the center, and then crumble the soft cheese over the top (concentrate in the center line or distribute edge to edge as you choose).
- Reduce temperature to 300°F, and return pan to oven until the top layer of cheese is melted and bubbly, but not overly browned about 10-15 minutes.

### **How to Serve**

Serve warm with diced avocado (or guacamole), sour cream, and salsa for those who want it. A green salad goes well on the side. Some people might want to have tortillas with them; we don't because it has tortillas already in it. I try to cut it in squares because that's what I'm used to, but you can probably just scoop it onto plates with a big spoon if that floats your boat.

### **What to Do with Leftovers If You Have Any**

The casserole freezes well. I cut it into serving sizes after it has cooled and put two (because we are a family of two) pieces in each container and freeze. It reheats best if you let it thaw first. It tolerates being reheated in the microwave well. It also reheats well in a shallow dish in the oven at around 275°F or 300°F. Watch that it doesn't burn. You may want to sprinkle on some more cheese to get the full melty experience.



**A pair of tacos is always a winning hand.**  
~TijuanaFlats.com



# Achiote

## Images by Chris Duval

The Yucatán Mayans cooked with a red dye called annatto, arguably flavorful, that has spread around the world, giving rise to the industrial food dye “bixin” named after the genus of the achiote plant.



Burst pod from a neighbor's achiote (*Bixa Orellana*) hedge; the seeds are the source for the culinary ingredient annatto (or bijol).



Flowers and unburst pods





Flowers being pollinated by bees

# Flexible Enchilada Casseroles - Garcia-style

## by Christopher J. Garcia

**I love enchiladas.** I'm not exactly good at rolling them, though. I'm just not dexterous enough, so I came up with the enchilada casserole. I love casseroles; I do come from a family where half of them came from the Midwest and Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Casseroles are easy, they can feed a bunch of people, and you can usually use canned soup. The enchilada casserole is easy to make, gives you the basic flavor and sensation of regular enchiladas, and doesn't leave the mess I make when I try preparing the rolled version.

The first step is to make the meat portion. Now, this can be variable, but there are five that make the most sense to me – chile verde, carnitas, ground beef, pollo con crema, and Costco Chicken. I never said this was going to be authentic in the slightest!

### STEP ONE MEAT CHOICES

#### **Chile Verde**

My version of chile verde is pretty simple and flexible. I tend to use pork stew meat, but I have used beef, chicken thighs, and even shiitake mushrooms. The key is the sauce you simmer the meat in.

1.5-2 lbs. pork stew meat (or any fatty pork cut, cubed into 1.5-inch cubes.)

1 medium white onion, chopped

1 or so cups celery, chopped

1 cup of shredded Carrots

½ cup of mushrooms, chopped

50 or so cloves of garlic, minced or crushed

2 cups green tomatillo salsa (or 15 or so tomatillos, roasted in the oven, then passed through a food mill or blender, or just crushed with a masher)

