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5 PUBLISHER’S NOTE

7 BAJA EXPRESSIONS
   Your Guide to the Tijuana Art Scene

11 Liquid Blue – Bound for Baja

13 Perspectives on Mariachi
   Dave Nuffer
   Gil Sperry
   Jeff Nevin

19 Alex DePue and Miguel de Hoyos return to Baja

23 WINE WORSHIP
   Less is More – Artisan Winemakers of Valle de Guadalupe
   JC Bravo
   Alximia
   Vinos Gassol

25 BAJA PEOPLE
   Philip and Eileen Gregory: La Villa del Valle
   A New Perspective

27 BAJA FLAVORS
   Restaurants that Matter
   Splash
   Taninos

29 From our Kitchen: Cooking with Susanne

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Dear Reader:

Good wine, art, food, and music are central to the Baja California experience. This is especially true during Fiestas de la Vendimia, or the Grape Harvest Festival, a series of elegant events held at wineries throughout most of August in Ensenada’s burgeoning wine country.

In honor of the grape harvest, this issue of Baja Breeze examines three artisan wineries that are turning heads in Valle de Guadalupe. As you will see, the vintners are as intriguing and delightful as the wines they lovingly nurture. We also present the second in a series on Tijuana’s highly regarded art scene; whatever your preconceptions about this border city south of San Diego, it’s time to put them aside and to embrace this increasingly sophisticated city with a palpable pulse and passion.

As we’ve seen in these pages, Baja California has many faces and facets. In our series Restaurants that Matter, we profile two popular destinations, Taninos and Splash, which are polar opposites – one for urban dwellers and the other for beach dwellers.

A magazine of this scope requires an investment of countless hours from our team of talented journalists, photographers, and designers. How do we keep Baja Breeze free for our readers? With the generous support of our advertisers, each of whom believes passionately in the mission and message of this magazine and in the promise of Baja. Please support them and let them know you saw their ad in Baja Breeze.

Susanna’s Restaurant is located in beautiful Pueblo Plaza, just three blocks north of the Rosarito Beach Hotel. Look for the two wagon wheels and the rock waterfall.

More info:
www.susannasinrosarito.com
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The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) requires U.S. and Canadian travelers to present a passport or other document that denotes identity and citizenship when entering the U.S. It is a result of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA).

WHTI went into effect **June 1, 2009** for land and sea travel into the U.S. WHTI document requirements for air travel went into effect in 2007.

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4. Check with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) about importing any medications prior to crossing into Mexico.
5. CBP has a zero-tolerance policy on illegal drugs. Any type, in any amount may result in serious fines, seizure of vehicle, federal record and/or imprisonment.
6. Switchblade knives, sea turtle boots or any other articles of endangered species (i.e. spotted cats, coral, crocodile, elephant, etc) are prohibited.

**Prohibited/Permissible Agricultural Items**

1. Most fruits are prohibited (No oranges or apples)
2. Do not take U.S. fruits and meats to Mexico-You cannot bring them back.
3. Before you go to Mexico, ask a CBP Officer for a list of items you can bring back.
4. Fines of $50 to $1,000 may result if you fail to declared agricultural items.

Visit the “Get You Home” Web site for comprehensive new information on border crossing document requirements. [www.getyouhome.gov](http://www.getyouhome.gov)
In the last Baja Breeze, Glenn Michel suggested that the real story, the one that doesn’t make headlines north of the border, is the thriving artist community in Tijuana, which has emerged and evolved unbeknownst to much of the world. Indeed, the very soul of Tijuana is defined in large part by its historical and ongoing commitment to the arts. In part two of this two-part series, Michel walks us through the Tijuana institutions, organizations, and players that collectively have created an environment in which art and artists can flourish in this complex and fascinating border city.

CENTRO CULTURAL TIJUANA (CECUT)

In the Mexican tradition, three levels of government – federal, state and city – provide funding for Tijuana’s cultural institutions. The Tijuana Cultural Center is not only the premier force in the Tijuana performing and visual arts community, it’s the city’s crowning contemporary architectural landmark. The IMAX Theater Building that Tijuanans call La Bola (The Ball) is a masterpiece of renowned Mexican architects Pedro Ramirez Vazquez and Manuel Rosen Morrison. El Cubo (The Cube), designed by Tijuana’s Eugenio Velasques of the Artesano architectural firm, harmoniously incorporates space for the visual arts while making its own architectural statement. The Ball was inaugurated in 1982. The Cube opened in 2008. The Center’s main theater is home to the Baja California Orchestra as well as the Spanish American Guitar Center.

Armando Garcia Orso, Sub-director of Exhibitions, is an architect by training and an experienced curator and manager of exhibits. He pointed out how The Cube meets the international standards for security, temperature, humidity and lighting. “Even San Diego museums do not meet these standards,” he said.

