



# DOWN ARGENTINE WAY

BY NICHOLAS GILMAN  
Special to The News

## El Rincón Criollo dishes up empanadas and other family recipes from its cozy corner

Of all the non-Mexican cuisines in the city, Argentine is certainly one of the most popular. There seems to be a steakhouse with “Buenos Aires” in its name on every corner. With so many in the city, how to choose? When my gastronome friends Tom and Juan Carlos heartily recommended a new outdoor Argentine “puesto” (street stall) right in my neighborhood, I was intrigued.

Just off a busy nine-way intersection near Insurgentes and Yucatán in Colonia Roma, El Rincón Criollo is like nothing else in the city. Less than a year old, this tiny outdoor restaurant is dwarfed by one of those screamingly lit pharmacies that grace our crazy metropolis. You could easily walk right by. In this most unlikely space, a surprisingly cozy corner of Buenos Aires has been created.

The triangular space offers a counter with 10 stools and several umbrella-shaded tables, protected from the street by some potted plants. Behind the counter Argentine owner Martin Forstmann prepares wonderful home-style “Bonaerense” (from Buenos Aires) cuisine.

The affable Forstmann, whose Spanish is graced by an accent as thick as cream, arrived in Mexico five years ago with his wife. During a late afternoon lull, he explained to me that he planned to open a catering business, but certainly not a restaurant.

“While we were looking for an apartment, we spotted an empty stand with a ‘for rent’ sign on it. It seemed to be calling out to us.”

Their little restaurant was open for business a week later (although they still had no place to live).

**MORE INFO**

Try this slice of Buenos Aires in Mexico City

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El Rincón Criollo  
Argentine street stall  
Yucatán 40-A, corner of Insurgentes  
Tel: 4195-2143  
Open noon to 10 p.m.  
Monday through Friday,  
1:30 to 7 p.m. Saturday

Forstmann grew up in a culinary family. His grandmother sold home-baked desserts door-to-door, and his older brother is a chef.

“I learned by watching and eating,” he mused with a twinkle in his eye. “The recipes come from my family. Our chimichurri (the classic parsley and garlic sauce) is done exactly as my mother used to make it at home.”

Argentines are famed for their empanadas, and the ones here are some of the best I’ve eaten. I had a hard time deciding between the humita (corn, béchamel, onion, green pepper and spices) and the carne (the ground meat delicately perfumed with cumin and pepper) so I tried them both.

Larger and more filling is the tarta, a deep-dish vegetarian pie. You can choose between spinach and atún, (filled with a spicy tuna mixture), the chef’s personal recommendation. They are served with a simply dressed mixed salad, which makes a satisfying light meal.

For a heartier lunch, there are baguettes, large sandwiches



Martin Forstmann, owner of El Rincón Criollo, with a helper

made with fresh, crunchy rolls, also served with a small salad. The “choripan” (Argentine sausage) is mouth-watering and not too spicy, and the arrachera, my friend Tom’s favorite, is meaty but tender and succulent.

The menu lists several pastas. Ñoquis (the Spanish spelling of gnocchi) and ravioli are homemade and served with your choice of sauce. I tried the salsa rosa, tomato sauce made richer and prettier by a splash of cream. It was light and didn’t overwhelm the flavor of the pasta.

The stars of the show, as always in an Argentine restaurant, are the meats. El Rincón Criollo’s are of consistently high quality. The house special is called “bife de chorizo.”

The chef explained to me that this has nothing to do with chorizo, but is an Argentine cut of beef, round, juicy and tender. The name refers to its shape, not its flavor. The meat here is grilled to perfection and served with either chimichurri, or a more Mexican-style salsa picante.

Finally, for dessert, order a traditional “mate” (a type of tea and Argentina’s national drink) and some “Alfajor Santafecino del Bono,” airy cookies filled with dulce de leche, the sweet caramel popular all over South America. These typically Argentine sweets are handmade daily.

Prices here, by the way, are very reasonable; empanadas are only \$16 pesos, baguettes are under \$50, and a full meal will not set you back more than \$100.

To accompany your meal, there’s an eclectic mix of music, from Argentine tango to American country and Cuban salsa, with the occasional honking of our eternally frustrated D.F. drivers thrown in. But what’s a little urban chaos? It will all seem irrelevant from the comfort of your new Argentine home.

Nicholas Gilman is author of the award winning “Good Food in Mexico City: A Guide to Food Stalls, Fondas and Fine Dining.” His Web site is [www.mexicocity-food.net](http://www.mexicocity-food.net).

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