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# Mexico City Eats: Alelí

R. Daniel Foster · Saturday, January 15th, 2022

Among the world's gastronomic capitals, Mexico City is having a moment–a lengthy one that started about a dozen years back. An influx of tourists into the world's fifth (or sixth by some counts) largest city launched numerous notable eateries. A vibrant architectural, music and art scene helped amp the cuisine scene. Now, that combo is really humming.

Beyond the internationally recognized Pujol by Enrique Olvera, which launched in 2000, there are scores of delectable options–even beyond the boundaries of Roma and Roma Norte, CDMX's hip and urbane center.



Chef Oswaldo Oliva / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

I visited in mid-December to sample the culinary excitement, joined by chef and cookbook author Mani Niall, who launched the renowned Mäni's on Fairfax Ave. in Los Angeles, circa 1989.

## Chef Oswaldo Oliva

Our first stop (I'll be covering three in this series) was Chef Oswaldo Oliva's Alelí, a rooftop grill in Roma Norte that's perched above his signature fine dining enterprise, Lorea, which opened in

2017.

Oliva has given Alelí more emphasis during the pandemic as diners seek open-air experiences. “This place saved us,” said Oliva, who spent a decade away from Mexico refining his skills at preeminent restaurants in Spain: the Basque country’s Mugaritz and El Celler de Can Roca in Girona.



The rooftop space at Alelí / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

This month, he plans to renovate the rooftop, bringing in new plants and flooring. A large abstract floral fills a wall on the patio rooftop, with the grill at one end and a small cocktail section at the other. It’s an unpretentious place–almost starkly homey, yet cozy. The freshened plants and flooring should add some polish.

Photos of famous chefs greet diners as they ascend a narrow staircase to Alelí. For Oliva, the Michelin star chefs daily remind him of culinary perseverance. “Each one is very subversive,” he explains. “They all have persistence, consistency, and moreover–tenacity.”

We began with a salad of ribboned daikon mixed with slivered almonds, the textures pairing wonderfully, although the dish was overblown with almonds that, in the end, overcrowded the dish.



Chef Mani Niall digs in / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Alelí excels with a variety of grilled vegetables and seafood–the skewers (squid and tuna), however, were unexceptional and bit undersized; the beef skewers were better.

The portabella gratin was a rich velvet treat, pairing well with the potato flatbread. And the corn tortillas set out pre-meal were amazingly crisply and flavorful.

## Torched cauliflower

Cauliflower is all the rage–so why not torch it? The blackened dish was certainly audacious, served with ultra-creamy hummus. The vegetable seemed a bit indistinct so we spiked it with some chimichurri, adding some acidity.



Blackened cauliflower / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

We didn’t sample the entrees, but perusing online reviews, they seem to be superb: a Porter House

Angus; a white fish with cucumber salad; grilled chicken with roasted cambray potatoes and chiles toreados; and grilled octopus served with honeyed rice, Grana Padano and nopales.

Alelí's signature cheesecake asado was served with a side of berries, and wholly lived up to its reputation: a decadent creamy wedge with a luscious mouthfeel.




Aleli / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

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