The current major exhibit, the 9th biennial Monterrey FEMSA, is an important showing of selected artists from throughout Mexico and Brazil. And yet, Garcia Orso stressed the many projects that are in collaboration with San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco organizations. “We will soon have an Ansel Adams showing from the San Diego Museum of Photographic Art,” he said. Also in the works is an exhibit devoted to the missions of Northern Mexico and California. Another example of cultural exchange with our neighbors to the north was a CECUT exhibit, “Heroes Y Artesanos,” displayed for a year by the Mingei International Museum in San Diego. In turn, a Mingei curated show will appear at CECUT next year.
While CECUT generates some income from projects such as the 300 seat IMAX “Ball” Theater, the majority of funds come through Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (the National Council for Arts and Culture.)

INSTITUTO DE CULTURA DE BAJA CALIFORNIA (ICBC)

Angel Norzagaray directs the Cultural Institute of Baja California. He is the equivalent to a member of a governor’s cabinet in the U.S. He administers financial support for the arts to all of the state’s cities, including Tijuana.

The state’s most current and ambitious project is the creation of an important, new Tijuana cultural center that is almost identical to CEA-TE in Ensenada and the state’s other museum and educational center in Mexicali. Under construction now, it is scheduled to open late this year, according to Norzagaray. This will give northern Baja three such centers. No other state in Mexico has more than one. More important, as part of Mexico’s network of state cultural centers, it will provide Tijuana with more access to mutual exhibits, expertise and resources.

INSTITUTO MUNICIPAL DE ARTE Y CULTURO (IMAC)

Not to be outdone by its national and state counterparts, the city of Tijuana has its own robust support system for arts and culture: The Municipal Institute of Art and Culture.

In 2006, the Municipal Palace in historic downtown was rededicated as the Palace of Culture to host concerts, exhibits, conferences, popular festivals, a film club and a history archive. It also has space for a future Tijuana history museum.

The two campuses of La Casa de la Cultura (House of Culture) feature theater, library and gallery space as well as classrooms and workshops for dance, theater, photography, painting, music and other disciplines for both the young and the old.

LA CASA DEL TUNEL (THE HOUSE OF THE TUNNEL)

The most dramatic – and ironic – international interchange of artistic thought and work is this art center. Originally a private home in Colonia Federal right at the border, renters of the building dug a tunnel to the U.S. and in 2004 were arrested for drug trafficking. The tunnel was closed and the house eventually returned to the innocent yet astonished owner.

Today, Director Luis Ituarte Mendivil, now retired from the cultural affairs department for the city of Los Angeles, is vigorously engaged in a far different kind of international trafficking. The small gallery currently displays three artists – all from the U.S. At the sidewalk, outside the front door, is a marvelous white Ford Mustang body painted white and riddled with holes. It’s by Charles Linder of San Francisco. At Avenue 50, a gallery in Highland Park, Los Angeles, there is a showing of three Mexican artists arranged by Mendivil. He also has an artist in residence program in the start-up phase, providing studio space for artists from around the world. As if he weren’t busy enough, Mendivil also hosted an “Attentado Poetico,” a “Call and Response” poetry gathering. Half of the attendees were on the building’s rooftop garden overlooking the U.S. parking lot in San Ysidro. The other half was in the parking lot.

The El Consejo Fronterizo de Arte y Cultura (COFAC or the Border Council of Arts and Culture) is the parent of La Casa del Tunel. The bulk of its funding comes from U.S. sponsors like the Annenberg Foundation. But this past year, it received a substantial Mexican federal grant through CONACULTA. It was originally founded to channel artistic talent to address border issues, the environment and its local community.

Already Ituarte Mendivil is busy enhancing the neighborhood of Colonia Federal, to make it the first green community in Mexico. He is providing funds for artists to paint neighborhood houses with some appealing results. He also has funds to provide trees and shrubs in pots with built-in micro watering devices for residents who sign contracts to care for them.

“The state’s most current and ambitious project is the creation of an important, new Tijuana cultural center...This will give northern Baja three such centers. No other state in Mexico has more than one.”
Yet another project is a planned series of presentations in the U.S. to encourage American artists to rent inexpensive homes for studios in Colonia Federal. They can park their cars in the U.S., a short walk away.

With enlightened advocates like the Border Council of Arts and Culture and Luis Ituarte Mendivil, Colonia Federal can’t help but have a bright, colorful and artistic future.

All of these powerful forces, with slightly different goals and missions, somehow manage to work closely together and compliment each other. The net effect is a vibrant artistic and intellectual community that now commands international respect. As I researched this article, something dawned on me: It was no mistake when Newsweek named Tijuana one of the top creative cities in the world. That’s one instance where the media got it right about Mexico.

“Half of the attendees were on the building’s rooftop garden overlooking the U.S. parking lot in San Ysidro. The other half was in the parking lot.”

