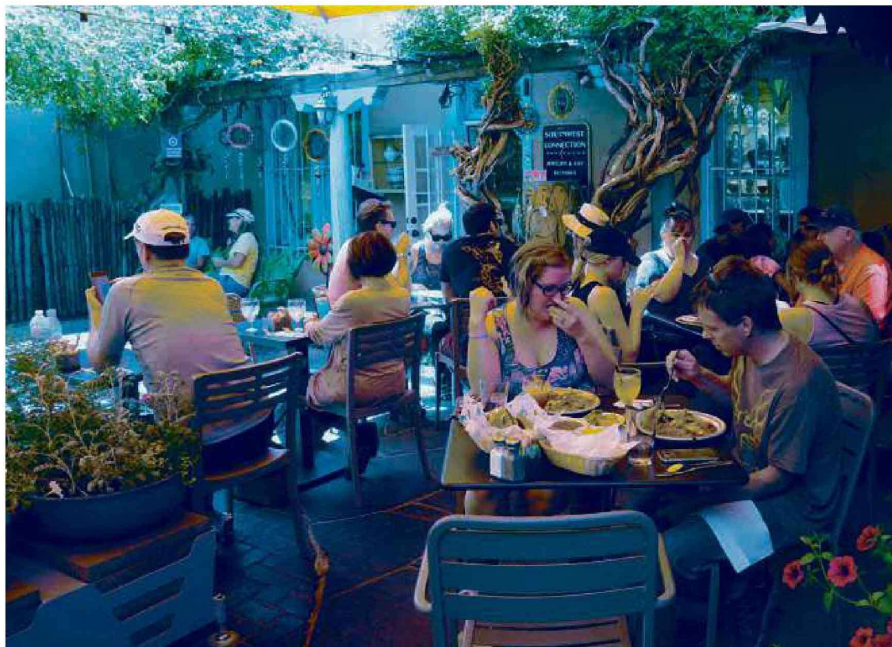
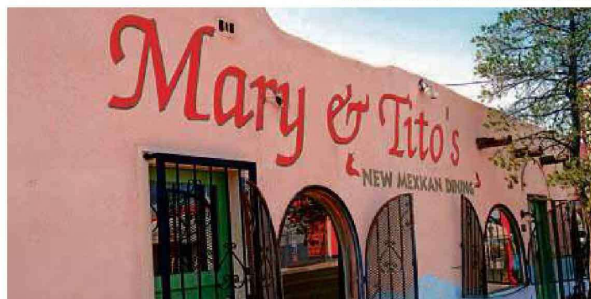




PATRICIA HARRIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



PHOTOS BY DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## FOOD & TRAVEL

# James Beard classics hit the spot in Santa Fe and Albuquerque

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Sometimes it pays to take your own advice. We have preached the virtues of the James Beard Foundation's America's Classics in these pages by highlighting the mostly mom-and-pop eateries in New England that serve great regional food and do it with character. While the foundation is known for honoring top chefs and cutting-edge restaurants, each year it also shines a spotlight on a few casual restaurants that are the delight of local diners and culinary roadtrippers.

We've rarely encountered a dud among them, so when we planned a trip to Santa Fe over the summer, we checked the foundation list for America's Classics and weren't disappointed. Two spots in Santa Fe and one in Albuquerque provided three angles on the chile-based cuisine of northern New Mexico.

We can't pretend that **The Shed** (113 E. Palace Ave., Santa Fe. 505-982-9030, [sfshed.com](http://sfshed.com)) is our "discovery." In fact, it's hard to miss the colorful sign under the arcade on East Palace Avenue. It points inside to Prince Patio, where the restaurant occupies the courtyard and nine surrounding rooms of a 1692 hacienda. Like many Beard classics, it's a family operation. Courtney Carswell — son of founders Polly and Thomas Carswell — and his wife, Linnea, run the place with their kids, Josh and Sarah.

Claims to "creative cuisine" aside, the very long menu offers straightforward New Mexican fare from enchiladas and blue corn soft tacos to hominy-rich posole. We simplified matters by selecting the special of the day, a tamale plate with a full palette of Southwestern flavors. One tamale was

stuffed with green chile and corn, the other with pork and red chile.

