

eat & drink

LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE



DEL TORO BURGER

\$6.50 at Del Toro 2133 S. Halsted St. 312-733-7144

WORTH A TRIP

By Michael Nigrant | FOR REDEYE

Before the artist boom and major gentrification—and before Kristoffer's Cafe served up its transcendent slices of tres leches cake, Simone's served its first PBR and Nightwood cooked up its first batch of crispy pig ears—the Garcia family settled in Pilsen.

The patriarch Froylan Garcia immigrated to Chicago from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, in 1959. He worked a bunch of factory jobs, eventually settling in at General Motors. After saving some money, he bought up real estate along South Halsted Street and the surrounding blocks. One of those parcels became La Favorita #2 grocery on May and 19th streets, a bodega where his wife Rosa cooked up some of Chicago's best weekend-only barbacoa for almost 40 years before selling the business to her brother, who subsequently sold it a few years ago. Their sons—Evy, Andy and Froylan Jr.—started

working in the store as boys. By 5 years old, Froylan Jr. helped Rosa with the braised beef cheeks. When Evy was 12, he manned the cash register.

Andy and Evy took over one the properties their father bought, liquor store F & R Liquors, located at 2129 S. Halsted St. in 1990. They saw the burgeoning artist community drinking craft beer by the mid-2000s and started offering a hefty artisanal selection, the kind you'd rarely see outside of Binny's. That craft beer selection proved fruitful when Nightwood opened as a BYOB restaurant a block away in 2009. Inspired by Nightwood's success and bolstered by their burgeoning beer business, Andy and Evy decided to launch an upscale taqueria of their own, Del Toro, in 2011.

Del Toro is rarely mentioned by foodies with the same kind of fervor reserved for Big Star or Antique Taco, but the quality of

their tacos—especially the tender weekend-only barbacoa (\$3) made from Rosa's special recipe—and the gooey, addictive queso fundido (\$5) are just as good and cheaper. One thing neither Big Star or Antique Taco has, however, is a burger.

Del Toro's is not just any burger, but one made from freshly ground beef seasoned like a traditional Mexican skirt steak with garlic and oregano-heavy adobo mix and fresh jalapenos or habaneros (you can select which type of chili you want depending on your heat tolerance). That beef is patted thin into a couple of old school-diner-style patties and griddled until the center is caramelized and the edges are crispy. A fistful of chihuahua cheese is stuffed in between the two patties and the masterpiece is mounted on a thick egg-glazed bun baked just a few blocks away in Chinatown.

The burger tastes like an Edzo's char

burger mashed up with a killer quesadilla. The fiery chilis, the gooey cheese and the juicy beef also remind me of a Latin spin on Minnesota's famed Jucy Lucy burgers. Considering that even a mediocre burger priced at \$6.50 is tough to come by, Del Toro's, which comes with a cucumber and jicama skewer on the side, is a steal.

So why does a Mexican spot, albeit an upscale one, even serve a burger? "We really knew tacos and tequila, but our former business partner [May St. Cafe chef] Mario Santiago used to serve a slider at his restaurant, and he said people loved them. So we put a twist on it, stuffing it with cheese and chilis, and it really took off," Evy Garcia said.

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