1 tbsp. oregano

1 tbsp. basil

1 tbsp. Italian seasoning

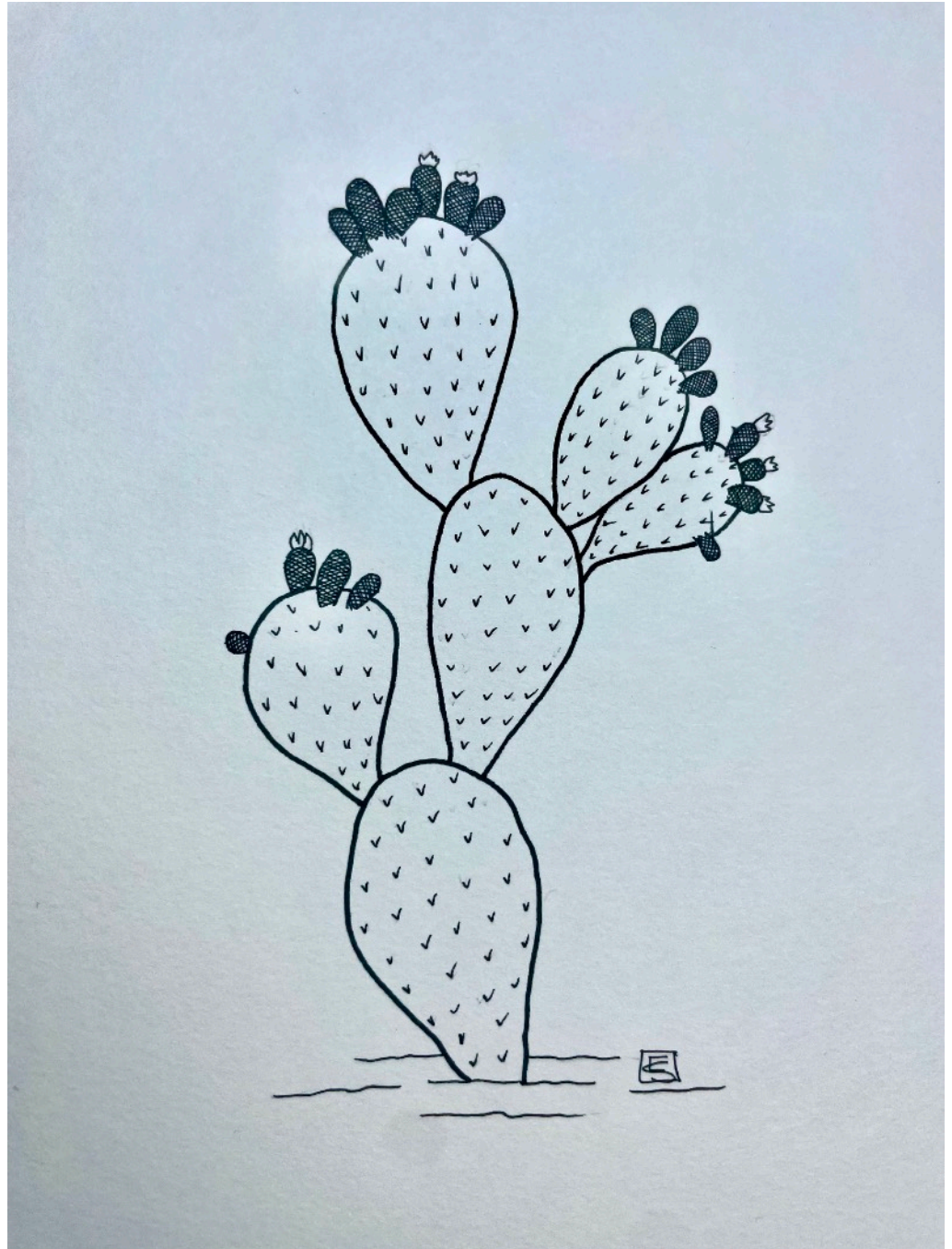
½ tbsp. cayenne pepper

½ tbsp. lemon pepper

Salt and pepper to taste

Olive oil

Put a bit of olive oil in a pan over medium heat. Brown the meat on all sides, then remove, but leave the fat in the pan. Add the onions, and cook for a minute or two, though you might need to add a bit more oil. Put in the mushrooms, and salt and pepper them as you cook for a few more minutes until the onions are soft. Add the celery and carrots and cook them for a few minutes. To that, add the meat and any drippings that have collected and toss 'em all together, add the salsa and all the seasonings, then turn down to low heat and simmer for a while, until the meat is tender. You're gonna need to stir every minute or two. For this version, remove the chunks and set them aside for a bit.



## **Carnitas**

There are many great carnitas recipes out there, and if you want to make it easy, just buy the packaged carnitas from Trader Joe's and chop it pretty fine.

Carnitas

Pork butt (no matter how much you buy, you're going to eat it) cut into fairly big chunks

Kosher salt

Pepper

2 tbsp Mexican oregano

2 tbsp Hot paprika

1 tbsp cumin

1 tbsp red pepper flake

1 tbsp granulated garlic

1 tbsp onion powder

1 tbsp Ground Chipotle

1 tbsp ground ginger

1 tbsp Trader Joe's Umami Seasoning (optional, but really, you're going to want it)

1 tbsp dried thyme

1 lemon, zested

a small handful of fresh herbs (I like basil, thyme, oregano, chives, and parsley) chopped with a touch of olive oil.

Combine all the seasonings, then toss the meat cubes in the mixture and set aside for twenty or so minutes. Then **WITHOUT BROWNING THE MEAT**, put it into the oven pre-heated to 250 degrees for 90-120 minutes. You wanna do it in a way that collects the drippings, and I often do a baking pan with the meat on a wire mesh sheet above it. You don't necessarily need to cook it all the way through at this point. Take it out and leave it covered under foil until it's cool enough to work with.

Then take out the meat and chop it much finer, or even just shred it. You want it fairly small.

Now, warm up some olive oil in a large, heavy pan. I usually use a Dutch oven. I go with medium-high heat, a 7.5 on my range. Add the "ensmalled" meat to it and get the pieces crispy. Stir to keep it from burning, but leave it to get a good crisp. When it's gotten there, turn it down to low. Squeeze the juice of the lemon on the meat. After a few minutes, add the fresh herbs and the zest of the lemon.

## **Ground Beef**

This one is highly variable, but this version, very much outside of the traditional Mexican flavor profile, works well.



1.5 lbs. Ground sirloin or regular ground beef, preferably 93% lean  
1 small white onion, chopped fine  
1 red or yellow pepper, chopped fine.  
1 rib of celery, chopped fine  
¼ cup shredded carrot  
¼ cup peas (I like to use frozen, but I put them in lukewarm water for a bit and then drain them)  
1 tbsp. garlic, minced  
2 tbsp Sumac  
1tbsp cumin  
1 tbsp Greek or Mexican oregano  
1 tbsp cayenne  
1 tbsp basil  
1 tbsp dried chives  
the juice of one lemon  
½ tsp ground mace  
½ tsp onion powder  
2 tbsp apple cider vinegar  
Salt and pepper  
Olive oil

Brown the meat in a little oil, add salt and pepper, and onion powder. Once the meat is browned, take it out of the pan, but leave the dripping in the pan. Add the onion and cook it for two minutes at least, then add the pepper, celery, and carrot, cook for a few more minutes, then add the meat back in, and then the peas. And the garlic, and then the rest of the seasonings and lemon juice. Stir this for a bit, then add ½ cup of water, the vinegar, and turn the heat to low, and stir frequently until the water has boiled off.