Tijuana Art & Culture Resource Guide

- CECUT (Tijuana Cultural Center)
  9350 Paseo del los Heroes, Zona Urbano Rio
  (664) 687-9600  www.cecut.gob.mx

- MULTIFORO DE ICBC (Multi-forum of Baja California Institute of Culture)
  10151 Ave. Centenario, Zona Urbano Rio
  (664) 684-8609  www.bajacalifornia.gob.mx/icbc

- PALACIO DE LA CULTURA
  Calle 2 & Ave. Constitution, Zona Centro
  (664) 688-1721 ext. 108  www.imac.tijuana.gob.mx

- CASA DE LA CULTURA, TIJUANA
  5 Lisboa, Colonial Altamira
  (664) 687-2604  www.imac.tijuana.gob.mx

- CASA DE LA CULTURA, PLAYAS
  777 C. Del Agua, Sec. Jardines, Playas de Tijuana
  (664) 630-9714  www.imac.tijuana.gob.mx

- LA CASA DEL TUNEL (The House of the Tunnel)
  133 Chapo Marquez, Colonial Federal
  (664) 682-9570  www.lacasadeltunelartcenter.org

- LA CAJA GALERIA
  118-B Callejon de las Moras, Colonia 20 de Noviembre
  (664) 686-6791  www.lacajagaleria.com

- DISTRITO 10 (DISTRICT 10)
  15-E Ave. Hipodromo, Colonia Hipodromo
  (664) 686-1637  www.distrito10ea@hotmail.com

- CASA VALENCIA GALLERIA
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The iconic CECUT Ball with The Cube in the background
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They’ve performed in 47 countries in Europe, including the Balkans. They’ve played throughout Asia -- singing in Mandarin! They’ve played for Israelis and Palestinians. Heck, they’ve even visited the Antarctica.

But now Liquid Blue, credited as the most traveled band in the world (113 countries, six continents), is spreading their dance music and their message of global peace to Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico.

Based in San Diego, Liquid Blue consists of founder and lead vocalist Scott Stephens (formerly a pro Roller Derby skater with the Los Angeles Thunderbirds), guitar wunderkind Michael “The Grovler” Vangerov, drummer Angelo Frisina, and Grammy Award winner Kevin Cooper on bass. The attractive female singers and dancers known as the Blue Girls include: Nikki Nova, recently a top-ten finalist in the Chinese version of American Idol, Gypsy Gina and Diana Ferrer. Layla Loxa, Liquid Blue’s DJ, won the World Bodysurfing Championship in 2002 and competes as a pro surfer when she’s not touring with the band. A past member of Liquid Blue, BC Jean, went on to compose songs for Beyonce and was later signed by the legendary Clive Davis for Sony Records.

Liquid Blue is intent on crossing – and fusing – musical, geographic, and cultural boundaries. They recently performed their unique brand of socially conscious dance music/pop rock at the Baxek Disco, and in August they will play a sold out show at Club Campestre, a Tijuana country club.

“Bringing people together – that’s always been a part of our mission,” says Stephens, who also serves as the band’s manager. “It’s important to expand your horizons, to experience different cultures and languages and philosophies. What we’ve found, at the end of the day, is that people are pretty much the same wherever you go. No matter their differences, they share the same basic values and the same dreams and aspirations.”

In spite of the steady stream of negative media coverage, Liquid Blue refuses to turn its back on Mexico. “It’s important to support our brothers and sisters south of the border,” says Stephens. “Tijuana has been beaten up by the media and frankly it’s been an injustice.” Most people accept the media’s version of reality rather than see firsthand for themselves, he says. Americans are not big on traveling outside of the U.S. “When you travel to other countries, your eyes are opened. The truth is that Tijuana is a hip, vibrant, and cosmopolitan city,” he says. “We always have a blast in Tijuana and meet really nice, interesting people. We’ve had no problems whatsoever.” Several of the band members are “medical tourists,” meaning they cross the border for dental and healthcare services that are of comparable quality but a fraction of the cost in the U.S.

“We love performing south of the border,” says Stephens. By all indications, Baja loves them right back; their Aug. 15 show in Tijuana sold out in a matter of days. “We have our dentists down there. We love the food and the people. I wouldn’t be surprised if one day we get a second home in Baja.”
FROM VEGAS TO CHINA

The seven-member act puts on an impressive feel-good show that exhibits the Blue Girls’ original choreography, dancing prowess and abundant energy. They call it the “Music to Move You” tour and it continues to attract sell-out crowds across the world, regardless of continent or culture. Liquid Blue has played at some of the most legendary venues such as Madison Square Garden and The Cow Palace. They recently performed for nearly 5,000 Las Vegas revelers; the concert was held at The Joint at the Hard Rock Hotel. “Vegas is not normally our ‘cup of tea,’ says band leader Stephens. “But we ended up having a blast.” They’re huge in Asia. In fact, Liquid Blue made history in 2004 when they were the first American act signed to a Chinese record label. Since 2002, the band has made eight trips to China, more than any other recording act from the West, says Stephens. The Chinese government invited the band to perform at the kick-off concert for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. The performance was seen by millions worldwide.

