

GOOD TASTE

[city bites, spirits]

A Taste of Mexico

Taqueria Guzman brings authentic flavor to West Valley Avenue.

By Daniel Schumacher Photos by Jason Wallis

A sunny day, fresh steaming tacos, good company and an authentic Mexican Coca-Cola is about as close to an ideal lunch as I have found in Birmingham. This bliss-dispensing truck, Taqueria Guzman, may have been parked in a slightly run-down Texaco station lot, but for a moment (several, really) it felt like I was back in California eating the freshest tacos ever.

This stretch of West Valley Avenue and the surrounding neighborhood has become a focal point for regional cuisines including Asian and central American offerings at Red Pearl Restaurant and Gordo's, respectively. To be truthful, though, it was months of whispers and heartfelt praise from office workers and bearded hipsters alike, not the neighborhood, that brought me to Taqueria Guzman that first sunny afternoon.

Anel Guzman runs the grill and keeps the tacos moving smoothly while her husband Daniel acts as the operation's smiling face. They came to run this tortilla oasis by way of Los Angeles three years ago to take over for Daniel's father. In one frenzied week I sampled practically all of their wares, which are crossed off a handwritten list as they sell out. Some of their authentic, traditional fillings—barbecued lamb (barbacoa), tripe (tripa) and tongue (lengua)—became fast

favorites. Their profound, rich flavors are ideal for tacos, but can easily overwhelm a sandwich (torta). This is not to say that the more familiar American taco palette—grilled steak (carne asada), roasted pork (carnitas) and chicken (pollo)—are any less delicious.

Choose your protein, place your order at the window, add mild red or spicy green salsa, squeeze a bit of lime, and enjoy. Pay after eating, because who knows if you will have room for more. Expect to want another. Wash down your tacos with a selection of carbonated fruit drinks, frequently including pineapple (piña) and coconut. Two to three tacos with the works (\$1.75 each), or one torta (\$5.50) make for a completely satisfying lunch. For a sweet finale, head about a mile east on Valley Avenue to Gordo's pastry shop for a chocolate-filled churro. ●

THE DETAILS

Taqueria Guzman
215 West Valley Ave.
Open Tuesday to Sunday,
11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Cash only

