

# new mexico

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Where to get away from it all

New Mexico is for the birds



DICK KENT

## Rancho de Chimayo

Some Like It Hot, Some Like It Not

By KENNETH W. HARDY

• Once upon a time in the tiny village of Chimayó there lived a young boy who every night studied diligently in front of the big fireplace in his grandfather's house. Between his studies he built dreams of far-off places, away from this land where the future seemed for the old.

When the boy grew up he joined the Navy, was euphoric when told he would be stationed in the East, married an attractive East Coast lass and settled down to live happily ever after in his nirvana by the sea, Hartford, Connecticut.

But balloons filled with dreams always seem to pop or whistle away, leaving in the mind's eye a fleeting image of curlicued abstraction. So it was with the lad from Chimayó. More and more, he remembered the fields of chile, the apple orchards, the warmth of the fire on a

starry winter night when the air was so clear that the only thing between man and the stars was the faint perfume of piñon.

His wife, a native of Connecticut, recalled her brief visits to this valley, with its icy stream, pine-covered hills and gracious people whose family roots are as deep as are those of the venerable cottonwoods growing along the irrigation ditches.

Then grandfather died and the young man found himself part-owner of the family homestead where he had studied by firelight. It hadn't been much of a decision to move his family back to Chimayó; it was more a matter of deciding when. By 1965, Arturo Jaramillo, now more properly State Senator Arturo Jaramillo, had transformed the homestead into a restaurant generally

acknowledged by connoisseurs of native New Mexico food to be among the finest in the state.

The fame of Rancho de Chimayó, as Arturo calls his *restaurant*, is widespread. Not long ago, notable *New York Times* food critic Craig Claiborne wrote: "Of all the Mexican restaurants visited recently, . . . the pleasantest was one found on the way to Taos. It is called Rancho de Chimayó in the town of Chimayó. This is a handsome place, an old home with white-washed walls, heavy beams, enthusiastic service and excellent cooking. It also boasts a most imaginative menu."

The menu of which Claiborne wrote is not only imaginative, it is varied. Standards such as enchiladas, tamales and tacos are exquisitely flavored with chile grown wholly in Chimayó, known among *aficionados* as producing some of the best. The chile colorado, or red chile, is rich in flavor, warm but not fiery. The chile verde, or green chile, spicier of the two, takes advantage of the unique flavor of Chimayó chile rather than overpowering the diner.

Says Jaramillo: "Native food doesn't have to be hot to be good. It's a common misconception that eating native food has to be a painful experience. Most of the natives who eat Chimayó chile do so for the flavor, not for hotness."

Other menu highlights include carne adovada (see recipe below) which, regardless of what anybody says, is so fiery that it must have been sired by a volcano; chile rellenos, layered with cheese, chile and meat, not stuffed as usual, because of the small size of the tasty Chimayó chiles, and pollo al estilo Chimayó, delectable marinated chicken breasts smothered with a red chile sauce and cheese.

For those with more pedestrian tastes or tender palates, Rancho de Chimayó has a small selection of steaks and chicken.

Knowledgeable diners order a side plate of posole (recipe below), which turns out to be the "underwater popcorn" that one youngster vigorously demanded not long ago. Sopaipillas, those heavenly bits of pastry which traditionally accompany native food in New Mexico, are so fluffy that diners slather on either locally produced honey or homemade jam to keep them from floating off.

Jaramillo believes that steps are necessary to keep the Spanish heritage of small villages like Chimayó from being absorbed by Twentieth-Century culture. Plans call for a sort of "nuevo" Williamsburg to be built around Rancho de Chimayó, with buildings, stores, homes and a hostelry similar to what visitors would have found in the colonial days.

While the *restaurant* is the only part of the village now complete, one has the feeling of being transported out of the modern world, at least during dinner hours. The entire menu is in Spanish and the familiar cry of the stewardess — coffee, tea or milk — becomes cafe, te o leche. Waiters and waitresses are careful, though, to explain the intricacies of each dish.

Rancho de Chimayó has not been without its notables. Such personalities as Jimmy Stewart, Henry Fonda,

Anthony Quinn, Greer Garson and Vivian Vance have supped in the restaurant's three dining rooms, traditionally furnished with pegged, heavy wooden furniture.

When actor-balladeer Burl Ives makes one of his frequent sojourns to Rancho de Chimayó from his new home in New Mexico, it's frequently an all-evening affair.

