



OFF MENU

Más pan dulce!

BY MITCH BARBER

“¿Qué más?” or “What else?” the clerk asks after she retrieves a pumpkin empanada before putting it in a small pastry bag. I add a bolillo, or little roll, to my order. “¿Cuántos?” she asks, or “How many?”

One advantage of a full-service Mexican bakery is the opportunity to practice Spanish—and to grab some pan dulce or sweet bread, of course. Everything is so delicious and reasonably priced that responses often require some reflection.

There’s a stretch of Franklin Boulevard between Sutterville and Fruitridge roads that resembles Mexico in its population and businesses. La Esperanza and La Superior supermarkets allow for a virtual visit to the country without the long drive south. The bustling La Esperanza bakery celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. The air is festive: in line, families wait patiently in lively conversation. Others wait alone, planning to order a bevy of breads for their coworkers. When it’s my turn, I order

a puerquito, or piggy, a mildly sweet, pig-shaped treat made with brown sugar and molasses. Its flavor is equal parts gingerbread and snickerdoodle.

About a quarter mile north is La Superior with its popular bolillos and conchas. Bolillos are four for \$1, and the conchas are round, airy sweet breads that resemble seashells and come in chocolate, pink, yellow and white varieties. Also tasty are the cortadillos, which are triangular pieces of yellow cake with some frosting and sprinkles on top. They’re good with milk and come in green if you need something to accurately represent one of the three colors in the Mexican flag (February 24th is Mexico’s Día de la Bandera, or flag day).

North of the city center on Del Paso Boulevard is La Jerezana, a personal-sized bakery and market owned and operated by the Olazábal family, who specialize in mini conchas. Héctor Olazábal is from the state of Zacatecas in Mexico, and most of the baked goods resemble

those found there. Cross-cultural options include the pan guatemalteco, affectionately known as a gusanito, or little worm. It tastes like vanilla and looks like a short, stubby earthworm. There’s also the semita salvadoreña filled with pineapple and surrounded by sweet bread made.

Even more personal is Dane’s Bakery at 65th Street and Broadway. It’s nothing more than a small display case and a long corridor with an inviting aroma. It belongs to the Villarreal family, including three baker sisters from Guadalajara.

A popular delicacy at Dane’s is the pay de elote, a small, rich, whole-grain corn tart with a buttery pie crust. Also on the must-try list is the jericalla. Lupe Villarreal, one of the three sisters, made it clear that it was not flan. Instead, it’s a traditional treat from Jalisco that is less sweet and more egg-forward than the better-known custardy dessert that bears a startling resemblance. When I ordered one, Lupe asked, “¿Qué más?” □

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