The critics have been unusually kind in their assessments of Liquid Blue. Entertainer Magazine has labeled them, “The hottest, hippest band in America” while Icon Magazine applauds them for turning “social commentary into art.” They have received a number of honors and awards, including “America’s Best Dance Band” and “America’s Best Independent Artist.” Their well received debut CD, Supernova, is, according to Stephens, “an exotic fusion of western rock melodies with ancient and modern eastern elements.” Produced by industry veteran David DeVore and mixed by six-time Grammy winner Joe Chiccarelli, it has been a top-ten seller at CD Baby and was featured on their best-sellers compilation. The single “Real” was the #1 Indie label song in the U.S. in 2005 with over 400 spins per week.

WALK THE TALK

At its core, Liquid Blue remains a socially conscious, activist band that wants to change the world through music, “one song at a time.” Cynical minds might wonder if their brand of “peace, love, and understanding” is merely a marketing gimmick; after all, the multi-cultural band members look like they’re right out of a Bet-netton commercial. Whatever suspicions you might harbor are quickly put to rest when you meet the band. Stephens is earnest, open, and articulate on a wide range of topics. There is not an ounce of insincerity or pretension among the band members. And they do more than simply preach a politically correct message – they walk the talk. Consider this: Last year the band was alone in being “certified green” by the County of San Diego. When I arranged my interview with Mr. Stephens, I suggested we meet at Starbucks. He politely declined, preferring to meet at an independent coffee house. Consumer activist Ralph Nader used the Liquid Blue song, “If You Gotta Ask,” as his theme song in his 2004 presidential bid. (They are big Nader supporters.)

Stephens and his band members are unabashedly sincere about their belief in the healing power of music and its ability to bring people together. In 2007 they stayed with a Palestinian family on the West Bank for a week. They met ordinary people representing both sides of the conflict. They even held a peace symposium and concert in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, and did free peace concerts in Israel and the West Bank. Currently the whole band is reading Howard Zinn’s, A People’s History of the United States. “The fun part is when we get together to discuss it,” he says. “We make an effort to read books and to learn history. Education naturally leads to activism, whereas ignorance or indifference leads to apathy.”

The band just completed a new song called “Earth Passport,” which is getting some radio play. A tribute to the United Nations, the song is sung in all six official United Nation languages. The band will perform the song for the general assembly during the 2010 Millennium Development Goals Awards ceremony.
His name is Oscar Amezcua, but it could just as easily be Oscar Mariachi, for he is peerless as a symbol of the pathos and joy of the music unique to Mexico. He was born in Jalisco, played the violin and with his voice and matchless falsetto performed for years with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, the best mariachi band in the world.

Oscar and his wife, Gloria (her father created the margarita at the La Gloria bar south of Tijuana), are later-in-life friends, who became so because their phone number was the only reliable one year in and year out that I could call to retain a mariachi band for special occasions.

Another Mexican friend, David Saldana, from earlier times, made the words and the songs come alive for me in my late 20s. He was called “El Fotografo de Estrellas,” photographer of the stars, and he took me by the hand and mind and led me down the path of mariachi. He introduced me personally to some of the great cancioneros: Miguel Aceves Mejia, Juan “El Tariacuri” Mendoza, Pedro Vargas, Saldana’s compadre, and Jose Alfredo Jimenez.

My happiest and saddest times are when I am listening to mariachis with friends. Nothing is more uplifting than the songs and rhythms of ranchera songs. Mexico offers more though. There’s harp-led Veracruzan or jarocho music from Vera Cruz, German influenced sinaloense music with trombones, saxophones and tubas from Sinaloa, Mexico City sophisticated, southern marimba, Nortena, the country-western music from the northern states.

But it’s the violins, guitars, trumpets, the guitarron and vihuela that penetrate my soul and psyche. And, as in the beginnings of mariachi in the 1800s, all you really need are three of those instruments, the violin, guitarron or bass and vihuela, the rhythm master. Plus those incredible Mexican voices.

So, how do you bring this magical troupe of musical stars around your table for a memorable song or a concert?

First, always remember the Mexican dicho: “Quien paga la musica tiene derecho a pedir las canciones,” or “who buys the music has the right to call the songs.” This means you own the band until you end your commitment…and no one has the right to interrupt with any other song request.

Some advice…always ask before they start how much they charge for each song. This tends to keep the price within range, which is usually somewhere between $4 and $5 for three to five member mariachi groups to $7 to $10 for larger groups of 6 to 10 musicians.

Although I know the names of at least 50 mariachi songs, I carry a list in my wallet that I can call upon if necessary.

The first song I learned the words to is Jalisco which glorifies the state of Jalisco and the music that emanated from that state. There are no rhymes in mariachi songs. Here’s an example of a quatrain from “Jalisco”:

Oh Jalisco, Jalisco, Jalisco
Your men are real men
And are reliable
Brave, and rough and supporting
Don’t accept rivals in matters of love.

