

THIS
MONTH
THE VERY
BEST OF

devour: late-night
bites

acquire: beauty
boutiques

nightlife:
new year's eve

contemporary cantina

A SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FAVORITE, MEXICAN JOINT JAVIER'S FULFILLS A CULINARY NICHE AT ARIA, SERVING AUTHENTIC FAMILY RECIPES AND PREMIUM TEQUILAS. BY DIANE DESANTIS

Owners Mark Post and Chef Javier Sosa just opened the fourth installment of their upscale, home-style Mexican restaurant, Javier's, and bigwigs such as Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan, and Newt Gingrich have already made their way inside. The long-awaited Vegas outpost, on Aria's main casino floor, offers local foodies and tequila aficionados a wide variety of authentic south-of-the-border dishes.

"Las Vegas is a great market for Javier's," Sosa says. "Our style of Mexican cuisine is totally different from other restaurants here in Las Vegas." For one, the menu was contrived by three individuals from different regions of Mexico, blending cultural traditions of home-style cooking. Sosa is from Tijuana, on the Baja California Peninsula; his wife, Silvia, is from Sinaloa; and their longtime collaborator Josephina Jimenez is from Michoacán.

"We have a dish called Chile Negro that is very, very good," he says of the restaurant's short ribs baked in a spicy sauce of chile negro peppers. "I consider 99 percent of the menu to be prepared in the way that you would

cook in your house. Let's say I'm going to have a guest in my house, and I want to cook shrimp—that's the way I'm going to cook it here, too."

Celebrated designer Dodd Mitchell created the unique ambience at Javier's, incorporating the world's largest piece of chain saw art. (The carving, by J. Chester Armstrong, weighs in at a mammoth 3,000 pounds.) The monumental 9,000-square-foot restaurant includes a circular main bar, an intimate lounge, and two spacious dining rooms, as well as a private dining room that seats 20. Sosa says employees have been rigorously trained so that they are able to speak in-depth about the restaurant's cuisine.

Diners have already established a few favorite dishes. A popular pick is Cabo Azul: a seafood trio of a Maine lobster enchilada in a creamy pasilla chile sauce; a grilled chile relleno stuffed with Monterey Jack, shrimp, and Dungeness crab; and a shrimp taco prepared Enseñada style. Pair this dish with a delicious, hand-shaken Margarita de Jalapeño, a top seller. *Aria Resort & Casino*, 702-590-3637; javier-cantina.com ▼