

THREE NIGHT EVENT

GIRLS' NIGHT OUTBACK



AUSTRALIA'S THUNDER DOWN UNDER

DIRECT FROM LAS VEGAS

DECEMBER 3-5 | 8PM

\$25 RESERVED SEATING

PURCHASE TICKETS AT
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MUST BE 21+
LIVE ENTERTAINMENT TAX OF 9% NOT INCLUDED IN TICKET PRICE.



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FOOD

BY TODD SOUTH



Estella at the Jesse serves handmade tacos with both traditional and innovative ingredients.
PHOTO/ALLISON YOUNG

Taco the town

Reno has plenty of tacos—street tacos, fast food tacos, restaurant tacos. There's a taco for everyone. And then there are the tacos at Estella, part of the renovated hotel and bar now known as the Jesse (a decades-old structure now named for Reno's namesake Civil War general). My friends and I met up at the stylish/trendy bar and enjoyed a few rounds of local microbrew (\$5 a pint) before moseying on over to the upscale taqueria.

The room is pretty small, with stool-and-counter seating. We ditched the stools and stood at the counter, engaging in conversation with the dedicated and enthusiastic folks crafting and serving our meal. We started with a housemade serving of thin, crispy tortilla chips (\$2) with a ramekin of chunky, herby bean dip (\$4). Both were very good, but we wished for more dip. We finished off the chips with green tomatillo salsa and smoky salsa *morita*. Both had plenty of flavor and what I'd call medium heat.

There is a sizeable selection of mezcal—the agave-based cousin to tequila—available, including one imposing bottle labeled *Peloton de la Muerte*, or “Brigade of Death” (\$30 per bottle). They're served with accompanying slices of blood orange, lime, something pickled I couldn't identify and *sal de gusano*, a.k.a. “worm salt.” Comprised of salt, dried chiles and toasted, ground moth larvae that burrow into agave plants, it's apparently a condiment that is fairly common in Mexico but has only recently become more available north of the border. It had an earthy, smokiness that I could see myself sprinkling on any number of foods.

The short menu includes vegan, vegetable and fruit salads, but I had eyes only for

tacos—and I ordered the lot. Rough-hewn, five-inch tortillas belied their housemade origins, lightly grilled and exceptionally flavorful. One piled with *carne asada* (\$6), *queso fresco*, local microgreens, and salsa *de arbol* had a nice bit of heat, tender meat and was generally enjoyable. This was followed by a taco *de pescado* (\$7) with beer battered snapper, chipotle crema and seasonal slaw. I'm not entirely certain what the veg was, but it was a nice contrast to the crispy fish and copious sauce.

Smoked king trumpet mushrooms and maitake mushrooms (\$5.50) were combined with *queso fresco*, pine nuts, radish microgreens and salsa *morita*. On first bite there was a sweetness I wasn't completely down with, but the 'shrooms pushed through and brought it all together. At this time of the year, the seasonal vegetarian taco (\$5.50) understandably centered on roasted pumpkin and pumpkin seeds, with *queso fresco* and microgreens. Squash is generally not my favorite thing, but this was a really interesting, creative, very New World concoction. Even my least favorite taco was something remarkable.

The last two meat and *masa* discs were spectacular. A taco *al pastor* (\$5.50) with cilantro, *adobo*, pineapple and a thin, fried wafer of queso Oaxaca was tender, crunchy and spicy. It was apparently my friend's first experience with *al pastor* pork, and what an introduction. However, servings of *carnitas* (\$5.50) with julienned house pickle, tomatillo salsa and the same Oaxaca cheese crisp blew everything else away. Salty, sour, spicy, meaty and completely fantastic. Despite being pretty full at this point, I had to order one more of these, because, damn. □

Estella at the Jesse

350 Evans Ave., 737-9461

Estella at the Jesse is open 4 to 9 p.m. on Wednesday and Thursday, 4 to 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, and noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday. Learn more at estellareno.com.