

A taste of Chile offered at Los Hornitos bakery

BY DANIEL MOCHON • FOR THE POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL • OCTOBER 4, 2007

I smile to myself with smug satisfaction as I spy the long queue spilling out onto the sidewalk from the popular doughnut chain a few doors down from Los Hornitos in Wappingers Falls. Not only am I going to be on my way quicker, but my breakfast will be much tastier - a sandwich that's prepared to order and served on a handmade roll, scratch baked just an hour or so before I arrive.

Monica and Hector Lorca opened the small, 13-seat bakery-café in February 2005, and named the place after a famous restaurant in the Chilean capital of Santiago where they first fell in love. Hanging from the walls are pictures of the renowned clay ovens of the original Los Hornitos, along with seaside renderings of the Chilean coast and a black gaucho (cowboy) hat.

Much of the floor space is taken up by a long, L-shaped counter with illuminated cases that display the wide variety of cakes, cookies and pastries made on the premises. Freshly baked bread (50 cents to \$3) in all shapes and sizes is also showcased in a bank of fabric-lined baskets behind the main counter.

A self-serve fridge holds a selection of soft drinks, most well-known American brands, though there are also a few examples from Ecuador, including Tome Tropical (\$1.20), a sweet strawberry soda we liked more than its red apple-flavored Manzana (\$1.20) compadre. Also refreshing was the naturally sparkling Guitig water (\$1.30-\$1.89) from the Ecuadorian Andes. Seven different Batidos or fruit smoothies can also be ordered; we tried the Mora (\$3.50), a creamy shake that wasn't overly sweetened, which allowed the subtle blackberry flavor to shine through.

Most of the sandwiches come on homemade rolls, including the chewy bun that cradled a tasty Hot Dog (\$2.75), which we ordered Chilean style or "completo," dressed with mayonnaise, sliced tomato and mashed avocado. Lohana's Favorite (\$5.95), named after the Lorcas' daughter, was another yummy standout, with slices of grilled chicken, crisp bacon, lettuce, tomato, mayo and melted provolone on a crusty baguette-style roll.

Hornitos' best sandwich is the Sirloin Steak Club (\$5.50) or Churrasco, a delicious composition of shaved griddled beef, melted muenster, avocado, tomato and mayo on a cakey Chilean amasado roll. The latter, made by hand rather than machine, provides an ideal vehicle that's soft enough to afford easy bites, but also has a certain density that soaks up the juicy, perfectly proportioned fillings without getting soggy.

Daily specials might include roasted chicken, pork chops, shrimp cocktail (ceviche) or the dish we sampled - a flavorful beef stew called Carne



Los Hornitos Bakery-Cafe serves sandwiches on homemade rolls. (Kathy McLaughlin/Poughkeepsie Journal)

LOS HORNITOS BAKERY CAFE

1582 Route 9, Dutchess Plaza, Wappingers Falls; 845-298-8683; www.loshornitosbakery.com; Casual Chilean and Latin Cuisine; open seven days for breakfast, lunch and dinner; Monday-Saturday, 7 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.; handicapped accessible; all major credit cards accepted; entire menu available for take-out; takeaway and off-premises catering available; one vegetarian item available; not suitable for vegans; restrooms available; delivery not available.

Menu and specials price range: 50 cents-\$12; cakes, \$15-\$140; wedding cakes by appointment.

Directions: From Poughkeepsie, take Route 9 south to Wappingers Falls. Make sure you are in the left lane after the intersection with New Hackensack Road (Wendy's will be on your right) and take a left at the next light into Dutchess Shopping Plaza where Main Street intersects Route 9. Los Hornitos is near the north end of the mall.

Guisada (\$7.50, including a soda). Thin strips of sirloin are sautéed with onions, bell peppers and tomatoes then braised in red wine for a few hours. Steamed long-grain rice and tender whole pink beans (or salad) made for a satisfying yet inexpensive meal.

Empanadas are hugely popular in Chile - these savory turnovers can come with a variety of fillings. Although Los Hornitos offers a few different types, usually their traditional beef version (\$3.25) is the only empanada to be had. This butterfly-shaped pastry sports a glossy sheen on its crusty dough and encloses a rich ground-beef stuffing with black olives, hardboiled egg and raisins. Although it's a bit messy to manage, we enjoyed our empanada even more with some of the tangy, coarsely chopped tomato salsa that comes on the side.

Sweets entice

No trip to a bakery is complete without something for your sweet tooth and there are plenty of goodies from which to choose. The actual number shall remain confidential, but among the numerous cake slices we sampled, one favorite was a fluffy Three Chocolate Mousse (\$3.75), with dark, milk and white layers capped by marbled chocolate. Another winner was the Lucuma (\$2.75), which had three layers of yellow sponge filled with dulce de leche and a whipped cream frosting that contained an exotic South American fruit puree (lucuma) somewhat evocative of peaches and guava.

On the subject of dulce de leche, Los Hornitos' excellent version of the thick milk-based caramel sauce shows up in a number of their pastries and should not be missed. The napoleon-esque Milhoja (\$2.50) had five tiers of crispy puff pastry separated by veins of the delicious tawny caramel, while Alfajors (70 cents and \$1.50) are buttery cookie rounds sandwiching dulce de leche, edged in finely grated coconut.

Chances are, the hard-working and personable Monica Lorca will be at the front counter to take and/or prepare your order. Sometimes the bakery-café gets a little backed up and it may take a while for your food to be ready, but usually it's well worth the wait. Be it breakfast, lunch, dinner or a sweet treat, Los Hornitos offers a tasty change of pace that's also easy on your pocketbook.

The Poughkeepsie Journal pays for the meals that are the subjects of restaurant reviews and reviewers do not identify themselves prior to the end of the meal. Daniel Mochon graduated in 2000 with high honors from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. He is the director of wine and cuisine at the Hudson Valley's largest wine and spirits store.