



home, sweet home: 'casa' heading toward finish line

by Rich Alossi on December 2, 2008



As **CASA Restaurant** wraps up its final leg of inspections and heads into the staff training phase, the new 5,000-square-foot Mexican outpost on Bunker Hill is drawing the looks of passersby attracted to quirky architectural flourishes by architect Ana Henton.

But in an increasingly crowded market, CASA wants to be set apart for its high-quality food at approachable prices. **"This isn't fusion. This isn't Spanish. It's authentic Mexican,"** said Director of Operations Sean Krajewski on a recent whirlwind tour of the space.

Chef Kris Morningstar has spent months traveling everywhere from San Francisco to Tijuana, sampling every dish he could get his hands on in preparing his contemporary menu for both the foodie set and casual lovers of good eats **(Think: Rabbit-carnitas tacos).**

Photo via [Eater LA's CASA coverage](#).

The Workers Who Lunch

Competing for the fickle lunchtime crowd, patrons are being funneled into a taqueria line for quick service "power lunches" with fixed prices between \$7-\$11.

"We're really conscious of the economy right now" and are pricing meals accordingly, explains Krajewski.

A "Step One, Step Two" process involves choosing a filling — Pollo Guajillo, Mole Poblano, Pastor, Chorizo y Papas, Carne Asada, Barbacoa, Verduras or Baja fish — and a "vehicle" such as tacos or burritos.

Happy Hour and Dinner

Once the menu transitions to dinner, small plates abound and are broken up into small finger foods, tacos (barbacoa, lengua, and shredded chicken), ceviche, soups and meat dishes.

Happy hour is an afterthought for most new ventures, but in the corporate Bunker Hill world, a good happy hour has a lasting impression that can be the deciding factor in a restaurant's success or failure. That's where CASA's cocktail menu comes in.

All beers and wine selections are imported from Mexico, and cocktails add new spins on favored classics. Check back here for a full cocktail menu once it's finalized, but lavender margaritas and guava mojitos are two contenders. Expect drink prices to range from \$8.50 to \$11.50.

Finally, a wine bar with optional seating will offer tastings for parties and events with no extra fees involved.

CASITAS

"Casitas" are the hallmark of this venture by Mario Del Pero, framing intimate spaces throughout the restaurant where parties can gather for lunch, dinner and a few drinks. Think of them as **booths on steroids**.

Each casita is its own room and has a specific purpose – the "see and be seen" front-and-center casita on the outdoor patio, or the more private casita inside with a retractable curtain wall. Some are outfitted with high bench seating that provides views of the action, and others offer a more contemporary low lounge seat.

Still, two-seat tables are available in the main dining area for those not dining in a large party. And in deference to the happy hour crowd, three-seat tables will be a big part of the bar area.

One thing's for certain: Bunker Hill's dining scene is about to take a leap forward once CASA passes final inspections, which may be later this month **or in January (Eater LA)**. It can't come soon enough.

Thanks to Sean Krajewski, Christina Wong and Mario Del Pero of CASA for their professionalism and hospitality.