So taken with the food and charm of the Rancho de Chimayó was Academy Award-winning director Sir Carol Reed, recently on location in New Mexico, that he and Lady Reed dined there two or three nights a week. Recalls Jaramillo: "He loved the outdoors patio and wouldn't eat anyplace else — even when it was cold or rainy." The patio seats two hundred for summer dining.

The fact that most of Arturo's customers are willing to drive the hefty fifty-seven-mile round trip from Santa Fe further attests to the excellence of the cuisine.

Arturo has a penchant for authenticity whether in decor or in Spanish-printed menus or in recipes which are "the ones we grew up with." During the restoration of the home, and its subsequent conversion into a restaurant, strict attention was paid to detail. Mud, not plaster, was used to coat the interior and exterior twenty-four-inch-thick adobe walls, as had been the custom in the old days.

Maintaining this authenticity has created occasional problems, as was the case during the restoration. Arturo applied to a Midwest-based insurance company for workmen's compensation insurance to cover the villagers who were helping him. Traditionally, men do the rough plastering, but only women have a touch fine enough to finish the walls smoothly. They use only their hands.

"The company approved the request for compensation insurance initially, but when they sent an underwriter out from the main office to inspect the job, it was a different story," recalls Jaramillo. "At the time we were working on the outside of the building. We had a scaffold about three stories high and right on the top was a woman in her seventies. The underwriter took one look at her, got a panicky look on his face, jumped back into his car and that's the last we ever saw of him. Right after that, they canceled my insurance."

This fall some state office of Economic Opportunity staffers, searching for ways to market local apple cider, stumbled onto a drink which has met with staggering success. Whether the tangy combination of cider and tequila will reach the same heights of popularity as the Manhattan is still to be seen, but if local acceptance is any indication, within a few years Chimayó could very well be an everyday barroom word. The drink was first served in the restaurant's Cantina, a homey bar decorated with hand-woven fabrics from the nearby Ortega's Weaving Shop. To brew one at home, just follow the recipe below:

#### Chimayó Cocktail (for one)

1½ ounces tequila  
1 ounce New Mexico apple cider  
¼ ounce lemon juice  
¼ ounce creme de cassis

Combine ingredients in a blender or bar shaker. Add ice and blend or shake until cold. Serve in a cocktail glass or on the rocks garnished with a wedge of New Mexico apple.

A hot, but tasty, specialty is:

**Carne Adovada**  
(for six)

- 2 pounds dried red chile pods
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- ½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 2 cups water
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 2 pounds tenderized pork steak

Wash chile pods then roast for two minutes in 350-degree oven (watch chiles closely as dry chiles are easily burned). Remove stems and as many seeds as possible from chiles, then place pods in blender with small amount of water. Thoroughly blend then combine with other dry ingredients and water in a pot and boil for fifteen minutes. Tenderize pork steaks with a mallet or the edge of a plate and sprinkle with flour, salt and pepper mixture. Brown pork slowly in fat until well done. Place cooked pork steaks in a casserole and cover with warm sauce. Cook in 350-degree oven for fifteen minutes. Sauce may be prepared in larger quantities and frozen until needed.

Serve with

**Posole (Hominy)**  
(for six)

- 1 pound posole (or hominy)
- 1 pound pork ribs (meat may be removed if desired)
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 3 quarts water

Combine all ingredients and boil for at least two hours. Add water as needed. Posole will pop like popcorn when soft and ready to eat. A whole chile pod, with seeds removed, may be added for flavor and holiday color.

A tasty, but not too hot, specialty is:

**Enchiladas con Queso — Chile Colorado**  
(for four)

- 12 tortillas
- ½ onion grated fine
- 1 cup grated mild cheese (longhorn, etc.)
- 3 tablespoons shortening
- 4 tablespoons flour
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 3 cups cold water
- ½ cup chile powder

Melt shortening in a sauce pan. Slowly stir in flour. Add chile powder a little at a time and stir mixture until completely moistened. Add cold water and stir until chile is dissolved. Add salt and garlic salt then simmer for 10 minutes. Heat ½ inch shortening or fat in a skillet until a haze forms on the surface. Quickly dip tortillas in the fat, making sure they are completely moistened. Do not overcook tortillas or they will become hard. Drain on absorbent paper. To serve enchiladas, stack three tortillas to a plate with a layer of onion, cheese and sauce between each tortilla. Top with sauce and cheese, then place under broiler or in hot oven until cheese melts. Braised cubed beef or ground beef may be added to the sauce for variety. Garnish with shredded lettuce and tomato wedges.

