



CyclHOPS:

Great new space to imbibe; fresh food needs “umph”

While bicycles and *el Día del la Muerte* (Day of the Dead) will no doubt be the ongoing themes of the new CyclHOPS combination “cantina” restaurant and bike shop, I’ll bet it’ll be the garage doors that people will be raving about come summer. Along with the fresh ingredients in the surprisingly complex Mexican edibles.

Two huge doors sit silently now framing the space, one along the bar and another making up most of the south wall. They portend welcoming openings to the decks that surround the building to the south and west. The inside space is huge because of the very high ceilings, and you can’t help but feel the impact of huge, bright aluminum, and no doubt architecturally-intended, heating ducts.

CyclHOPS opened at the beginning of January, so they're still working out the kinks and adding features like a happy hour and a "late happy hour," according to head chef and self-proclaimed "Patron de Tacos" Darrell Jensen.

Beer, obvious from the name, is a big focus here – 12 of them (from all over the U.S., not just those made by Oskar Blues Brewery, the owner of this inventive space) are on tap. Two of the taps are nitro-style so they can handle beers such as Guinness Stout. Two highlights the day my friend and I were there were Alaskan Smoked Porter (\$6 for 16 ounces) and Double Jack IPA from Firestone Walker brewery in Paso Robles, Calif. (\$7 for 10 ounces).

All beers not on tap must be in cans, following the new Oskar Blues thrust, and they are still trying to figure out which Mexican lager they'll be having. Jensen said that because of the keg system and the quick turnover, they "have the opportunity to change the beer list almost every day."

Not to worry, if your tastes *favorecen la* tequila, an awesome 43 tequilas were listed on the menu when we were there, costing an average of perhaps \$11.

They are divided into "Highland" and "Lowland" categories, wherein different soils create "citrusy and fruity" notes, in the case of the highland, and "earthier" flavors from the lowlands. The latter, the bartender said, is better for "coin" style margaritas. Being a former restaurant liquor and wine buyer I had never heard of this distinction among tequilas, and it's fascinating!

As to the cantina (read Mexican bar) food, it's so far fair to good, but nothing to run back to. The classic intro chips (deep fried and served warm – what's not to like?) are excellent and the default salsa – like a pureed pico de gallo with just the right amount of *picoso* chile – is great.

Five other salsas are \$1.50 a bowl or three for \$4; I got just a decent-sized sample of the "serrano verde," which was basically pureed tomatillos, fairly hot and tasty if a little simple. I think more cilantro and a touch of vinegar would help make it soar.

Our "Cesar Millan" (I speak Spanish but can find no meaning for "Millan") was really fresh, with the classic romaine made special with arugula, corn nuts and a tasty "smoky Oaxacan dressing." Nonetheless, as we found with all the food here, it lacked "umph;" we thought some anchovy paste and lemon would add a lot to this dish.

My friend and I had two tacos each (there are six fillings to choose from, and can also be made as a torta sandwich, made with a nice, crusty roll, a good facsimile of Mexico's *bolillo*). These are very on-point priced at \$3 each or three for \$8. They had well-made, fresh fillings that also needed more distinctiveness, more piquant flavors, such as lime juice (on the fish tacos, which we each had) and hot sauce on my pibil one (which is Yucatan-style shredded pork – it's hard to believe there's "arbol chile salsa" on them).

Her second taco, a "sweet potato + green chile" one, actually had a green squash that might have been the Mexican one I know as *chayote*. It too had good, fresh ingredients such as arugula and pickled red onion but lacked definition. Maybe too many ingredients.

Our server, Cody, was casual but attentive. As he had few other tables during our late lunch-time, we chatted with him a great deal about how the restaurant has a great future, and laughed together about the mural on the huge east wall depicting skeletons riding bicycles, and falling off of them at the end – which Cody called "mayhem." Fun and spooky at the same time.

I can't help but mention CyclHOPS' very creative private dining room, sporting a high table that seats 10 with walls adorned by an

almost dizzying array of Day of the Dead shrines (*santuarios*) adorned with Christian crosses, statues and photos of the Virgin Mary as well as pictures of deceased relative. Scores of candles could create just the right festive (or eerie) mood. What a great space for an idiomatic Halloween party!

Their special OZO organic coffee, made and served in insulated French presses (\$4 for eight ounces gave us each of us one small cup) comes with a whole explanation of where it's from (a biosphere reserve in the mountains of the southern Mexican state of Chiapas) was perhaps the best thing about the meal! Since I'm *my cafetero* (a real coffee lover) "chocolaty, creamy and balanced," as their description has it, really hit the spot.

CyclHops “Bike Can-Tina” (restaurant, bar and bike shop)
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303-776-2453
cyclhops.com
Hours 10 am-10 pm “or so”

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Photo by Kathy Partridge