

On our plate: *Cantina 76*



photo// Eva Chillura

What started as a bitter resentment for Cantina 76 on 819 Coleman Blvd. surprisingly turned into a growing appreciation for the franchise taqueria.

My bitterness towards the Mexican restaurant was because, in my eyes, it had committed a capital offense by replacing my favorite restaurant in Mount Pleasant -- the Americano. It had been a Cuban-American style restaurant that served dinner and brunch, so overall just top-notch in the fact that I could potentially eat Cuban food all day.

But after they closed down, Cantina 76 moved into the location earlier this spring. Let's just say, I was not ready for this kind of change -- arroz y frijoles con huevos to tacos, sweet plantains to nachos, empanadas to refried beans and guava toast to fried ice cream.

Then I remembered -- I still really like tacos.

So much so that I trudged myself and a friend into my unwitting rival. Which is a restaurant.

The visible differences were there -- no wall with plants for aesthetic pictures, no intricate floor tiles, not the same retro vibe -- but the restaurant still had a pleasing atmosphere, embracing a calming blue theme.

We were quickly sat and greeted by a friendly, down-to-earth server. He brought us our drinks and set down -- wait for it -- paper straws. Cantina 76 was already doing great.

We started with some chips and hot salsa which was not a free starter, which we were kind of upset about, being the cheap teenagers that we are. The starter cost \$3 which is way too much in my opinion for the brown liquid salsa.

The chips were just salty enough for perfection, but the salsa

was disappointing. Just a personal preference is that salsa should have a 30:70 percent ratio of liquid to diced ingredients and should display the colors of those ingredients, but Cantina's salsa did not. It was a brown color (tomatoes are not brown) and one liquid consistency. Basically, the salsa was boring and overpriced.

The tacos came out shortly after we ordered and, despite being served in a black cafeteria basket, looked heavenly. I ordered one Peruvian style shrimp taco and one jalapeño shrimp taco -- both \$3.50. The steam floating up off the freshly fried shrimp carried the delicious smell all the way to our noses. The bright green of the jalapeños and lime aioli contrasted the red of the pico de gallo and sweet sesame chili sauce.

Then I remembered again -- I really like tacos.

The Peruvian taco had two to three strong flavors of sweet chili and district savory shrimp taste and was complemented with the neutral red cabbage. A sign of a good taco is simple flavoring because too many complex toppings can drown out the taste of the "meat" or main focus of the taco.

The jalapeño shrimp taco was definitely the better of the two.

The one word I would use to describe this taco -- fresh. The jalapeño lime sauce added a unique flavor combination with the crispy breaded shrimp. This is the kind of taco that would make you think you're eating a salad and being healthy, when in reality you're just eating a taco. A really good taco.

Cantina 76 was a surprisingly good for replacing one of my favorite restaurants. For a taqueria, the tacos were delicious, despite the disappointing salsa. I will definitely put aside my "vendetta" and go again.

■ Eva Chillura

PICKS & PEEVES

Tyler Fedor

Co-Writing Editor

Pick: Fast loading

A video, a picture, a loading screen in a game, doesn't matter what it is. Maybe this is from me being a lucky consumer of Comcast top quality internet connection (that's sarcasm). Honestly, the simple act of something loading in an instant shouldn't be this good, but I blame Comcast for that.

Peeve: Movie chatters

So you're telling me you are going to buy tickets to see a movie, watch it and then proceed to ask the person you probably went with what happens next? Now you're annoying them and trying to willingly spoil the movie for yourself. I just don't get it.

Pick: Philly Cheese Steaks

Little simple compared to the other ones but come on, these things are basically a gift from God. I also got my first cheesesteak in Philly, so I got credibility. Probably one of the best hot sandwiches you'll ever have. I usually just get it from Jersey Mike's now, which are still some pretty good stuff. The white bread, the cheese and meat and whatever else you want on there, it's beautiful.

Peeve: Drink vending machines

Okay, I don't always have physical cash on me and I'm sure everyone has been in that situation at one point. So it's a little frustrating to see how one vending machine gives you the option of using your card and the other doesn't. It's almost like the drinks machine is laughing at you and your physical cashlessness. What gives? Built in different times, I guess? You got money but you just can't use it, a truly horrible feeling.

Movie: Rocky

Who doesn't love an underdog story? This movie basically invented the underdog story, or at least perfected it. Rocky is a down to earth and easy to root for character. So when the training montages and epic musical score by Bill Conti begin playing, it makes for a movie to be seen and remembered by all movie enthusiasts. The entire movie is so feel good honestly and when Rocky "The Italian Stallion" Balboa takes his stand against Apollo Creed, and even puts up a really good fight, you can't help but want to get on your feet and cheer.

SPECIALTIES

- Starters: "Tres Hombres" sampler
- Tacos: Surf and Turf taco, Peruvian Shrimp and The Traditional
- Other meals: Chimichangas
- Dessert: Mexican Brownie a la mode

PRICE RANGE



SUGGESTED

- Mex 1 Coastal Cantina
- Carmen y Juan's
- Cinco Tex-Mex
- Señor Tequila's