

Eubudo Station

By Candy Jones



The acrid remnants of the July 4th fireworks were washed from the northern New Mexico skies by a fervent thunderstorm this morning. As the sun took hold, the clear blue sky celebrated its cleansing and the asphalt glistened as my Subaru headed upstream on 285 north of Santa Fe en route to Embudo Station, a restaurant nestled some thirty feet from the Rio Grande' cascading waters and glorious stands of Cottonwood just 41 miles north of Sante Fe on the road to Taos.

As I turned onto the small bridge, which crosses over the river, my eyes met with glorious feldspar colored cliffs surrounded by darker stone hillsides punctuated with juniper and pinion. A short turn right, I pulled my car up to park along an old railroad tie, a remnant of the Embudo Station train depot and reason for the name of the present restaurant Embudo Station. Embudo was a stop along the now defunct Chili Line, a stretch of railroad that transported people and chili on a narrow rail from Santa Fe to Denver. In 1881 during the railroad days, Embudo began its history as a stopping place to eat for weary travelers-- an oasis in this high desert nestled alongside the rustling of the waters of the Rio Grande. The rails of steel were pulled up in the 40's it is said to help with the war effort, but this land still provides a place of sanctuary to eat and to rest along the state's major tributary.

I am met by the new owner of Embudo Station, Alana Banner, the force behind the impressive renovation and reinvigoration of Embudo Station restaurant. Alana Banner is a local girl, daughter to Cerrillos drummer and sound wizard Baird Banner and daughter to local musician and artiste Busy McCarroll. Alana purchased the restaurant in January of this year and opened its newly renovated "doors" with a fresh look and a conscious eye. James Beard award winning Chef John Cox designed a menu that combines culinary magic with a commitment to keeping things local. From Babecued Portk Ribs Local Bison Meatload Sandwich, cedar Rainbow Trout, Housemade Blackbean Burger, or Tierra Amarilla Lamb Tacos the menu places emphasis on comfort food with a twist of sophistication while maintaining a reasonable price point.



Alana's restaurant serves food that was grown here in New Mexico as was she. Alana says she shops 95% locally, supporting the community and buying fresh from local farmers from Velarde, Dixon and Abiqui. She donates cooking oils to bio-diesel driving New Mexicans, all to-go orders go out in biodegradable containers and she provides composting materials to local farmers. She has picked out choice wines and beers from Black Mesa, Vivac, Turtle Mountain, La Chirapada, and Santa Fe Brewing company and placed custom made "Day of the Dead" labels on her bottles fashioned by local Taos artist Amy Cordova and Dan Engar, For the white wine Embudo offers Sirena Blanca meaning mermaid in Spanish, and the Rojo or red wine label features an illustration of Billy the Kid, and for the beer label she has chosen the name Senor Cerveza.

This twenty-five year old statuesque blonde with large round and Intelligent eyes escorts me to a selection of tables from which I can choose, 23 outside, 13 indoors. I am told there is a seating capacity of 130. I am struck by the composure and sense of purposefulness this young women projects.

The patio is adorned with stylish aluminum table and chairs on the patio and indoors. Many of the tables sport colorful chartreuse and Kelly green umbrellas. My ears take in a cacophony of birds chirping, wings flapping, the steady bobble and play of water against rock and the occasional rustle of leaves from the enormous cottonwoods canopy above me. Just then the acoustic guitar of Nacha Mendez is added to the mix. Her melodic voice rises. Nacha is seated in front of a life-sized mural of the "Universal Guadalupe", rendered by Alana's mother Busy McCarroll. This extraordinary mural portrays the Guadalupe standing upon a Green Chile, a veritable Venus on the half shell, only here it is the band shell! I am tempted to dub her "Guadalupe: Madonna of the Chili Line". Nacha sings songs from Argentina, Mexico, Peru, and Cuba. I hear the voices speaking Spanish from the table adjacent, and I feel transported, here in this sultry, watery, environment my week's stresses dissolve and wash away by the sound and surf.

And then my soda arrives. Oogave's watermelon crème soda. It's vegan, its certified organic, gluten free (see www.oogavesodas.com) healthfully sweetened by agave. What's more it's manufactured by a small concern in nearby Colorado. As I sip on my sweet soda, I realized that already over 10 tables had been seated and it is not yet noon. My eyes scan the detailed décor that Alana and bar manager Makenzie Holland inspired and personally hand-crafted. The patio area is adorned with Stylish mason jars filled with candles and suspended from above with wire. Small and tasteful garlands of lights cross overhead providing a "Tavern on the Green" effect in evening hours. Several long wooden custom made tables and benches are interspersed with the

aluminum chairs. In the inside dining area, the walls sport photographs of Embudo station in the railroad days, the river, the trains, and railroad trestles. Two large brilliantly gold colored calla lilies sprout forth from large fish shaped ceramic vases reminding me of the water nearby. I walk back to my table as Macenzie tells me my meal is coming out. I have chosen two appetizer specials: Fried Green tomatoes: small delicately sliced green tomatoes with a fine cornmeal crust, crisp and succulent arranged on a bed of arugula, with finely shaven radish with a cherry mustard vinaigrette dressing served on a beautiful glazed white plate with a deco flair. The presentation was only surpassed by the gastronomical delight! Next came the locally harvested squash blossoms delicately fried, tasty and crisp, made by Embudo Station's chef Rob Dejka. For desert came the all too decadent Fudge Pie. Embudo Station has already developed a well earned reputation for their delicious pies all made by Dixon baker, Russel Owens. With a robust coffee I was able to foist myself from this soothing sanctuary by the river's edge for a step into the ladies room where larger than life Flower pedals a la Georgia O'Keeffe and Frida Kahlo merged. More art from the restaurants Music Director and talented artist Busy McCarroll who has made her mark with promises of more to come.



What's next for Embudo station? Alana says she is soon to open an art gallery just across the dirt driveway in one of the older buildings not twenty feet away. Her fine artistic mind is still in the throws of working out the details, but new garden beds have been planted and the flowers abound. Embudo Station seems to be all about New Life spawning from a deep regard for the history of this region.

If you go:

Located 41 miles north of Santa Fe/25 miles south of Taos on Hwy 68

open 11:00-8:00 Thursday through Monday

Telephone (505) 852-4707

Website: www.embudostation.com