



Evaluation for FLORENTINO'S RESTAURANT

Section One. Ranking

Rate from one to five, with one being poor and five being stellar. Provide a narrative explanation of your rating.

► **Staff knowledge of product/ menu:** 1 2 3 4 **4.5** 5

Explanation

4.5 From the staff recommendations, it was obvious the server had experienced the menu. However, it would have been helpful if the server advised diners on the subtle nuances of the food. One of the dishes ordered was extraordinarily spicy; a warning would have been helpful.

► **Ambience:** 1 2 3 **3.5** 4 5

Explanation

3.5 Deep earth-tones set the mood, but they didn't dominate. The restaurant walls are painted deep Oaxacan hues of maroon and gold, nicely accented with earthy brown and tile tan. Booths and tables crowd the dining room; if they removed even one table it would ease the bulky appearance. That said, the tables were far enough apart that conversation was possible.

Non-descript Latin adult contemporary music softly fills the dining room, which strikes you as odd; this is a restaurant whose focus is Italian. While it marries Mexican cuisine — there are half-dozen Mexican entrees and bread sticks with olive oil and balsamic vinegar on the side is served instead of chips and salsa — it's primarily an Italian restaurant so one would expect to hear Italian music.

► **Cleanliness:** 1 2 3 **4** 5

Explanation

4 Florentino's has been open seven months and from appearances, great care is taken to ensure that the restaurant's newness is preserved. Floors, tables and walls were clean, although the walls are a bit cluttered with paintings and other decorations. Bus staff was quick to clear dirty dishes between courses.

► **Service (friendly, engaging, timing):** 1 2 **3** 4 5

Explanation

3 Our server was extremely friendly and engaging as it pertained to the menu. He also was extraordinarily fast. From the time we sat down to the time we paid the bill and left during an early weekday dinnertime, with about six tables filled, was exactly 30 minutes. While at lunchtime, this type of expediency is appreciated and encouraged, it would have been nice to linger a bit longer. We did notice that another table asked the same server to return later to take the order and he gave them 15 minutes alone before returning. Pacing was expedient: We were seated, drink orders taken, order taken when drinks were delivered, salad arrived three minutes later, followed by the

entrée just as we were putting our forks down on the salad plate.

► **Appearance of staff:** 1 2 3 4 **4.5** 5

Explanation

4.5 Servers were dressed in simple black pants and white pressed shirts, giving the appearance that the staff took their jobs and the cuisine seriously. The attire, though, didn't scream anything exciting. A splash of color to complement the black-and-white would add a little pizzazz.

► **Pacing of service:** 1 2 3 4 **5**

Explanation

2.5 Very efficient and fast, perhaps too fast. From the moment we were seated to the time we received our bill, 30 minutes had passed. It would have been nice to linger a bit longer over the bread sticks and balsamic vinegar and olive oil dip. Salads arrived in less than three minutes, followed by the entrée, which arrived just as we sat the fork down on the salad. This is welcome news to lunchtime diners, but dinner should be a bit slower paced.

► **Food styling & appearance:** 1 2 **2.5** 3 4 5

Explanation

2.5 Plate presentation is pedestrian at best. There are no attempts to dress up plates with color — a sprig of purple kale, perhaps, or diced red onions, paprika sprinkled on the plate's outer rim. Instead, food is arranged on the plate neatly, but with no discernable intent to entice the eye.

► **Taste:** 1 2 **2.5** 3 4 5

Explanation

2.5 The speedy service might also explain some culinary missteps:

- The shrimp in the camarones a la diablo were slightly overcooked and rubbery. On the plus side, the half-dozen shrimp were generous, medium-sized.
- The sauce bathing the shrimp had subtle hues of smokiness that nearly got lost in the spiciness.
- The side of Spanish rice was flecked with peas and carrots and thin-sliced celery, which was a nice touch. But the rice had little seasoning to support the cast. A dash of salt or even a sprinkle of the spicy shrimp sauce would have added a welcome flavor boost.
- The breadsticks delivered to the table were warm, but strangely hard, as if they had been reheated before serving. As a result, the bread didn't soak up the overly tart balsamic vinegar and creamy olive oil that is set at each table in sleek glass dispensers. Another nice touch to the table setting was the fresh pepper mill.

Section Two: Cuisine Undercover Recommendations

List menu, service, marketing, etc recommendations for this restaurant.

1. The restaurant is located in a community heavily populated by retirees, 55+. As such, servers should routinely advise diners of the heat level of their dishes, particularly their Mexican dishes. The spiciness in the camarones a la diablo (shrimp in a spicy red sauce) was lip-curling hot — and that comes from a diner accustomed and favorable to spicy foods. A heads-up from the outset would curtail any kitchen returns.
2. More emphasis can be placed on plate presentation. Add a sprig of lettuce or diced red peppers ringing the plate to dress things up.
3. The restaurant is in a corner spot next to a big box store in a fairly non-descript strip mall. It's hard to spot in the shadow of the two larger retail outlets sandwiching it. It would be nice to add the restaurant's name to the mall's street-side sign, or even install a 5- or 6-foot tall sandwich board sign on the sidewalk to attract attention. This will be increasingly imperative when the upscale restaurant at the opposite end of the mall opens in the next month or so.
4. While Mexican and Italian cuisines are perfectly fine culinary cousins, it seems odd that the menu is so heavily weighted toward Italian. If you are truly combining the two, you should pay as close attention to one as the other instead of giving Mexican such short shrift (six entrees).
5. Serving bread sticks and offering balsamic vinegar and olive oil for dipping is a nice authentic Italian gesture if this were strictly an Italian restaurant. But the introduction of Mexican entrees conflicts with our expectations: chips and salsa. Perhaps servers can ask diners what they prefer, which might hint to what side of the menu the diner is leaning.

Section Three: Prototype Review or Blog

Green Valley's newest Italian restaurant appears to be suffering an identity crisis: Is it Italian or Mexican?

From the warm breadsticks and nicely stated dispensers of olive oil and balsamic vinegar at the table, to the heavily-weighted Italian menu featuring fairly inventive veal dishes, creative applications for fish and basic Italian staples from spaghetti and meatballs to chicken and shrimp fettuccine, it's easy to surmise this is an Italian restaurant.

Then you spy the half-dozen Mexican entrees, two centered on shrimp and a combo plate that pulls from tacos, enchiladas and chile relleno. It's at the bottom of the menu, almost as an afterthought.

The Mexican inspiration comes from owners Luis Martin's and Miguel Elizalde's Mexican restaurant La Placita in the Green Valley Mall. Fans of La Placita might feel simultaneously placated and patronized by the skimpiness.

The Mexican menu includes camarones a la diablo, an excruciatingly spicy dish featuring a half-dozen fat, slightly overcooked medium shrimp swimming in a lip-curling spicy red sauce. Flashes of earthiness kiss the sauce, but the spice all but buries it, leaving you grabbing for your drink and cursing the heavy hand in the kitchen that thought it was wise to create a dish so hot only the bravest of hearts can endure it. This would have been a much better dish if the heat was knocked down a Scoville unit or two.

The entrée came with a wonderfully fresh green salad tossed with Romaine, earthy garbanzo beans, sliced black olives and red onions, and those complimentary bread sticks. They were delivered warm to the table, but they were suspiciously hard, as if they had either sat under a heat lamp beyond their welcome or were reheated and served.

Service is informed and fast, perhaps too fast at times. Entrees were delivered almost before salads were consumed. A recent early weekday dinner took 30 minutes from start to finish, hardly enough time to take in the decorations adorning the warm Oaxacan colored walls.