What we like about The Shed is that the chile sauces, even though they're often served in small side bowls, are the heart and soul of the menu. The family grows its own red chiles and grinds them at the restaurant to make red chile sauce. They've always sourced their green chile peppers from the same farm in the Hatch valley south of Albuquerque. We ordered some of both red and green sauces to dollop on the rich, corn-intensive tamales.

Slightly less obvious than The Shed, **Cafe Pasqual's** (121 Don Gaspar Ave., Santa Fe. 505-983-9340, [pasquals.com](http://pasquals.com)) sits a block off the south side of Santa Fe's historic central plaza. Berkeley, Calif., expat Katharine Kagel opened the restaurant in 1979 and named it for the patron saint of cooks and kitchens.

The décor is a colorful pastiche of Santa Fe style, Mexican kitsch, and more than a few hints of its counter-culture roots. All the food is organic, natural, and, for the most part, local. Do not ask for a Diet Coke. "We don't serve anything that's bad for you," our server chirped. "Aspartame will kill you." We'd been admonished. As Cantabrigians, we felt right at home.

Although Pasqual's accepts dinner reservations, there's usually a long line for the 50 seats at breakfast and lunch. Sitting at the big communal table or joining others to fill out a four-top means getting seated sooner. At a Sunday breakfast, we shared a corner table with a Californian. We ordered huevos rancheros with a tangy green chile sauce, as well as an unphotogenic but delicious dish of griddled polenta cakes flecked with green chile and topped with red chile sauce and two fried



eggs. But Cafe Pasqual's hasn't quite shaken its California origins. Our table mate had poached eggs on avocado toast.

We were glad to have built up our chile heat tolerance before we got to **Mary & Tito's Cafe** (2711 4th St. NW, Albuquerque. 505-344-6266) in an adobe building about 2 miles from Albuquerque's tourist-central Old

Town Plaza. Mary and Tito Gonzalez opened the spot as a retirement project in 1963. He did the cooking and she presided over the counter and the big room of Naugahyde booths and Formica tables. Both founders have passed on, but the family-run cafe carries on their hospitality and their recipes.

Mary & Tito's is known for carne

**Cafe Pasqual** (top left), **Mary & Tito's Cafe**, and **The Shed** (above). Menu offerings include (left, from top) tamale plate special at The Shed; poached eggs on avocado toast at Cafe Pasqual; stuffed sopapilla at Mary & Tito's.

adovada, a Southwestern slow-roasted chile-oregano-garlic-infused answer to pulled pork. The kitchen is also known for its sopapillas, but not the puffy dough made to slather with honey. The cooks fill sopapilla dough with savory meat, beans, rice, and chile and then deep fry it. Carne adovada is one of the most popular fillings. Perfect. We could try two specialties on one plate — and a big plate it was. We also ordered a plate of enchiladas: one chicken and one cheese and onion.

Our server didn't blink when we asked for Diet Coke. She brought big glasses full of ice and a can for each of us. She informed us that she'd bring a free refill when we needed it. That turned out to be a distinct kindness. Mary & Tito's red and green chile sauces are so fiercely hot that they make your eyes water and your nose run — but the food is so good that you will eat every bite.

Mary & Tito's is very particular about their chile sauces, sourcing all their chiles from a single grower. The cooks make red chile from ground pods, never from purchased powder, adding only salt and pepper. Servers say that the green chile sauce — essentially a chunky chop of fresh green chiles with a little ground beef, onion, and garlic — is slightly less hot.

After a certain level of burn, comparisons are moot. We asked for the enchiladas "Christmas" style to compare red and green sauces side by side. Our server acknowledged that it was a touristy cliché, but the kitchen was happy to oblige, laddling the sauces crosswise so some graced each enchilada. Which was hotter? We couldn't tell. Both were the best of their kind we have eaten. The green is more vegetal and eye-poppingly sharp. The red is rounder, sweeter and full-body hot.

Please pass the Kleenex.

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