



MUY CALIENTE: Executive chef Amador Mora's chile relleno is one of Maximo's best entrées.

MAXIMO

Chef Amador Mora—expat of The Mansion and Trece—is ready to convert Dallas to fine Mexican cuisine. But is his food? BY TODD JOHNSON

WHY MAXIMO: It's hard to give up a good cheese enchilada. That's the challenge for chef Amador Mora: wean Dallas' chile con carne-drenched palate off the heavy excess of Tex-Mex and expose them to the lighter delicacies of traditional Mexican cuisine.

Mora—along with owners Mark Maguire and David Knouse—think Maximo is just the ticket. It's a handsome, hacienda-like space far removed from Tex-Mex's typical piñata-plagued trappings. Likewise, Mora's pedigree goes beyond your typical chimichanga: 24 years at The Mansion on Turtle Creek and, most recently, head chef at Trece Mexican Kitchen. So, Maximo has the talent and the backing. The big question is, can it deliver the tasty goods?

WHAT TO EAT: By all means, load up on the appetizers.

These were the most successful and delicious of Mora's creations. Tabla Mexicana could be deemed a Mexican pizza. Oh but it's so much more: crispy corn flatbread brushed with adobo cream and topped with whatever strikes the chef's culinary fancy that day. On my first visit, the toppings included steak, mushrooms, onions, and a thick layer of gooey cheese. My dining companion said it best: "This is bar food of the gods. I'd come to happy hour every day just to eat this." Paired with one of Maximo's perfectly balanced

margaritas—a generous pour of premium tequila blended with flavors such as lemongrass, tamarind, and grapefruit—I'd be tempted to join my friend. I'd also order the gaucamole and ceviche, both prepared tableside. You can toss in a number of ingredients to suit your taste and heat level. Our table opted for roasted onions and pureed habanero. The results were fiery but not so much to break a sweat.

Alas, entrées were hit and miss where the simplest choices satisfied most. Gorditas topped with scrambled eggs, chorizo, and melted cheese was Mexican home cooking at its comforting best. Alberta's enchiladas were stuffed with chicken, spinach, cheese, and onions and then topped with a "secret" smoky red sauce that exhibited mole-like undertones. A delicate chile relleno was moored in a pool of tomato-chile broth. It might be the best chile relleno I've ever had in Dallas. Unfortunately, the braised short rib—tender and moist—was topped with a lackluster pipian sauce and the accompanying chipotle mac and cheese was a clumpy, bland mess. It was like something you'd find on the kids' menu of a place that didn't love kids. The Mexican lasagna was plagued by competing flavors: pulled chicken, mango, chorizo, and three different sauces. Too *mas*. Happily, desserts—much like the appetizers—succeeded. My favorite was churros with a warm white chocolate dipping sauce. They were crispy, doughy heaven. If Mora keeps the food simple—as he should—Maximo just might convert those Texan taste buds after all.

THE LOWDOWN

MAXIMO
5301 Alpha Rd.,
972-233-5656

THE FOOD:
Upscale Mexican

THE COST:
Average lunch
entrée price \$12

WHO'S THERE:
Harold and
Annette Simmons,
Roger Staubach,
Emmitt Smith

WI-FI: Yes

FULL BAR: Yes

**THE POWER
TABLE:** Table 61,
an oval table in the
center of the room
that can comfort-
ably seat six