Or the tunes of sadness and distress, such as “Paloma Negra,” my favorite, which ends with this plea:

My black dove you are the bars of my prison I want to be free
To live my life with whom I want
God give me strength for I am dying to find her.

“Ella” is another favorite of love’s despair:

I feel that my life is falling into an abyss
Deep and black, look at my fate
You want to find oblivion Jalisco style
But these mariachis and that tequila have me crying.
When you have quenched your desire ... or run out of money ... the perfect ending to a concert is the Mexican song of farewell, the end of a career, an evening or a life. It is Las Golondrinas. It’s closing words, adios, adios, adios, and we all know what that means.

So Viva Mexico! Viva Mariachi! And viva my number one mariachi and friend, Oscar Amezcua.

Born and raised in El Centro, Dave Nuffer’s 50-year love affair with mariachi music was cultivated at Hussong’s Bar & Cantina in Ensenada. Nuffer is one of San Diego’s best known business and community leaders. He founded Nuffer, Smith, Tucker Public Relations, San Diego’s oldest PR firm, in the early ’70s and has served as chairman of San Diego’s most important business organizations, including the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce and the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau, among others.

Fast forward to 2003. My son Matthew was a famous soccer player. After all, she reasoned, I had an M.A. from Stanford in history and I had been a life-long musician. That night, back in our hotel room, my wife suggested that I write a book. After all, she reasoned, I had an M.A. from Stanford in history and I had been a life-long musician. All I lacked was the fluency in Spanish which would enable me to translate the lyrics into English for the countless “gringos” who couldn’t understand them, either. I avoided making the positive commitment she was after.

Fast forward to 2003. My son Matthew was a famous genre-hopping musician who had played with Gloria Estefan, Anthony Braxton, David Byrne, and Tom Waits, amongst others. He was in love with World Music. He had just returned from a trip to Jalisco where he had recorded two CDs with world-class huapangueros. He called and asked that we come up to his Oakland, CA home to hear the music that he felt was “the bridge between the cultures.” We spent a wonderful evening with him and, at its conclusion he told me that I should write a book. He used the same litany of reasons that my wife had, 28 years before, but this time he called my attention to one significant point: we had been living in Baja since 1998 and my Spanish had improved to the point that I could definitely translate the lyrics into meaningful English. Before the night was over, I promised him that I would write the book, although I was reluctant and felt very little urgency to get started.

Three weeks later, the urgency was ratcheted up a great deal. I returned to our home in Baja after a day of teaching at Harborside Elementary in Chula Vista and was met by my wife who was crying hysterically. I joined her as soon as I heard the news, through her sobs, that Matthew had been killed, by a truck that ran a red light, while riding his bicycle the short two-mile commute to his ‘day job’ at Leap Frog in Berkeley. He was working there to help create software to help pre-school children better appreciate music; the fact that he was survived by his wife and a two-year old daughter made the circumstances of his passing all the more poignant. At his funeral, many of the famous musicians who attended asked me the same question. Matthew had told them of the book that he had suggested I write and they all wanted to know if I had started yet. My promise to my son would have been kept without their queries; however, finding out that he had thought enough of my project to tell his colleagues from around the globe about it was definitely additional encouragement.

Today, as I travel throughout North America presenting “Mariachi 101” at schools, colleges, public libraries, book stores, and onboard cruise ships, the book dedicated to Matthew (“Mariachi For Gringos”) is about to go into its third edition and a second volume (“More Mariachi For Gringos”) is just months away from its initial printing. I can’t help being moved by Marcia Manna of The San Diego Union-Tribune, who recently referred to me as “...the Johnny Appleseed of mariachi.” There is no doubt that I am obsessed with my adopted-country’s amazing music.
Sometimes in life, moments occur that change everything. Mine came one spring in Tucson, Arizona, when I was invited to join my first mariachi. At the time, even having grown up in Tucson, I didn’t know what to expect: it was 1984, just before the explosion of mariachi programs in public schools, and the only youth mariachi in Tucson was the curiously named Los Changuitos Feos (“The Ugly Little Monkeys”). Lucky for me I didn’t speak much Spanish at the time.

I am often asked what it was that attracted me to mariachi in the first place, what caused me to devote most of my life to this music. The truth is, in the beginning it was more about the camaraderie amongst the musicians than the music itself; very shortly after joining the group I said to myself, “These are my best friends.” But as we began to improve as musicians and refine our playing as an ensemble, I was drawn deeper and deeper into the mariachi world. I also joined my first symphony orchestra that year, and I continue to perform mariachi and classical music professionally to this day; however, I can honestly say that I felt most comfortable performing in the mariachi: this is where I grew most as a musician and as a person.
A year later we attended one of the first mariachi conferences in Tucson, where the great Lola Beltran sang, as well as Linda Ronttad (before “Canciones de mi padre”), and I heard Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán perform live for the first time. I was absolutely blown away by the performances of Mariachi Vargas: the excitement of the music, amazing sounds, phenomenal playing and singing—this is what I wanted to do.