### ***Pollo Con Crema***

I didn't think we'd get to eat this again after Vanessa stopped being able to deal with milk products, but we found some excellent non-dairy sour cream! This recipe is the "milkified" version, but the non-dairy sour cream is pretty much a one-for-one replacement.

2 lbs. of chicken (I like to buy a Costco chicken and pick the meat off, but I'll also buy chicken thighs and brown them with salt and pepper in olive oil)  
3 carrots, shredded  
1 large white onion

2 cups chopped mushrooms  
3 ribs of celery  
Several cloves of minced garlic  
1 16oz container of sour cream (or, even better, 15oz container of El Mexicano Crema Mexicana)  
½ cup of cream (or coconut milk)  
Paprika  
Cayenne  
Red pepper flake  
Lemon juice  
Basil  
Oregano  
Salt and pepper

Put the onions in the pan over medium heat with a little olive oil, after a couple of minutes, add the mushrooms, and then a couple of minutes later, the rest of the veg, add some salt and pepper. When everything is fairly soft, pour in ½ of the milk, add the paprika, cayenne, red pepper flake, basil, and oregano, and reduce the heat to low. Stir for a couple of minutes, then add the chicken. Let that warm up for a couple of minutes, then add half the sour cream. Stir that until the sauce comes to temperature, then add the rest of the sour cream, and a squeeze of the lemon juice, and the garlic. Stir this and let it heat for 10 or so minutes. Then turn off the heat, but leave everything in the pan. Alone, this is tasty, over noodles, it's a Mexican-ish stroganoff, and on top of rice, it's delightful.

### ***Costco Chicken***

Buy a Costco chicken.  
Pluck the meat off of it.  
Set aside.

Now we know the meat! The next crucial thing to know is the enchilada sauce. Pretty much any of the canned or bottled sauces will work, but I do make my own from time to time. It's fairly easy, though it does take a while. There are three versions I recommend knowing.

### **STEP TWO: SAUCE CHOICES**

#### ***Red Enchilada Sauce***

2 tbsp olive oil  
2 tbsp gluten-free flour

¼ cup chili powder (I like New Mexico, but pretty much any will do)  
1 tbsp chipotle powder  
¼ tsp cayenne  
1 tsp garlic powder  
1 tsp ground cumin  
1 whole fresh chili (I like to do habanero, but jalapeno working.  
2 cups vegetable or chicken stock, or Chicken bone broth

Start by adding the oil to a pan over medium-high heat, then sprinkle in the flour. That's right, we're making a roux! It has taken on the color you want, add the spices. Then, add the stock, stirring the whole time, making sure there are no lumps. God have mercy on your soul if there are lumps! Turn it down to low-medium and simmer for a while, stirring now and then. It'll thicken up.

### ***Green Enchilada Sauce***

Start by putting Green salsa in a saucepan. Then simmer for a while, adding a little garlic, some onion powder, and maybe a bit of oregano. Honestly, if you're doing a chile verde enchilada casserole, you're best off just using the liquid from that and maybe adding some green salsa if there's not quite enough.

### ***Tomato Sauce***

1 large can of crushed tomatoes  
3 dried ancho chilis, deseeded with stem removed  
five garlic cloves, at least  
¼ cup of chopped onions  
1 tsp cumin  
1 tsp chipotle powder  
water  
salt and pepper

First, boil a cup or so of water, and put the chilis in for a few minutes. Then add the tomatoes into a blender with a bit of the water from the chili soaking. Add everything else and then blend. If you want something a bit Indian-like, add a couple of tablespoons of curry powder, a bit of coriander, and cardamom. If you want something spicier, add a mess-load of cayenne or a couple of whole chilis of your liking.

We have most of the pieces, but there's also the tortillas. I tend to use medium-sized corn tortillas. You should too.

### **STEP THREE: COMPLETING YOUR FLEXIBLE ENCHILADA CASSEROLE**

One batch of meat of your choice

One batch of the sauce (if you use the chile verde, use the liquid from the simmering)

20 or so corn tortillas, cut in half

1 large bag of shredded Mexican-style cheese (Yes, you can grate your own, but really, it's so much easier with no real loss in flavor)

Italian seasoning, or dried oregano and basil.

Optional: sour cream

Start by brushing a little of the sauce into the bottom of a Pyrex dish. Then start covering the bottom of the dish with the cut-in-half tortillas. Dip the tortillas into the sauce, then place it on the bottom of the dish, with the cut side along the edges of the dish. Then, cover the gaps with tortillas. Then, spoon 1/3 of the meat on top of that, top that with a couple of handfuls of cheese. Repeat this two or three times, and then top the whole thing with tortillas, then a bit of cheese on top of that, and sprinkle with the dried herbs. Bake in the oven for 35 or so minutes at 350. If you like, drizzle sour cream over the top after you take it out of the oven.







# Billy Parisi's Recipe for Arroz Con Pollo

## Shared by Josefine Nauckhoff

Upon hearing about The Drink Tank's salute to Mexican food, Josefine Nauckhoff, a high-school friend of Chuck's, decided to share [Billy Parisi's recipe for Arroz con Pollo](#). Billy's got much to say about this dish in his article, but here we'll share Billy's basics for construction, in his own words.

