

# The Record (New Jersey)

## AT BLUE MOON MEXICAN CAFE IN WYCKOFF

Section: LIFESTYLE / PREVIEWS

The Record LINDY WASHBURN, Restaurant Reviewer

Column: CASUAL DINING

My friend called me from her car, right after she finished lunch at the **Blue Moon Cafe** in Wyckoff. "You've got to try this place," she said excitedly. "It's really cute. I'm so surprised to find such good **Mexican** food - and in such an unlikely place."

I followed her advice, and found this hip, fun restaurant tucked into a nondescript storefront in a shopping center next to a Sam Goody.

The music was cranked up, and a din of children's chatter and general conviviality came spilling out the door. The walls were painted in blocks of color from a color wheel of Southwestern desert shades, with big silhouettes of wolves and other designs overlaid. The wait was 20 minutes that Friday night, and has been known to extend to more than twice that.

The formula that worked in Englewood, home of the first **Blue Moon**, is working in Wyckoff: Attract adults with an interesting, fairly sophisticated menu and accommodating service, make sure the kids are happy with toys and junior burgers, and - voila! - busy suburban families will return again and again.

The young staff works hard and knows how to make customers of all ages comfortable. One waiter taught my son the authentic pronunciation of the dishes he ordered, and another made sure the Dos Equus we'd brought was kept chilled. They were quick with refills, and only forgot a side dish once in several visits.

On a busy weekend night, however, you can feel as if you're in the middle of a runway as servers rocket down the aisles. The portable carpet sweeper rumbles constantly between seatings - the kids do get messy. Romantic, it's not.

The meal began with crackling corn chips and a thick, spicy salsa. Though the restaurant has no liquor license, it does serve several flavors of non-alcoholic margaritas (\$3.50), of which I tried the mango. Like a Creamsicle-colored smoothie, it went down way too fast - the perfect refreshment for a hot or, in this case, a not-so-hot day.

**Moon** wings and **moon** strips are the true crowd-pleasers from the appetizer list, the phases of the **moon** denoting the hotness of the seasoning. Timidly, we tried the quarter-**moon** (mild) version (\$7.95 for a single order), consisting of about a dozen wings, not too greasy, with **blue** cheese dressing and piles of celery and carrots. The strips, six of them (also \$7.95), were of generous proportions, tastily breaded, and hot, moist, and tender.

Black bean soup (\$3.95), another appetizer, looked innocuous enough in its cafeteria-white cup with a single folded tortilla and a spoonful of sour cream. But again, the pepperiness surprised me. It was thick and hearty, pur'eed to a perfect smoothness - without the annoying chewiness so common to bean soups.

Three forms of chili are available here: **blue moon** (ground beef and beans), full **moon** (prime sirloin chunks, no beans), and

vegetarian (three kinds of beans, plus the usual). Cups are \$3.95, bowls \$5.95 or \$6.95. We tried a bowl of the full-moon for supper once, and worried when it arrived that it was too small.

Appearances deceive, however: You'll be packing it home. It left my tongue dulled to sensation, so hot was the seasoning.

While much of the menu is standard fare - fajitas, combination platters, burritos - two unusual entrees were especially satisfying. The mole sauce on the crab enchilada special (\$14.95) one night was simply unforgettable - dark, with tones of chocolate and orange that opened my taste buds in ways they'd never been. I asked on a subsequent visit for anything at all with mole sauce, but was sadly disappointed - there wasn't any.

Instead, I opted for simple Southwestern chicken (\$11.95) - and will return next time just for that. The combination of a lime-juice-and-honey marinade and the searing heat of the grill left the breast cutlets sweetly glazed, and moist and tender inside.

"Smokey the Bearrito" (\$11.95) promised barbecue chicken breasts, but delivered only a smear of barbecue sauce on top, which hadn't united with any of the ingredients. It was the least successful of the entrees.

Pray that the specials menu lists cheesecake chimichangas. (Note to owner: Put this on the regular menu.) Close your eyes and imagine a slice of rich cheesecake, warm. Wrap it in a soft flour tortilla, fry it gently, then roll it in cinnamon and sugar. This, my friends, is a dessert experience encountered only once in a **blue moon**.

## **Blue Moon Mexican Cafe**

\* \* 1/2

327 Franklin Ave.

Wyckoff

- Poor

\* Fair

\* \* Good

\* \* \* Excellent

\* \* \* \* Outstanding