And incredibly, the members of Mariachi Vargas were our instructors at the conference! So—at 15 years old—I met and befriended the greatest mariachi musicians in the world. I remember this moment well: Federico Torrez, principal trumpet for Mariachi Vargas, said to me at the conference, “You are playing all of the notes better than any of the other students here.” (It didn’t hurt that I already knew how to read music.) The compliment came with a caveat: “But you are not playing the music.” Mr. Torrez took some time to show me how to play the music, how to apply the proper style to the notes, because to a mariachi, style is as important if not more important than the notes themselves. Soon enough I was able to adapt to this style of playing. Federico Torrez remains with Mariachi Vargas to this day—we have become lifelong friends.

Fast forward 25 years: I am a professor of music directing the world’s first college degree program in mariachi at Southwestern College in Chula Vista, California; I earned my Ph.D. in Music while playing mariachi on the side, researching and writing about mariachi for my degree; I compose and arrange music for mariachi and symphony orchestra; and I specialize in performing professional mariachi + orchestra concerts across the US and Mexico.

And I find myself continually trying to repay my debt to mariachi through the work I do as a musician and teacher. As a professional musician, I like to think I might bring mariachi the attention and appreciation of new audiences by performing in the most elegant settings possible. As a professor, I strive to pass along the same passion and enthusiasm for this music that Federico Torrez and others so generously showed me, and along the way give my students performance opportunities that could change their lives.

My students from Southwestern College, Mariachi Garibaldi, have performed in Guadalajara each of the past seven years, including performances alongside Mariachi Vargas! Over the past few years, we have also performed in Russia and France, and this fall we will play in Beijing and Shanghai. Not to mention recent performances as soloists with the Classics for Kids Orchestra in San Diego with thousands in attendance, or performing on stage in Copley Symphony Hall and the Center for the Arts in Escondido—some of the most important performing venues in the region.

And you can see it reflected in the students’ eyes: the passion and excitement they feel, the admiration and respect they receive—the life-changing moments, as they occur.

Jeff Nevin, Ph.D., is founder and director of Mariachi Champaña Nevin, Chair of Performing Arts and Director of Mariachi Activities at Southwestern College in Chula Vista; Artistic Director of the Mariachi Scholarship Foundation; author of “Mariachi Mastery” and “Virtuoso Mariachi”; Director of Youth Music Programs for Sinfonía Mexicana; and has written music for Mariachi Sol de México and Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán.
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If you’ve never been treated to a performance by this incredible duo, now is your chance. “The Fiddler,” Alex DePue, who has a background in classical violin, fiddling and guitar virtuoso and Miguel De Hoyos, master of South American, Spanish and 16th century Baroque arrangements, are returning to Baja norte with live performances scheduled throughout August.

Alex DePue began taking classical violin lessons at age five and won his first major competition at 10. He has an impressive string of international tours and accomplishments to his credit, from performing with progressive guitarist Steve Vai to his Carnegie Hall debut at age 14 with the National Guild Youth Symphony Orchestra under Joseph Silverstein.

Miguel De Hoyos performed his first solo concert when he was 16. He studied guitar with Maestro Severo Barrera, has performed for Nobel Laureate for Literature Octavio Paz, Diana Laura de Colosio as well as ambassadors, governors and mayors. He comes from a family of musicians, but he was the first in his family to make it a lifelong profession and career. “Music is my life, has always been and will always be,” he told Baja Breeze. “I practiced guitar as a child for six hours a day and I loved every second of it. I played my first professional concert for an audience of 1200 music lovers when I was 16 and have never looked back.”

The DePue/De Hoyos show runs from unique, technically flawless covers of classic rock (“Dust in the Wind” and “Stairway to Heaven”) to familiar jazz standards and improvisation to the great classical composers. The two just completed their second record, “Twisted Strings.”

Alex and Miguel continued to receive critical acclaim on both sides of the border. George Varga, music critic for the San Diego Union-Tribune, wrote: “What results is a heady mix of virtuosity and sophistication that is even more impressive live.” And from music journalist Todd Clouser: “Miguel De Hoyos is an overwhelming guitarist to watch. His humble and gracious demeanor runs at odds with his epic playing, largely influenced by Flamenco stylings. His timing is perfect and his chord voicings are dense.”

Their bond as friends and performers makes the performance all the more enjoyable. Alex tells Baja Breeze: “Our shows are very interactive and we definitely feed off the audience. On the other hand, if we had no audience, Miguel and I would be quite happy sitting on the same stage jamming with each other and for each other.”

By CLAUDIA FUENTES

The DePue/De Hoyos show runs from unique, technically flawless covers of classic rock (“Dust in the Wind” and “Stairway to Heaven”) to familiar jazz standards and improvisation to the great classical composers. The two just completed their second record, “Twisted Strings.”

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Reservations & information call USA. 1 800 343 8582
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More Info:
Ensenaña's Valle de Guadalupe, or Guadalupe Valley, is just a hop, skip, and a jump from San Diego. This burgeoning wine region features more than 200 wineries and winemakers which, together, produce 90 percent of the country's wine.

