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by Brian Adornetto, *Food Editor*



You can't help but feel festive when you walk into Dos Taquitos Centro, the Salamanca family's second Raleigh restaurant.

The entire restaurant, in the old Sunrise Biscuit space on Wilmington Street, was decorated by Chef and Manager Angela Salamanca (the niece of co-owner Carlos Salamanca) along with her family and friends. There are sombreros on the walls, stars and eating utensils hanging from the ceiling, Christmas lights decorating the bar, and hand-painted tables decorated with Mexican art, religious icons and literature. The painted and exposed brick walls are adorned with tapestries, family portraits and cultural knick-knacks. There's even a Mexican sanctuary in one area.

The Salamanca family has been at the forefront of the Mexican food scene in Raleigh for almost 25 years, providing diners with traditional and unique Mexican cuisine. They opened Dos



Taquitos Centro in September 2007 as the sister restaurant to their long-running North Raleigh hit Dos Taquitos (which is open for dinner only). The idea behind Dos Taquitos Centro (DTC) was to bring healthy, made-from-scratch food to the lunch crowds in bustling downtown Raleigh. The goal here is "freshness and speed." At the time of its opening, dinner wasn't served, but DTC's success has allowed them to open Thursdays through Sundays for a sit-down, full service dinner that features an elaborate menu.

Lunch service at DTC is designed to be grab-and-go. So when lunching, you will need to head to the counter on the near side of the bar to place your order. If you're dining in, you'll receive a stuffed animal to place on your table to let the server know where to bring your food, since you're free to sit wherever you please. The line at the counter, though it moves quickly, can go all the way to the front door and the 15 tables plus bar stools, and outdoor tables will fill up before you know it. As our publisher Crash ventured, "I believe they could double in size, and it would still be packed."

Soon after sitting, we were brought a few of DTC's seasonally changing Aguas Frescas (\$3), delightful tonics made with ice, fresh

fruit, sugar, and water. Our favorite flavor was Cucumber Lime, a refreshing alternative to soda or tea. It was the perfect cooler to balance the heat of the day and the spiciness of the food.

Quick on the heels of our drinks, the server brought our food. We started with the Soupa de Pollo (\$5). Its chicken broth was made in-house and featured marinated grilled chicken, homemade pico de gallo (a fresh red tomato salsa), avocado, and fresh cilantro. That was followed by the Quesadillas da la Casa (\$6.95), Dos Taco's Tacos (\$6.95) and chicken-filled Los Tamales (\$7.50). Our Quesadilla was the antithesis of the greasy, cheese-engulfed, commercial variety. DTC's version, a large fresh tortilla filled and folded in half, was light and flavorful. We had two tacos, steak and vegetable. Both came with pico de gallo, Mexican cheese and avocado. In each, the main ingredients were marinated and charred, well seasoned and tender. We also enjoyed our chicken tamales. They were sweet, spicy and smoky with a great corn flavor, thanks to the masa harina (the traditional Mexican corn flour used to make tamale dough).

Also worth noting are DTC's terrific side dishes served in fried tortilla bowls which you get to choose as an accompaniment for your meal or treat yourself to an extra side for just \$1.50 more. The rice, mixed with roasted corn, was deliciously seasoned with garlic and fresh cilantro. Our salad (they change frequently) was a Mexican version of cole slaw. Consisting of shredded cabbage, diced tomato, red onion, lime juice, cilantro, and chipotle (a dried, smoked jalapeno) mayo, it was hands down my favorite side.

At Dos Taquitos Centro, you'll enjoy fast, fresh, flavorful, high-quality lunches at an extremely affordable price in an unusual, fun and bright atmosphere. If you haven't treated yourself yet, stop by and see why it's packed every day of the week.

Brian Adornetto is a culinary instructor, freelance food writer and personal chef. He teaches regularly at A Southern Season in Chapel Hill and his business, Love at First Bite, offers private cooking classes and intimate dinner parties.