### Ingredients and Substitutions

- o **Chicken:** I prefer to break down an entire chicken. However, you can use any part of the chicken to make this dish.
- o **Rice:** Any long-grain rice will work for this.
- o **Peppers:** I used a combination of red and yellow peppers in this.
- o **Onions:** A yellow, white, or sweet onion can be used for this dish.
- o **Tomatoes:** Any fresh tomato will work. I almost always use Roma tomatoes because they are decent year-round.
- o **Spices:** Annatto seeds, coriander, and cumin are used in this dish.
- o **Stock:** A good chicken stock will just make this recipe that much more flavorful.
- o **Fat:** I used rendered bacon fat to fry the chicken, but any oil will work.

### How to Make Arroz con Pollo

- o Season the chicken on both sides with salt and pepper.
- o Add the fat to a large frying pan or rondeau and sear the chicken until well browned on both sides, which takes about 3 to 4 minutes per side.
- o Add chicken stock to the pot with the chicken and braise over low heat for 20 to 25 minutes or until it is done.
- o Next, in a separate large saucepan or rondeau, add the fat and toast the annatto seeds over low heat for 30 seconds to 1 minute to draw out some of the colors.
- o Discard the seeds, and then add in the peppers, onions, and garlic and sauté for 4 to 5 minutes or until it becomes lightly browned.
- o Place in the tomatoes and sauté for 4 to 5 minutes to help break them down.
- o Next, add the olives, cilantro, cumin coriander, rice, and chicken stock that the chicken was braising in, along with salt and pepper, and stir to combine.

- o Place the cooked chicken on top of the rice mixture cover with a lid, and cook for 20 to 25 minutes or until the rice is tender.
- o Garnish with green onions and cilantro, and serve.

### **Make-Ahead and Storage**

**Make-Ahead:** You can make this up to 30 minutes ahead of time. Just keep it covered over low heat.

**How to Store:** Place this covered in the refrigerator for up to 5 days. This will freeze covered for up to 3 months. Thaw it in the refrigerator for 1 day before reheating.

**How to Reheat:** Add the desired amount of Arroz con Pollo to a rondeau pot along with 1/2 cup to 1 cup of chicken stock and cook over low heat while frequently stirring until chicken stock is absorbed and the ingredients are hot.

**“...you take something simple, a tortilla, and you fill it with a lot of history...you fill it with where you’re from, where your parents are from. You fill it with where you are at the moment, and you fill it with a lot of hard work. And then you give it to someone you care about.”**

**- *Midnight Burger* podcast on Tacos**







By Chris Garcia



When I was 17 or so, a few friends of mine drove down to Los Angeles. I-5 in the late evening was an easy trip, and as I remember it, we decided to make the journey after a movie and a Denny's meal. We got in about 6 am, and I barely remember what we did other than get a cheap motel and walk up and down Hollywood Boulevard.

I do remember that we decided to end our trip the next day with a visit to one of Los Angeles' most legendary restaurants – El Coyote.

The story begins in 1931. Blanche and George Marsh open up a little shop on Le Brea – El Coyote Café. It was tiny, and it was in a part of town where it wasn't going to be getting the business of the stars. Still, it did good trade, the food was good, and as non-Hispanic Angelenos discovered Mexican food, it thrived.

It should be noted that El Coyote is not the first Mexican restaurant in Los Angeles, nor the first to become popular with non-Chicano eaters. It's not even the oldest continually operating Mexican place – that would be El Cholo (and if you like enchiladas, they do them right!) and there are times I'd take El Cholo as the better of the two. They'd opened two locations by the time El Coyote opened.

In 1951, El Coyote moved to Beverly, a much tonier part of town, and that made all the difference. While they'd had a strong clientele, this gave them far more access to the stars, and they started going frequently. To not have to deal with anti-Mexican prejudice, they said they sold “Exclusively Spanish” food, but it was Mexican. The first stars who became regulars? Ricardo Montalban, John Wayne, and supposedly Marilyn Monroe. I've heard different versions of her thoughts on the place but print the legend.

The food has always been good, and they had a built-in crowd to keep them going. It did, however, become something of a place to be seen, and as the years went by, more and more stars would enjoy meals there, and a lot of agents would take their clients there. You can see tons of headshots over the bar these days, and those are all folks who enjoyed the food . . . or at least ate there once.

On two of my visits, in the 1990s, I ran into Brad Pitt. The first one he walked in while we were walking out. The second time, I talked to him as we both waited for a table on a busy night.

And it'd have to be super busy – they have a seating capacity of almost 400!

I took a seat on a bench to wait, and a minute or two later, Brad Pitt came in, asked for a table, and then took a seat next to me. I looked at him, and said “Dammit! If you can't get a table, what chance do I have?”

He laughed.

Even today, some celebs visit the place. My last time there, I wanna say 2004, I saw Stephen Root of *News Radio* fame. I had a friend who called me from El Coyote after having chatted up Lucy Liu out front. Jack Black once appeared in a friend's Instagram pic eating what appeared to be the Enchilada Ranchero, which I find delightful.

Though, I usually just get a combo with a tamale and a taco. The rice and beans are super good, and they make it worth it!

The most famous meal ever eaten at the place, though, was the final meal of four people – Voychek Frykowski, Abigail Folger, Jay Sebring, and Sharon Tate. Supposedly, others had been invited, most famously producer Robert Evans, but those four were there for sure. Later that night, back at 10050 Cielo Drive, they

would be 4/5 of the first victims of the Manson family. You can still request the Sharon Tate booth, and you'll be shocked to know that I never have. The scene of them enjoying that last meal was included in Tarantino's *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood*.





