

{ FOODIE PROFILE }

Contemporary Southwest MEETS OLD TOWN

Blue Agave Grill makes a tequila-infused splash. BY RHEA MAZE



Blue Agave's sleek patio is perfect for people watching over an icy margarita. Pair it with an order of skirt steak sliders (right) topped with avocado and bacon aioli.



A MAN SEATED AT THE BAR takes a sip of sangria, stares thoughtfully into space with a wide-eyed look, and remarks, “that’s flavor country right there—there are at least 10 different tastes in this drink!”

Blue Agave Grill’s house sangria, a labor of love developed by owner Richard Lucio more than 15 years ago, is light, fresh and impeccable—a good metaphor for all that the hip, contemporary Southwest restaurant serves up.

Packed and lively since its doors opened in early April, this new kid on the block wasted no time fitting right in with FoCo’s dining scene, thanks to its creative menu, quality service, and vibrant, accessible location underneath the Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art on the south side of Oak Street plaza.

With a dynamite drink selection, scratch kitchen, energetic vibe, and tastefully decorated ambiance complimented by burnished metals, wood-grained tiles, and metallic-turquoise vinyls, it’s casual enough for after-work margaritas and appetizers with pals, classy enough for date night, and perfect for patio-side people watching.

“We make everything in house,” says Lucio, who co-owns the restaurant with his wife Brenda. “We offer a healthier, lighter menu with a large seafood and gluten-free selection—and even though it’s healthier, everything we serve still has flavor



profiles that people think of as comforting.”

In addition to Lucio’s famed sangria, the new hot spot’s drink menu lists 13 different margaritas. Most notable are those enhanced with their house-infused tequilas, made by marinating fresh jalapeños or pineapple in tequila to create a spicier or sweeter margarita.

The Lucios also own Coyote’s Southwestern Grill in Greeley and Palomino Mexican Restaurants in Loveland and Evans. Richard and Brenda each have more than 30 years in the restaurant business under their respective belts and have been independently running restaurants in Colorado for the past 15 years. They eyed the Fort Collins market for five years before seizing the opportunity to open Blue Agave Grill, knowing that in order to be successful here they would have to bring something new and different.

The Lucios credit much of their immediate success to their team. “We surround ourselves with the best people we can find,” Lucio says. “Our chefs have worked with us for 15 years... Though we’re new to Fort Collins, we’re very established in the industry.”

Even after many years in the business, Lucio never tires of witnessing a customer’s first taste of something off his menu. “I love seeing the expression on people’s faces when they’re enjoying what they’re having,” he says. “There’s nothing more rewarding than that.” **FC**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW GRAVES

BLUE AGAVE: *If You Go...*

It will take a few fall evenings on the fire pit patio to get through everything you'll want to sample from the menu. Start with a few of the highlights:

☛ SMALL PLATES

Opt for picks like the tunarita, sushi-grade tuna served in a margarita glass with avocado, jicama, soy sauce, ginger, wasabi, and radish; the black-and-white nachos made with lobster, shrimp, chipotle cream, corn pico de gallo, black beans, cheese, and guacamole; the addictive crispy-fried coconut shrimp; or the skirt steak sliders with bacon aioli.



☛ MAIN EVENTS

Try the **grilled salmon** with red-chili agave-nectar glaze and mango lime puree; top-shelf enchiladas; or pan seared airline chicken breast,



a gourmet cut served with fried goat cheese polenta cakes.

☛ SWEET ENDINGS

Top it off with a **très chocolate brownie** or a sopapilla stuffed with vanilla ice cream, strawberries, and warm fudge.

☛ COCKTAILS

Set up a ride home before trying to narrow down which of the **13 margaritas** to order.

A foodie favorite? The spicy cucumber margarita, made with fresh cucumbers and sprinkled with toasted Japanese chili powder—genius. After dinner, try the Spring 44 honey vodka margarita, made with vodka distilled in Loveland from Buckhorn Canyon spring water.

☛ GET THERE

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frozen mango margarita



frozen strawberry margarita



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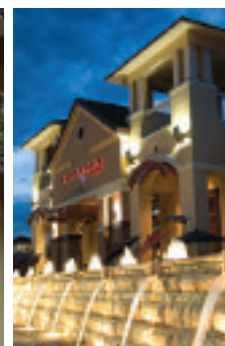
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