

Scene

Magazine

DEC 13-19, 2013

Winged Victory

PALOMA'S MEXICAN FOOD LANDS GRACEFULLY IN GOLETA

Paloma Restaurant & Tequila Bar

5764 Calle Real, Goleta
681-0766, palomagoleta.com
Hours: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday,
9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Food: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★★★
(Table)

Overall: ★★★★★

\$\$

Michael Cervin

serves as a judge in food and wine competitions throughout California. His writing also appears in *Decanter*, *Wine Enthusiast* and *Santa Barbara Magazine*.



Chile en Nogada, a stuffed pasilla chile, is a typical seasonal dish from Puebla Mexico.



Paloma (meaning "dove") has flown into Goleta with much-needed, creative food and an upscale, but casual, ambience. Owned by the Rudy's folks, this is not a rehashing of their popular Mexican restaurants; this is something totally different. Even though this used to be a Rudy's location, once you enter, you'll find booths, tables and a small bar that fill the space with its burnt orange walls and a family-festive vibe. They run frequent specials, sometimes even up to twice a week, so there will always be something new from Paloma, in addition to their comprehensive regular menu. Offering about 100 tequilas by the shot and by the bottle means you can find something to like in any price category.

There are six salsas at their small salsa bar, including the mildly spicy roasted tomatillo mixed with pepper and diced onions that produces a mildly sweet and spicy salsa. The regular salsa is a tomato-based, mild version — all the better to go with chips; and their Guacamole (\$7) is a smooth, creamy version, topped with cilantro and diced tomato. There's a little bit of pepper on the backend.

The Empanadas de Camaron (\$9) provides two, small, shrimp-filled turnovers, topped with a mango habanero sauce. The pastry is soft and light, the shrimp moist and the habanero sauce has a slow burning heat to it. A basic appetizer, it is nonetheless wonderfully flavorful. The Ceviche (\$10) is citrus-marinated, diced halibut, mixed with a small amount of pineapple, and served with thin, crisp, fried plantains. The fish retains a nice tropical flavor to it, but nothing overly sweet, nor one-dimensional.

Their regular Margarita (\$7) is a smooth, sweet concoction, nicely balanced with plenty of lime without being overpowering. It's simple, tasty and hits the mark. The Paloma Margarita (\$9) uses grapefruit juice, blood orange and tequila, resulting in a beautifully balanced drink using all the ingredients to their advantage; and it's a good bet that even non-margarita lovers will indulge in this one.

The Chile en Nogada (\$14) is a pasilla chile stuffed with walnuts, pine nuts, ground beef, peaches, spices and topped with a creamy and slightly sweet sauce, and dotted with pomegranate seeds. Typically a seasonal dish from Puebla Mexico, Paloma brought this gem to Goleta for an everyday experience. This combination offers a great balance of heat, mainly from the chile, and texture from the nuts, and this unusual dish is spot-on being distinctive, flavorful and very satisfying.

The Enchiladas Paloma (\$15) is shrimp and cheese enchiladas topped with a creamy chipotle sauce, served with salad and a side of rice. Rudy calls this his "go-to dish," and there's good reason why. The velvety chipotle sauce actually has a roasted, smoky quality — the way chipotle is supposed to be. The large shrimp are moist and tasty all by themselves, giving texture and flavor.

Dessert-wise, the Bandalone (\$6.95) is their signature dish. A moist, corn cake, a cross between tres leches without the milk and corn pudding, this is served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and sliced strawberries, and then drizzled with caramel sauce. This is a dense cake with plenty of corn flavor, balanced by the sweet caramel and ice cream, and is a terrific new version of the old favorites. The success of Paloma is in striking a flavor balance with their foods and elevating them beyond traditional Mexican fare.

High Points

Creating wonderful and flavorful foods at exactly the right price, Paloma immediately fills a void in Goleta's Mexican food offerings. The Chile en Nogada and Enchiladas Paloma are a must try.

Low Points

Being so popular, it gets a little noisy, and the seating is tight.