# My Top Fives

## by Chris Garcia

### Burritos

- 1) Taqueria Zorro San Francisco, Cabeza Burrito Zorro
- 2) Taco Bell Burrito Supreme
- 3) Baja Taqueria, Oakland, Steak & Prawn Burrito
- 4) La Victoria, San Jose, Chile verde burrito
- 5) Los Tres Reyes San Jose, Chicharron Burrito

### Carnitas

- 1) Los Amigos, Boulder Creek
- 2) Los Gallos, Scott's Valley/Boulder Creek
- 3) Carnitas Michoacan, San Jose
- 4) Los Garcias Taqueria, San Jose
- 5) Patio del Copal



### Chile Verde

- 1) Ben Lomond Market (Seriously, the best food ever out of a supermarket chafing dish!)
- 2) The ones Grandpa made at his home on Lake Comanche
- 3) Los Amigos, Boulder Creek
- 4) Nopalitos, Sacramento
- 5) La Victoria, San Jose

### Enchiladas

- 1) Los Gallos, Boulder Creek, Pastor enchiladas
- 2) Moss Beach Distillery, Moss Beach, CA, Crab Enchiladas
- 3) Casa Lupe, Chicken Enchiladas con Mole, Sunnyvale
- 4) Casa Villa, Green Chicken Enchiladas, San Jose
- 5) Puro Michoacan Restaurant, Enchiladas Michoacanas, San Jose





## **Flautas**

- 1) La Victoria, San Jose, chicken
- 2) Acapulco, Santa Clara, Chicken
- 3) Garcia Taqueria, Pollo Asado
- 4) Los Amigos, Boulder Creek, Carnitas
- 5) Green Burrito, Chicken Flautas

## **Pozole**

- 1) Homemade, 2020
- 2) Las Cazuelas, San Jose
- 3) El Pirrin, San Jose
- 4) Carnitas Michoacan
- 5) Taqueria Tepeque, Capitola

## **Quesadilla**

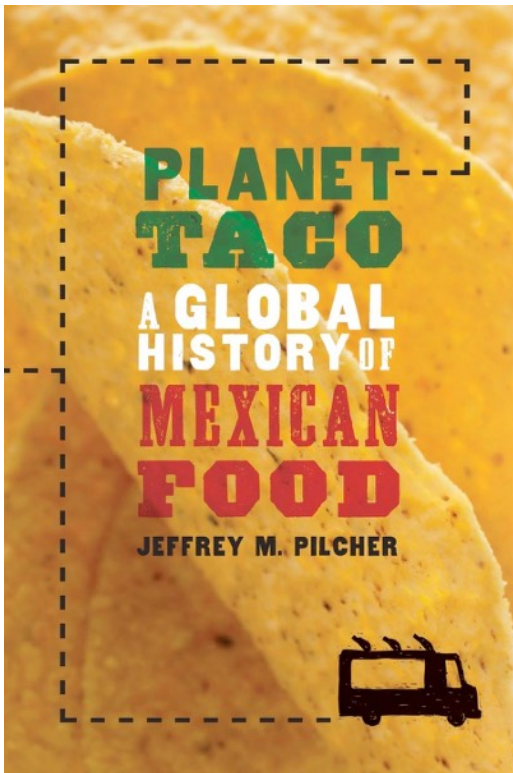
- 1) Homemade with Oaxaca cheese, five-spice ground pork, and fresh basil
- 2) La Victoria, Corn Quesadilla with Carne Asada
- 3) Homemade, A bag of shredded Mexican Blend with cherry jam
- 4) La Victoria, Flour Quesadilla with Al Pastor
- 5) Homemade, Polish bigos quesadilla

## **Tacos**

- 1) Los Amigos, carnitas tacos, Boulder Creek (Closed 2023)
- 2) Los Gallos, pastor tacos, Scott's Valley/Boulder Creek
- 3) Taqueria La Bamba, Camerones Tacos (closed 2020 or so)
- 4) Vanessa's Carne Asada Tacos
- 5) El Faro, al Pastor Tacos, San Francisco

# *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food*

## Reviewed by Chuck Surface



**Professor of History and Food Studies** at the University of Toronto-Scarborough, Jeffrey M. Pilcher explores the taco and the overall history of Mexican cuisine, a much more complicated topic than casual readers might expect, with his *Taco Planet: A Global History of Mexican Food*. Conquest, globalization, appropriation, and industrialization have all played roles over centuries until we've reached a point where what's considered authentic Mexican food stems from promoters of cultural food tourism. Chefs claim to serve dishes based on Aztecs or Maya, but Pilcher asserts Mexican cooking traditions as currently understood began the Spanish conquest, a form of globalization, because conquistadors and explorers also brought Mexican agriculture and ingredients back into the Old World, part of a process known as the Columbian Exchange, where plants, animals, diseases, and ideas were exchanged between these worlds. Spanish colonialists, for example, introduced wheat into Mexico both for basic dietary purposes and for religious needs, since maize wouldn't do when producing wafers for the Eucharist. There's much intermingling of cultures here, and what Pilcher finally delivers is quite a conversation among participants within the Mexican cooking realm.

