

Midnight Tacos

By Isaac Chavarria

Seconds before midnight, as Cinderella scurries through her bedroom window to avoid a reprimand, at the legendary Don Felipe Taquería the initial measure of the “Himno Nacional Mexicano” (Mexican National Anthem) welcomes her children. If your Cinderella, or Prince Charming for that matter, is socially engrossed by a last holdout of a gentrified and colonized border town, welcome to the real world Gut Renovation. For any habitué, the eclectic reception is complemented by the wall décor. A wood carved Jesus at last supper next to an inept Bud Light neon fixture, directly above a glittered and framed representation of the quintessential Virgen de Guadalupe, weeping Jesus Christ in the corner, eyesight directed back to his last supper. While the waitresses huddle, cornered by Mexican sodas and the gate to the kitchen, playful banter is tossed around until the next call of ¡carro! is shouted by the matron hen.

The patrons read like a list from a modern day lotería game (Mexican Bingo), originating from Italy, transported to Spain, and refined en México. El Vaquero, clad in alligator boots, leading his partner in an elegant, glittery thigh length dress. Meanwhile, the single ladies, las coquetas, primp themselves in preparation. Otherwise, los viejitos and a spattering of skwinkles tend to their business. Each follows the ancestral advice: one should eat before a marathon of drinking. Bustling between them are the waitresses, dressed in matching Pretty In Pink tops and hip complimenting black slacks, prepared to heed your finest Beginning Level Spanish when placing an order.

Don Felipe’s sparse menu wistfully conceals careful planning by the seasonal sous chef. Like jolly elves in Kris Kringle’s workshop, maíz and flour tortillas alike are hand spun on the comal to be constructed into complete masterpieces of various meats. Any meal is deemed deficient without seeking the waitress’ recommendation of her preferred beer. A favored selection is a well-chilled Corona, dressed along the neck with sugar, lime, and chile granules. Don Felipe’s is a gustatory and visual fairytale realm. In a few hours’ time, la Llorona will be crying for her children as she downs a set of trompo tacos hecho a mano, el valiente will arrive with Presidente purging from his body, y la lechuga waits for el Sancho (whether it be your abuelo or father) stopping for their last supper.