

Delightful Surprise

Tucked away in one of downtown Fredericksburg's many nooks you'll find yourself with less than ideal parking and a uniquely familiar Mexican cuisine restaurant. In 2020 this little restaurant tried its best, but like many it was shut down due to COVID-19. In 2021 the owner, Oscar Arellano, decided he had waited long enough and reopened his restaurant. At first glance this quaint little building doesn't look like much as if it were wearing camouflage amongst a sea of other buildings. With it being planted right smack dab on a chaotic corner of downtown traffic, no one walking would think to look off the beaten path to find a small white rustic building with a tiny sign reading "Agave Bar and Grill".

However, if by some chance someone does find themselves stumbling upon this place I would tell them it's worth a look around. The door that opens up to the interior reminds me of my grandmother's old trunk at the end of her bed; impossible to open, yet it gives you a sense of achievement once inside. Immediately you are faced with a small open room with about six booths and a few tables as well as a small bar tucked to the right side, and your ears are filled with moderately loud chatter given the size of the room. Quickly after taking it all in you are greeted by sincere and enthusiastic servers, and as you are being shown to your seat that sensationally familiar smell of traditionally cooked Mexican food hits you like a wave from the back kitchen. At this point either your mouth starts watering and your mind races with what could be on the menu or your stomach turns at the thought of Mexican for the third night in a row. The restaurant can meet max occupancy fairly fast and become quite overcrowded and

noisy at times, but easy going servers and mellow music in the background make you feel comfortable in a busy atmosphere.

We were seated right next to the bar, and the server almost instantly brought us water and a fresh bowl of warm tortilla chips and cold salsa (free, might I add). The chips had just the right amount of salty seasoning and had a perfect crispy crunch every bite. The hand made fire roasted, red tomato salsa has a smooth finish that is thick enough to stay on the chip, but not so thick that it feels like drinking a smoothie. Non-spicy food lovers be warned because this salsa has a kick to it. Soon after, we ordered their freshly made guacamole and a house margarita. These too were delivered promptly and with an overwhelmingly large portion for the price. When I tell you their guacamole is fresh, I mean they must have harvested those avocados at just the right time, gone out to a farm and hand picked every piece of crisp cilantro, dug up an onion to chop, and squeezed a minute old lime on top. Every bite was a burst of fresh flavor. I can't vouch for all of their alcoholic drinks, but what I can tell you is whether you like it frozen or on the rocks, not only can the bartender make it, but they can make you feel it too. A wonderful balance between tequila and mixers created a chug worthy margarita.

As we wrapped up consuming as much guacamole as humanly possible, with impeccable timing we were greeted with sizzling hot skilletts of exactly what we had ordered. LA PARRILLADA MEXICANA and a CORN TORTILLA BEAN ENCHILADA were that night's picks. The LA PARRILLADA featured a savory mix of steak, chicken, and chorizo with mushrooms, bell peppers, onions, and tomatoes all served with a side of beans, rice, and your choice of corn or flour tortilla. This spectacular flavor pallet made for one heck of a meal. The juicy seared meats mixed in with veggies sauteed to a crispy edge laying overtop a bed of yellow mexican rice will

surely put your taste buds at ease. I've got to give it to Agave for doing such a great job at preparing and presenting their food. They did so well that I even felt the need to branch out and try something I normally wouldn't. I've never been one for corn tortillas because, yuck. In this one instance however, something was drawing me to them and I just had to try them. Nothing has ever exceeded my expectations to this extent before. I'm used to either overcooked, hard and flakey corn tortillas or undercooked, soggy, and grainy corn tortillas. To my surprise these corn tortillas were carefully cooked to just the right temperature creating a warm, soft, chewy interior, and lightly roasted exterior that simply blended with the other flavors of the meal. This is what did it for me, this is what made me want to come back again another time and try some more of their home made recipes.

The BEAN ENCHILADA is one of the great picks for vegetarian preferences. It was presented in a set of three warmly wrapped corn tortilla enchiladas topped with a special tomato based enchilada sauce and sprinkled with white mozzarella cheese. Each enchilada was packed full of gourmet refried beans and every bite was greatly balanced.

Agave Bar and Grill is one of those restaurants that I can say has fully exceeded my expectations. First impressions are important, but giving a restaurant a shot regardless of what it looks like is what's rewarding. It's a great place for a quick night out on the town or a cute first date or even to sit at the bar and have a couple custom made mixed drinks. I wouldn't attempt to bring a family of five or more due to limited parking and of course the limited space inside.

There's lots to do in the surrounding area as well, so it's an easy place to make a part of your day while enjoying other activities downtown. Side note, they are also very kind and accepting of members of the military, a military discount is always a bonus in my book. If you go all in then

the appetizer, main course, drink, and dessert all together will run you anywhere from \$30-\$55.

I'll skip the oh-so-common star rating that makes zero sense, (they're an easy way out and provide little to no value to a world of people that differ in so many ways) and let you decide for yourselves if it's worth going based on the details explained in this review.

Restaurant Review by Jonah Helbling

Agave Bar and Grill

101 William St, Fredericksburg, VA 22401

<http://agavedowntown.com/>

Open: 11AM to 10PM