A growing number are so-called artisan or boutique vintners, typically family owned enterprises focused on low-yield, sustainably-farmed vineyards. Many a wine aficionado insists that small production wineries create some of the most complex and concentrated wines available.

The artisan wine movement has recently gained momentum in the Valley, supported by an infrastructure that is now in place to guide hobbyists, gentlemen farmers, as well as more ambitious winemakers. It includes La Escuelita, wine guru Hugo D’ Acosta’s school that provides aspiring vintners with hands-on instruction, mentoring, and support. Courses are also offered through the local universities. And finally, those wishing to turn their wine passion into a business attend the Guateque wine expo.

In these pages we profile three artisan winemakers: A school teacher born in the Valley whose Carignan has unleashed something of a cult following; a scientist-artist who gets his grapes from Valle de Guadalupe but produces his wines in Tijuana; and an expert in applied mathematics committed to producing complex, eco-friendly wines.
Bravo, Bravo, Bravo!

by LILLIAN MERIDA

Juan Carlos Bravo, the vintner behind JC Bravo, is one of the Valley's true locals.

“I was born and raised here in the Valle de Guadalupe, in Ejido el Porvenir, for wish I feel very proud,” he says. Growing up in the largely unspoiled Valley, a 20-minute drive from the Ensenada coast, gave him the opportunity to feel connected to the land and the natural elements.

He was encouraged by his parents to pursue his education and become a teacher. He taught for years and kept his mind sharp, but his heart always remained in the Valley. He started by selling grapes to other wineries. Ten years ago he decided to give winemaking a try himself. Mentored by the highly regarded Hugo D’Acosta and good friend Antonia Badan, Mr. Bravo learned the ropes and has become one of the rising stars in the artisan movement in Valle de Guadalupe. Soon he will retire from teaching and devote full time to his winery.

His first release was in 2001. Production is small by design. “We started with 20 liters and now we’re producing 8,500 liters,” he says.

Mr. Bravo has established a reputation for an impressive Carignan. In most of the world, including the south of France, Carignan is typically a blending grape. But that’s kids play. Mr. Bravo goes the extra mile, making a pure, 100% Carignan that attracts droves of wine lovers from both sides of the border. This artisan red wine is also served at famous resorts like the Rosarito Beach Hotel and high end properties like the Ritz Carlton in Cancun.

His Carignan has grown to 750 cases a year, and Bravo says he won’t do more than 1,200. He also makes a small amount of Palomino, a white wine with shades of sherry. And, like many in the Valley, he’s now branching out into olive oil production.

Bravo is a traditionalist, decidedly old school in the best sense of the word. “Preserving our traditions and history is very important,” he says. “We have kept our winery the same way as it was planted 38 years ago.” As such, his winery has no irrigation system.

“The vines are watered naturally by rainfall and with the moisture that drifts in to the Valley with the coastal breeze,” he says. If that’s not enough, a well on the property supplies water.

Given our high-tech world where efficiency and science reign supreme, Bravo’s back-to-basics approach is refreshing. He points out with a smile that science has its limitations. “Sometimes we just pray to the god Tlaloc to send us water.”
Q&A

With

Alvaro Alvarez Parrilla,
Alximia Winery

BB: Tell us your story. What is your background?

AA: Professionally I am a mathematician doing research in pure and applied math at the University of Baja California (UABC). And yet I have always been interested in good food, good beer and good wine: when I was a grad student in Santa Cruz, I learned how to make homebrewed beer; when I returned to Baja California after my graduate studies in 1999, I continued to make beer for me and my friends.

BB: How did your interest in wine develop?

AA: Ensenada has a great wine tradition and I became interested in the wines that were being made here in Ensenada, in particular the Guadalupe Valley wine region. In 2001 I bought a small parcel of land (roughly 7 acres) near San Antonio de las Minas (in the south part of Guadalupe Valley) with the intent of planting some grapevines and as a weekend getaway for the family. In 2003 I attended the Guateque del Vino Artesanal (the local artisan–wine festival). In 2004 we planted the rootstock and in 2005 I took a wine–making summer course at “La Escuelita” (Estación de Oficios del Porvenir).

BB: At that point, you were confident to proceed with your first project?

AA: Yes, that year I made my first wines: three barrels with grapes bought directly from the local producers in the Valley. The Alximia wines were born. And our wines had immediate acceptance within the community -- and with this motivation I started exploring the different varietals being produced in the region.

BB: And over time you evolved quite a bit.

AA: In 2006 I produced again 3 barrels under the Alximia label: a Barbera, a Cabernet and a Merlot–Cabernet blend. The next year, Zinfandel was a great hit and I discovered the beautiful intricacies of the Petit Verdot. In 2008 I realized that the Petit Verdot variety, which is usually present in a very small percentage in the Bordeaux Blend, expressed itself beautifully in the Guadalupe Valley region. In honor of this I made the Alximia Propuesta 8 blend (Petit Verdot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Tempranillo and Zinfandel). It is one of our two wines that are currently in the stores. In it you will find expressions of fresh raspberry, lavender, violet, and just the right hint of tannins, making it an easy to drink and quite versatile wine.

