

La Cañada  
**Valley Sun**

A8 Sunday, September 11, 2011



Photos by CHERYL A. GUERRERO Staff Photographer

El Metate Café offers burritos, specialty meals, tacos, breakfast, seafood, cocktails, soups, appetizers, drinks, juices and desserts.

## DINING

From \$7

I've had, chopped into pencil-eraser sized morsels, though I had to scrape off a pile of shredded lettuce to find the chicken.

The tacos al pastor are filled with shavings of beautifully marinated pork covered with a blanket of cilantro. I'd like to tell you I tried the cabaza, lengua and buche, but...

The rice and beans on full plates are standard, the salad served dry, though any of four excellent salsas from the counter bar can wake up the strips of romaine and shredded carrot.

## Infobox

**What:** El Metate Café  
**Where:** 12 N. Mentor Ave., Pasadena

**What:** Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; closed Sunday

**Cost:** Breakfast, \$4.99-7.99; tacos, \$1.50-\$2.25; entrees, \$4.99-\$14.99

**Contact:** (626) 229-0706

Shrimp al mojo de ajo explodes with the scent of garlic (and so will you).

Enchiladas de mole are drenched in the dark and rich chocolate, cinnamon and chili-infused sauce. Tortilla soup, one of several soups on the menu, has a rich tomato-bey broth, with limosa strips of tortillas fried crisp and dusted with Mexican



Cactus, chorizo, Mexican sausage, carne asada and grilled chicken served in a stone bowl at El Metate Café in Pasadena.

cheese. The gigantic El Metate burrito is stuffed with wonderful, lime-scented beef, pinto beans, rice, salsa, and, oddly, bits of green beans and carrots.

Our favorite was the Molcajete El Metate. A giant stone mortar, or molcajete, is filled with carne asada, grilled cactus pods, shrimp fish, a pasilla pepper with all its seeds, chorizo and a palm-sized slab of molten cheese.

The lava bubbled and popped like the La Brea Tar Pits. We stood at it for a good few minutes before grabbing tortillas and venturing into the pot with a spoon. It's a salty, delicious and increasingly spicy meal that could stretch for two or three people.

Breakfasts are mainly eggs in various states of dress — rancheros, with chorizo, with ham, with

dried beef. But the star is the chilaquiles, fried tortilla strips sautéed with salsa, mixed with cream and cheese. El Metate's are a bit oniony, like its picas de gallo salsa, but satisfying.

Drinks include the sweet rice concoction horchata, hibiscus flower-flavored Jamaica, or excellent agave made with mango, cantaloupe, watermelon or other fruit.

When you head for the door, the Muró family bids you adios; even the women cleaning the griddle shouts out a goodbye and thanks. But no warning about the parallel parkers down the street.

## About the writer

REBECCA BRYANT is a writer whose work has appeared in *Swing*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and other publications.