This volume is a version of Pilcher's *Que Vivan Los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican National Identity* (1998), aimed at general

readers. I know little about Mexican history beyond the basics we learned in California public schools during the 1970s, so preparatory investigations would have been helpful. Nonetheless, I greatly appreciated what I understood and with work could bridge the gaps. Especially interesting are the Chili Queens, street vendors who operated in late-nineteenth-century San Antonio, their chilis were wildly popular among both white and Latinx citizens, but the press labeled them as seductive sellers of spicy Tex-Mex which eventually led to civic moments that proved their downfall. I'd love more studies into these entrepreneurs because that's what they were, understandably taking advantage of economic opportunities. Pilcher spends many pages outlining various

vendor wars not only in San Antonio but in Los Angeles as well. Civic battles over street vendors were happening across the U.S. Southwest.

Eventually, Glen Bell enters the picture, exploiting industrialized taco-shell manufacturing and opening his Taco Bell franchises. This Americanized approach to Mexican food runs against the “insurgent taco” promoted by street vendors and within homes. Pilcher says more about Bell during an interview with Katy June Friesen of *The Smithsonian Magazine*:

Glen Bell borrowed everything about the taco from his Mexican neighbors. He did not invent the taco. What he did was bring a U.S. business model called franchising. I mapped out where these taco shops were, and I found there were no shops—or very few—in East L.A., the biggest Mexican neighborhood in all of California. I was like, “How can this possibly be?” And I realized that Mexicans, when they were selling to other Mexicans, were not calling their restaurants taco shops. The word “taco” in a restaurant name was actually a way of selling Mexican food to non-Mexicans. What Glen Bell was doing was allowing Americans of other racial and ethnic groups to sample Mexican food without actually going into Mexican neighborhoods.

Honestly, no one can trace the origins of tacos, but Pilcher dips heavily into media, cookbooks especially, to support his ideas. Oddly, critics have taken exception with this methodology, but isn’t analyzing source materials a historian’s job? I’ll give Pilcher latitude, much more latitude than others spare for him. You’ll never find a more in-depth study. Pilcher’s traveled the world sampling tacos, which thanks to the interactive forces described throughout his book are not just Mexican but global fare. I’m no gourmand, but I’d wager the same could be said for other cuisines as well. Certainly, I’ll not disrespect current chefs in Mexico and the United States working to define “authentic” Mexican food through the use of supposed Aztec and Maya ingredients and techniques, regardless of Pilcher’s observations about phenomena beginning with the Spanish conquest. These chefs aren’t just taking their identity back from colonizers, they’re forming new traditions based upon those efforts. Pilcher supports this too, even if he strives for historical accuracy. What an exciting journey.

**“Carnitas is the King of Meat.”**

**- JP Garcia, Aged 4**



# The Incredible Story of Quesabirria

## by Christopher J. Garcia

**At first, it was the San Diego hipsters** who, having tired of adding French fries to all manner of Mexican food, decided to try something that had been popping up largely on taco trucks in the most southern portion of Southern California - Mexico. They discovered that they were selling tacos made with a slightly unusual meat – birria.

Birria used to be a weekend dish, served on Saturday and Sunday at the most authentic of mom-and-pop Mexican places along with pozole or menudo. Originally a goat dish, it's meat stewed in a sauce of peppers. It's delightful, and I remember having it for the first time when I was a kid at a tiny joint by my grandma's house. Eventually, the preferred meat became beef because it was cheaper and fattier. Goat ain't exactly cheap in the US, that's for sure. The new version, which came with consommé, was invented at the Tijuana taco stand of Don Guadalupe Zárate in the 1950s. It spread pretty fast around California, though I understand that it wasn't nearly as prevalent in Texas or New Mexico originally.

Now, birria is a stewed dish, the beef incredibly flavorful, the consommé full of chili goodness, and the whole thing is often slightly stringy. It's wonderful on a cold day, and making it in winter will fill your house with the scent of chilis, garlic, and meat.

I might have done it a time or two.

Now, back to the hipsters. In the late 1990s, there was a small explosion in the number of food trucks on both sides of the California-Mexico border. These smaller establishments gave rise to a younger type of chef. These chefs experimented with new dishes, and in the mid-to-late 2000s, someone, unknown exactly who, got the idea to use some of the birria they'd made to fill a taco. Or maybe a quesadilla.

Or maybe both!

Thus, the unholy hybrid of a stewed meat taco and quesadilla was born – the Quesabirria.

You make the birria, stewing the beef in a delicious mixture of ancho pepper, onion, garlic, and spices, and then dip a tortilla in the consommé formed as a result of the stewing. Put that tortilla (okay, usually two tortillas stacked together) on your flat top and toss in some cheese. Traditional Chihuahua cheese is used in many places, but mozzarella has become a favorite in the United States. Then, you put the meat on, maybe a sprinkle of chopped white onion and cilantro, fold, and serve with the consommé for dipping!

It's super delicious!

A food writer, Bill Esparza, went to a Tijuana taco truck called Tacos Aaron. They're known for their Tacos varios, which are just anything you have leftover slapped on a tortilla. My grandma did this, and I still do this for my kids! Bill wrote about the truck in 2010, where tacos varios, or tacos guisado represent Mexican home cooking. It's your mom throwing some of that leftover machaca with eggs in a tortilla as you run off to school. At the many stands, and stalls in Mexico, these stews

are cooked in the early morning and then brought to hungry customers still with sleep in their eyes. Many places open anywhere from 5 am to 8 am and wrap things up in the early afternoon. Once at the stand, the taqueros (taco makers) ladle their tacos from fancy street chaffing trays or traditional clay pots.

