

## A 50-Year-Old, Under-the-Radar Mexican Gem 9-2-2010

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your way.

What I love about NYC is that you never know what hidden gem you're going to stumble upon next. We are amidst a new era of food media who are obsessed with covering the city's newest and hottest spots. Sure, it's nice to score a tough resy at one of those oft-buzzed about restaurants. But there's a different and deeper satisfaction to be had from "discovering" a place on your own without food blogs, magazines, newspapers or Yelp'ers leading

I remember trying the pickled ginger scallops at [Graffiti Food & Wine Bar](#) in the East Village (prior to Chef/Owner Jehangir Mehta's run on Next Iron Chef) and wondering how this restaurant had remained off of New York's powerful food radar for so long. Same goes for **Sushi You** and its formidable, yet affordable, *omakase* in Midtown East. Jill lived in Murray Hill for several years and I've lived nearby in Midtown for close to seven, yet not until this past weekend did we realize that an authentic gem of a Mexican restaurant had been right there in Murray Hill under our noses all along.

We stumbled in this past Saturday night close to 10pm expecting the place to be dead. As we walked through the non-descript front entrance, we encountered a nearly full and lively bar and only a few empty tables in the back. We were warmly greeted with a smile and led to a table.

The menu boasts "New York's Best Kept Secret Since 1959," an indication this place is keenly aware of its status as a hidden gem. As opposed to trendy restaurants with their strict set of rules ("no substitutions", "20% tip mandatory on all parties of 6 or more"), here there is a more congenial and customer-friendly attitude. Another note on the menu didn't escape our attention. It read: "Please feel free to ask for any old favorite dish that you like but do not see on the menu." That's pretty darn cool. I didn't know at the time, but I hear you should ask for the off-the-menu queso fundido con chorizo.

We started things off with a couple of frozen house margaritas, which were big, potent and delicious. We would need them to cool us down for what was about to come — **one of the most bizarre and spicy bites to eat I've had in a while.** When I first saw the **Jalapenos Rellenos with option of chunky peanut**



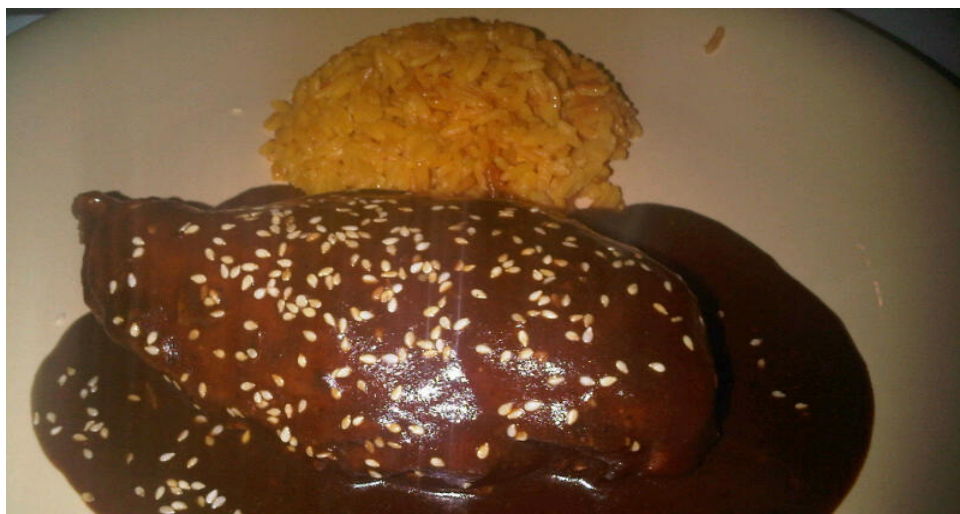
**butter** (can also come with anejo cheese), I thought it was some sort of joke. But the waiter said we had to try them. I think they may also come breaded and fried. Can't hurt to ask.

These are some no-joke jalapenos. If not for the bit of cooling from the peanut butter, I'm not sure how much I could have handled (and I have a high heat tolerance). Thankfully our waters and margaritas were filled early and often. This interesting combination of super spicy and sweet worked and I would recommend it to anyone looking for something different and out-of-the-box.

The menu provides a nice mix of Mexican cuisine, ranging from casual eats like nachos, fish tacos, quesadillas, enchiladas and fajitas to more culinarily complex dishes like bouillabaisse in a jalapeno and garlic broth, a 24-ingredient chicken mole and grilled double-cut lamb chops with a chile and garlic adobo rub. There's also a menu insert with a list of 6+ specials. Jill went with the special of spice-rubbed cod in lobster broth w/ green beans and zucchini while I tackled the chicken mole w/ its 25-minute preparation time.



Everything we ordered was very good. The mole was beautifully presented in a large clay pot and there was much more than the 1/2 chicken that's advertised. It was subtly spicy and quite sweet and the chicken was a perfect moist conduit. Jill's fish, while not as substantial in portion size, was delicate and delicious in its mild broth.



As for the service, it was friendly, efficient and accommodating. We overheard the table behind us complain nicely about a dish being too spicy, and with no pushback whatsoever the server said he would be more than happy to bring something else out.

They also have some pretty good deals. We didn't realize at the time, but they offer 2 happy hours (3-6pm and again from 10-12am) with all beer, sangria and house margaritas offered for \$5 and a selection of 1/2 priced appetizers. I knew \$80 didn't make sense for the amount of food and drinks we ordered. If you're in the area during lunch, you can go with the new \$20 3-course prix-fixe lunch.

**For authentic, sophisticated, soul-satisfying Mexican food and some great margaritas, to boot (well hopefully not to boot), [El Parador Café](#) is your place.**

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## 2 Responses to “A 50-Year-Old, Under-the-Radar Mexican Gem”

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# **alanles** on 02 Sep 2010 at 1:51 pm

we love that place...hope you don't ruin our little secret spot

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# **trish78** on 03 Sep 2010 at 5:22 pm

i've been going here for years...this is the first i've seen anything written about it. awesome

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