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Cantina LAREDO.  
gourmet mexican food

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**RESTAURANT REVIEW**

## FRESH, FLAVORFUL CREATIONS STEEPED IN TEX-MEX ELEGANCE

BY JON CHRISTENSEN | FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH



**at a glance**



**Cantina Laredo**  
8791 LYRA DR.  
(614-781-1139, WWW.CANTINALAREDO.COM)

**HOURS** » 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays and 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays

**RATING** » ★★★ (out of five)

**PRICE RANGE** » \$10.29 to \$26.99 (entrees)

**AMBIENCE** » bright, open, well-spaced, with hacienda accents

**CHILDREN'S MENU** » available

**RESERVATIONS** » accepted

**ACCESSIBILITY** » good

**LIQUOR LICENSE** » full

**QUICK CLICK** » good values in upscale Mexican in a new, elegant setting

**Guacamole is prepared fresh at the table.**  
BROOKE LAVALLEY | DISPATCH

Cantina Laredo of Dallas has opened its 30th location (the first in Ohio) in a new area on the perimeter of Polaris Fashion Place.

The restaurant clearly seeks to avoid offering just another Tex-Mex lineup or cooking heaps of cheap, dull food. The menu features many dishes that are probably firsts for Columbus.

The first item sets the tone: "Top-shelf guacamole" (\$9.49) is made at the table using lime juice, seasoned salt, jalapeno peppers, onion, cilantro, somewhat-unripe tomatoes and reasonably ripe avocados.

Fresh-tasting, it comes with nicely crisp, flavorful corn chips. Yet the guacamole lacked enough lime juice on one visit, throwing the flavors out of balance; another time, with another server, the flavors were fine.

Two salsas come with the complimentary chips. The liveliest is made with tomatillos that are roasted on the premises, giving the salsa a smoky, nutty flavor with a mild chili background. The other is tomato-based, though not brightly colored; it has more zip and tastes as if it's made with several types of chili peppers.

One of the house specialties (camaron poblano asada, \$21.49) starts with a poblano pepper that is roasted; stuffed with shrimp, jack cheese, onions and mushrooms; and wrapped in a thin flank steak that seems to have been marinated and grilled.

The beef-wrapped pepper is flavored with chimichurri, a parsley-based concoction with mild garlic and onion flavors. The sauce is a classic combination with beef in South American countries. The result: The

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## TEX-MEX

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pronounced grilled-meat flavor pairs well with the complex mix of tastes.

The cascabel sauce in the tacos of the same name (\$14.79) can't be beaten. It's red, hot and full of chili flavors — a wonderful foil for the pieces of sauteed chicken in the double-thick corn tortillas.

On the side are onions marinated with lime and cilantro, ready to contribute.

The mole sauce is one of the best, with balances of roasted ancho and other dried chilies, sugar and chocolate. It's served over well-executed chicken enchiladas.

Another enchilada worth trying contains spinach, jack cheese and sliced mushrooms (enchiladas de espinaca, \$10.49).

The poblano sauce, though less complex than the mole, does the job.

The daily fish special (\$25.49) has been halibut sauteed and served on a banana leaf with a mild green-pepper puree. The fish is unremarkable, especially for the price. Pass.

Excellent, fluffy mild rice and a saute of zucchini, mushrooms and potatoes come with most entrees.

The apple pie (\$5.99) is given an unusual presentation: A slice of very sweet pie with a beautifully golden crust is served on a hot fajita platter. A pitcher of caramel sauce is poured around the pie and caramelizes on the hot platter. A large scoop of acceptable cinnamon ice cream on the pie is ready to melt into the proceedings.

The crepes (\$5.99) are filled with apples and pie-filling sauce, which has a made-elsewhere flavor. The large flan (\$5.29) has a good custard and a forceful caramel sauce.

Libations are expensive. Some of the glasses of wine from the small, mediocre lineup and some of the margaritas cost more than \$10. The house margarita goes for \$8.

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