That's the most basic tenant of Mexican Home cooking – use what you got. Esparza goes on to talk about the various forms and says this: “A good bet is the beef birria taco. This is the Tijuana style of birria, the version at Tacos Aaron isn't the best in the city but pretty damn good.”

This likely was the first mention of what we today call quesabirria in English. It caught on, and those San Diego hipsters I mentioned? Well, they were hitting trucks in Tijuana and as they opened taco trucks on this side of the border, they added it to the menu.



It was Los Angeles taco trucks that started doing quesabirria tacos that got the most attention, and it was largely due to Instagram. Foodstagrammers started taking pictures, and around 2016 it was Teddy's Red Tacos that introduced it to Instagram, and they had 100,000 followers. The photos started to draw a buzz, and other trucks, some of which were already serving quesabirria, started making them a focus.

By 2019, it was all over California, but the greatest concentration was in the Bay Area.

A place in Antioch, Los Originales Tacos de Birria, was founded by a guy who used to eat birria tacos for breakfast. The place became popular, so much so that it survived the pandemic! I first saw it served in San Jose about 2018, at a small mom-and-pop place called La Superior Taqueria. I didn't get it, but I noted it. I didn't try it until 2022 or so, when a food truck, El Rey, took up residence in our little mountain town. They served quesabirria, and the whole family ordered it the first time we went. I loved it! The permanent taqueria, Los Amigos (which, sadly, recently closed) began serving it shortly thereafter. Their version was good, almost great. Now, the new taqueria, Los Gallos, also does quesabirria, and their meat is the best, though their consommé is only good.

Now you can find quesabirria all over the place. It's no longer a dish that has people driving long distances to find, but it certainly has adepts. I love them, even if I can only eat them once every other month or so.

**The Food of Cesar Vasquez**  
**Photos by Michelle Mendes Vazquez**







**Taquitos with green sauce, crema,  
lettuce, tomato, onion, cotija cheese**



# Chilaquiles





**Green Chile  
Pork with  
Rice**



**Carne Asada  
Nachos**





Molletes



Tostadas





Codfish Mole with Rice





**Camarones**

# Sonora Dogs and Ceviche







*Taqueria*  
**Vallarta**



CAUTION  
Wet Floor  
Cuidado  
Piso Mojado

# Taco Bravo: A Campbell Institution

## by Chuck Serface

Certain institutions in Campbell, California, have lasted many decades, although ownership has changed hands. Jerry's Barber Shop still occupies the same strip mall suite where my dad took me for haircuts. Jerry has retired, but the shop remains active. Freddie's Liquor has moved, but only across the street. Most impressive, however, is Taco Bravo, in business since 1970 and operating in the same building at 1950 S. Bascom Avenue, across from the Pruneyard Shopping Center ... and proprietor Dennis Wuollet still runs the place with his son, Shawn.

Patrons can tell that the building was originally a Taco Bell because the Wuollets haven't altered the floor plan or the faux Mexican hacienda style associated with that corporation. When Taco Bell closed, Taco La Paz took over. Then came Taco Bravo. Given the dominance of large fast-food chains, how has this tiny outfit survived so long?

Hours and location are critical. Sunday through Wednesday, they're open from 9 a.m. to midnight. Thursday through Saturday, they're open from 9 a.m. to 3 a.m. With Pruneyard Shopping Center across the street and Downtown Campbell not more than half a mile away, Taco Bravo has been a favorite for hungry folks once closing time hits local bars and nightclubs. Independent partiers, including teens, also stumble to the counter for refueling. And it's just that: fuel. There's nothing fancy on the menu. The most bodacious offering is the Super Taco Deluxe, a soft tortilla smeared with beans and wrapped around a hard taco shell containing beef, lettuce, cheese, tomatoes, and sour cream. Years ago, when my friends and I imbibed a few too many at Boswell's (permanently closed now), one or two of those beautiful monstrosities soaked up the excess. Even if they were still open past closing time, Taco Bell or Chipotle have nothing quite like these life-shortening delicacies, which rival an average adult's forearm in length. There's Denny's too, but they don't serve what I consider "intoxication" food, and Taco Bravo is an outside venue, with fewer chances for property damage should the night take one there.

Nothing [served at Taco Bravo](#) will earn Michelin stars or high Zagat reviews, but the Wuollets endure nonetheless. Recently, the pair faced quite a challenge. In 2016, Matthias Gafni, reporting for *The San Jose Mercury News*, explained how Scott Johnson, a disabled attorney, sued thousands of small businesses throughout California, often over minor violations. The Wuollets were hit *twice*, forcing them to close their Snell Avenue location. Wuollet told Gafni that the experience ruined his life. However, the Bascom Avenue location continues to persevere. Under the COMPLIAct, businesses have 90 days to address infractions once cited, and the law limits high-limit litigants.





