

## BRACERO COCINA

Friday 19 Feb 2016



Having near-perfected the urbane and modern left coast aesthetic for which they are celebrated, Bells & Whistles design principals Barbara Rourke and Jason St. John have recently exposed a stunning, south-of-the-border flair with the recent opening of B.S Taqueria and Broken Spanish in downtown Los Angeles, as well as their latest project, renowned Chef Javier Plascencia's Bracero Cocina de Raiz.

Located in San Diego's Little Italy on up-and-coming Kettner Boulevard, Bracero's superb Mexican cuisine and impeccable service ethic is inspired by the story of the Bracero, and interpreted through its Bells & Whistles design.

The restaurant pays homage to the 1942 Bracero Program; an agreement between the U.S. and Mexico for the importation of workers to fill the gaps of Americans away fighting WWII, their absence causing shortages of food and other goods throughout the country. The program and its steadfast Braceros, or laborers, are largely responsible for establishing California's food and wine markets as we now know them.

Guests of Bracero are greeted with a wave of warm colors and textures. Festive, leather-upholstered chairs from Mexico and saddle-inspired booth backs are arranged around a mixture of intimate and communal wooden tables throughout the 4800 square-foot, 2-story space. The levels are linked by a breathtaking leather-clad storage cabinet standing guard at the back bar and spanning both floors.

The transition of first floor to second is marked with an installation of genuine, hand-selected Bracero hats on the landing wall. Along with crisp white shirts, the hats were a functional element of the Bracero uniform, used to protect the workers from the blazing sun. They are hung facing upward to the heavens, in tribute to those who wore them.

Breathtaking, 40"x 24" custom-cast concrete tiles created in a geometric agave pattern line the long, marble-topped upstairs bar – an intimation of the rare tequilas available behind it. Vintage hand tools from Mexico are arranged on a wall near the exposed kitchen, while a massive, tiling sculpture lingers between floors in the center of the room. Hardwood flooring and hanging succulents offer a nod to the burgeoning Tijuana farm-to-table movement, while a selection of Plascencia's personal items and objects and art sourced in Mexico lend a cozy, home-like feel to the space. Bracero's raw materials combined with antique tools and art imparts a distinctive balance of rustic, modern and authentic Mexicana to the indoor/outdoor eatery.

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