

DINING

Solid Southwestern

Zolo provides plenty of reasons to get out of the house

By Rachel Odell Walker
Camera Dining Critic

Until recently, the last time I had fried oysters was on a sandy beach in New England with sea gulls coasting overhead and sailboats dotting the horizon. Served in a paper tray from a small shack manned by a shirtless college kid, the oysters seemed emblematically regional. Then I sampled those at Zolo Grill.

Served on the half shell atop a fresh slaw salad marinated in a savory vinaigrette, the blue corn fried oysters with a jalapeno crema (\$12) arrived crisp and hot. The tangy dipping sauce kicked up the intensity and the soft oyster dissolved in my mouth. The dish was so convincing I would have believed it was endemic to the southwest.

What a way to start a simple lunch date—and it wasn't even my order. My appetizer, gazpacho (\$6), was a beautiful deep red palette of heirloom tomatoes blended with garlic and hot spices, softened by sweet, tender roasted beets. My companion kindly shared her oyster platter as I absorbed the consistent goodness I've come to associate with Zolo.

I'm no stranger to jicama, roasted chilies, garlic, blue corn, and lime. I adore the transformative flavors achieved through unique and precise combinations of cilantro and mole, roasted peppers and hot chiles, slow-cooked pork and biting paprika. Striking the right balance of spice and flavor while letting the main ingredient—be it pork, chicken, posole, or beans—



Paul Aiken | Camera

Heidi Foote, at left, and Cheryl Rochford laugh together as they finish lunch Wednesday on the patio at Zolo Grill in Boulder.

Food ★★½
Service ★★★
Ambience ★★★
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IF YOU GO

2525 Arapahoe Ave.,
Boulder 303-449-0444,
zologrill.com.

Southwestern cuisine made with fresh ingredients and savory spices.

Hours | Mon. 11 a.m.-9 p.m., Tue.-Sat. 11 a.m.-10 p.m., Sun. brunch 11 a.m.-3 p.m., dinner 3 p.m.-9 p.m. Accepts all major credit cards. Wheelchair accessible. Vegetarian and vegan dishes. Accepts reservations.

Noise level | Moderate noise that is still conducive to conversations.

Recommended dishes | Any of the tamales on the menu, mashed guacamole, peach cornmeal cobbler.

hold its own is a culinary feat, one that Zolo achieves time and again.

The restaurant's sweet potato and shrimp tamale was an exercise in creamy cornmeal and rich, sweet shrimp sautéed in butter. It was excellent. My friend's crispy trout tacos also had a tantalizing taste, but the fish could have been crispier. The jicama on which the tacos sat burst with juicy flavor.

If lunch was good, dinner was better. At the first taste of

guacamole, the abundant bowl of mashed avocados and spices impressed, complementing creamy and sharp tastes. The arbol crusted scallops with house-cured bacon, farmers market greens and sweet corn broth swept my taste buds to another plane. The scallops were perfectly cooked, juicy yet firm, and were basted in a complex suite of flavors. Likewise, my companions grilled shoulder blade steak (\$17) was so tender and juicy I entertained brief fantasies of raising and butchering my own pigs and devoting my remaining years to learning the art of cooking pork.

A meal at Zolo could be enhanced with a few tweaks to the service.

There are small flaws that can be polished away with a little effort. Fortunately for Zolo, the food and the restaurant's exotic interior and secluded patio will continue to draw people looking for a distinct menu that would be hard to replicate at home.

Dining critic Rachel Walker can be reached at boulderddining@gmail.com

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