Dennis and Shawn Wuollet  
 Credit: *San Jose Mercury News*

99-cent tostadas on Tuesdays? Taco Bravo has you covered. 99-cent tacos on Thursdays? Ditto. I don't imagine the Wuollets will go away soon, especially since Santa Clara County Valley Medical Center night workers frequent the joint too. I'll give a *Mercury* reviewer the final word:

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Hours:</b>              | Sun. – Wed. 9 am – midnight, Thurs. – Sat. 9 am – 3 am.                           |
| <b>Types of Food:</b>      | Mexican fast food.  |
| <b>Average Meal Price:</b> | Under \$10.   |
| <b>Good Choices:</b>       | Tacos, taco salad.  |
| <b>Not Recommended:</b>    | Mild burrito (very bland).  |
| <b>Attitude:</b>           | Fast and efficient.   |
| <b>Amenities:</b>          | Sports!   |
| <b>Vegetarian Options:</b> | Bean burritos.  |
| <b>Drinks:</b>             | Fountain sodas.   |
| <b>Eat in Car:</b>         | One of the best places to enjoy your taco.  |
| <b>Next-Day Edibility:</b> | They never last that long.  |
| <b>Who Goes There:</b>     | Anyone with late-night munchies, those wanting fast food from a local restaurant. |
| <b>Credit Cards:</b>       | All major ones accepted.  |
| <b>Parking:</b>            | It shares a small lot with a Wienerschnitzel, so it can get crowded.              |

“A Burrito is a bread balloon of meat, rice, and sauce.”  
 - JP Garcia

# My Firsts

## by Christopher J. Garcia

I started looking into the deepest parts of my memory to find the exact moments when I first encountered a certain piece of Mexican cuisine. Some were easy, some were harder, and some had always just been there.

### Burritos

Beef:	Taco Bell (1980 or so)
Carne Asada:	Likely Garcia's Taqueria (1993 or so)
Carnitas:	La Costeña, Mountain View (1999)
Chicken:	Acapulco (1983 or so)
Mojo de Ajo:	La Costeña, Mountain View (1999)

### Enchiladas

First Overall:	Gramma's house (c.1980)
Carne Asada:	La Victoria
Cheese:	La Victoria (1989 or so)
Chicken:	Acapulco (1981 or so)
Crab:	The Moss Beach Distillery (January 1, 1999)
Shrimp:	Los Hermanos, Pismo Beach (1991)
Suizas Verde:	La Milpa (February 1999)

### Mole

Coloradito:	Mezcal, San Jose, ca. 2004
Negro:	Mezcal (2005, at a Cinequest event)
Poblano:	Blue Iguana, July 2014

### Nachos

First Overall:	I cannot remember a time I hadn't eaten nachos.
Shrimp:	The Whole Enchilada (1999 or so)

### Quesadillas

First Overall:	Pedro's Santa Clara (1985 or so)
Lobster:	Baja Taqueria (2008 or so)
Shrimp:	Baja Taqueria (2008)

### Tacos

Al Pastor:	Tico's Tacos (1992-ish)
Beef (Crunchy):	Acapulco (1979 or so)
Beef (Soft):	Taco Bell (1988-ish I learned they were introduced in 1987)
Butter Chicken:	My apartment, Sunnyvale (2009)
Cabeza:	Garcia's Taqueria (1995 or so)
Carnitas	Garcia's Taqueria, Sunnyvale (1990s)
Chile Verde	Rosita's in Morgan Hill (1987 or so)
Lobster:	Baja Taqueria, Oakland

Lamb: (2007 or 2008)  
Tacomania, Downtown San  
Jose (closed in 2019 or so)  
Shrimp: The Whole Enchilada, Moss  
Beach (ca. 1987)

### Other Mexican Foods

Chalupa: Taco Bell, Mountain View  
(1999)  
Chapulines: Mezcal, San Jose (2004-ish)  
Chilaquiles: Wildberry Café, Chicago  
(August 2022)  
Chili Relleno: Las Palmas Taco Bar (1990 or  
so)  
Chips and Salsa: Gramma's (probably 1975 or  
so)  
Conchinita Pibil: Maya, Sonoma, CA (2005-ish)  
Elote: Likely at Christmas in the  
Park (1980s)  
Enchirito: Taco Bell (1980 or so)  
Flan: Acapulco (1984 or so)  
Flautas: El Torito (1990 or so)  
Gorditas: Taco Bell, likely the one on  
Homestead in Santa Clara  
(1997)  
Guacamole: Chevy's (1988 or so)  
Menuudo: Gramma's (probably  
Christmas 1975 or so)  
Milenesa: Los Altos Taqueria (c.1999)  
Paella: Either Roo's Café Salsa or my  
ex-girlfriend's grandfather's  
place, (c.1992)  
Pambazitos: La Milpa (early June 2003)  
Picadillo: We made this at Westwood  
Elementary, 4th grade (1984  
or 1985)

Pombazos: El Rosal Bakery, Live Oak,  
Santa Cruz (2016 or so)  
Quesabirria: El Rey de Leon, Boulder  
Creek (2022)  
Sopes: I made these for the kids the  
first time I ever ate them.  
(c.2019)  
Tamales: Gramma's (probably about  
1975)  
Taqitos: El Torito (1985 or so)  
Tortillas: Grammas (probably 1975)  
Tortilla Soup: Pedro's, Santa Clara, (mid-to-  
late 80s)  
Tostada: Mom made them (1985 or so)

