San Diego MAGAZINE

FIRST LOOK: Bracero

Baja icon Javier Plascencia finally opens spot in central San Diego

TROY JOHNSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL BODY

Remember when I told you this was a huge week for Mexican food in San Diego? This is the second shoe to drop: Bracero Cocina de Raiz from renowned Mexican-American chef, Javier Plascencia and his partner Luis Peña. It opens today.

Plascencia is the real deal. He grew up on both sides of the border. His family, under Grupo Plascencia, has been a leader in Tijuana's culinary scene for decades. Plascencia made his own name with his Chula Vista restaurant, Romesco, then opened his temple to modern Mexican cooking, Mision 19, in Tijuana, followed by the rustic Finca Altozano in Baja's wine region, Valle de Guadalupe.

For all his repute—including features in the *New York Times* and The New Yorker hailing him as the chosen son of Baja cuisine—San Diegans have had to drive near the border to try his food. And now they don't.

Bracero is a 4,800, two-level showpiece on Kettner Blvd. in Little Italy. Little Italy is the undisputed heart of San Diego's culinary scene right now, and for the foreseeable future.

San Diego's long had a fitful relationship with gourmet Mexican food. Blame $3 defrosted rolled taco culture. But over the last few years, some of Baja's most accomplished chefs have brought their riffs on seafood, chiles, charcoal and spice across to San Diego. The hottest thing in San Diego's food culture right now is Mexico.

So the timing couldn't be more perfect for Bracero. Expect small plates, large plates. Dishes inspired by Plascencia's other restaurants. Dishes inspired by San Diego and Baja. They'll be making their own masa in house—a key for a truly housemade Mexican experience. A crudo bar will serve shellfish from Carlsbad and wild seafood from Baja. The tequila program will be massive. Wines will come from California and Valle de Guadalupe. Craft cocktails will have a Mexican kick, and craft beers will be from both sides of the border.

There will be tiraditos, ceviches, sashimi, roasted meats, the smell of corn, peppers and sopes and high-end French saucing techniques. It will be a mishmash of border and culinary cultures.

San Diego has never been more ready to see what real, top-end Mexican cooking is all about.

But enough of that. Please enjoy our first look inside Bracero Cocina de Raiz, with design done by talented locals, Bells & Whistles.

Bracero opens today.

Bracero Cocina de Raiz, 1490 Kettner Blvd, Little Italy, 619.756.7864.