BB: What was the defining point – where you took what amounted to a hobby to the next level?

AA: I’d say that defining moment was in 2008. That’s when I continued my enological education by attending the Graduate Program in Enology at the University of Baja California (UABC). That same year we developed the plans for the Alximia Winery.

BB: The Alximia name is intriguing. What is its significance?

AA: The name Alximia is directly related to Alchemy, but not just in the usual aspect of transmuting lead into gold, or something mundane into something divine, but also in that we want it to reflect a spiritual enhancement of the human nature. Our logo reflects the fact that with very simple elements one can form complex, rich and beautiful structures. Our slogan translates to “Alximia, elemental, authentic, mystic wine: bajacalifornian.” Hence our pursuit of eco–friendly practices in the vineyard, our use of gravity instead of pumps to transport the wine from the different stages of the process, the use of solar energy for electricity, wind–driven passive cooling and humidifying systems, and super–adobe walls for temperature control. We are a company that not only wants to make a premium quality product, but we intend to do it with the least impact to the environment.

BB: What are your plans for the future?

AA: We started the construction of our winery in June 2009 and plan on opening it for the 2011 harvest. Our vineyard is planned in three stages: currently it has Cabernet Sauvignon, Tempranillo, Syrah and Barbera grapes; in the second stage we plan on having Petit Verdot, Zinfandel and probably Viognier, while for the third stage we will explore the white varietals.

Getting There

In Ensenada take Highway 3 north toward Tecate (this is the new four-lane “wine route”). Once you pass San Antonio de las Minas (the first town on this road), drive for 9 kilometers and then make a u-turn. Turn right onto a dirt road (note the winery signs). Follow this dirt road for 3 km and Alximia Winery will be on the left side.

www.alximia.com
Raising children requires patience, love, and plenty of nurturing. The same can be said of wine. In fact, the inspiration for the artisan winery Vinos Gassol, a husband-wife venture, is their three children; it’s no surprise, then, that they named their wines “Las Niñas.”

“All our wines are called Niñas,” explains Alberto Gassol, “because they are like our kids. At least that is the way we like to feel about them and of course the way we treat them.”

In 2005, Alberto and his wife Julia, a highly regarded attorney, were looking for opportunities to spend more time together and to give their marriage a bit of a tune-up. Their solution? They enrolled in La Escuelita, the popular winemaking school in Valle del Guadalupe, Ensenada’s burgeoning wine country, run by the respected Hugo D’Acosta.

“We had been regular visitors to Valle de Guadalupe for many years and loved everything about the region and its wine culture,” he says.

And they attended El Guateque, the wine symposium that has inspired and supported artisan winemakers throughout Valle de Guadalupe. In 2006 after a labor of love, they had something tangible and real to show for their efforts. “We produced our first white wine, a Chenin Blanc. Thus began our love and appreciation for white wines.”

Vinos Gassol currently produces three young wines: La Niña l’Blanc, a Sauvignon Blanc; La Niña au Rouge, a red Zinfandel fermented in carbonic maceration; and La Dolce Niña, a red Zinfandel dessert wine.

“We try to explore new niches by producing different wines. We started making white wine because it was a challenge,” Alberto says. “Nobody at our artisan level was making whites, so we set out to make one that was as good as any other out there. And I like to think that we achieved our goal.”

Most students who attend the wine school work on their craft at the Valle de Guadalupe site, just east of Ensenada. But this Tijuana based couple took a different approach, bringing their operation to Tijuana.

“This gave us more control over the product and the direct experience of doing everything by ourselves,” he says. That is the way they have been operating for the past five years: buying the grapes from growers in the Valley and bringing them to Tijuana where they produce their wines.

BLENDING ART & SCIENCE

Good winemaking involves a blending of opposing principles: technology vs. tradition, stainless steel vs. oak barrels, chemical analyses vs. tasting and spitting. Old School versus New School. Objective versus subjective.

Alberto Gassol is himself an example of the left-brain, right-brain dichotomy that is evident in many successful winemakers. He was educated as a scientist but trained as an artist. (His mother is a highly regarded painter in Spain).

“We approach winemaking as an art form. Even our wine labels can be considered artistic creations in their own right,” he says. The Niña l’Blanc label is inspired by Alice in Wonderland from a lovely drawing by British artist Arthur Rackham; the other two Niña labels were created by Tijuana artist Enrique Ciapara.

And though his background may be in science, Alberto speaks very much like the artist that he is.

“Making wine is a transformative, profoundly moving experience,” he says. “I enjoy the contact and connection with the earth and its elements. There’s magic in transforming the grapes into this succulent elixir that inspires the soul.”
Have you had Baja California, cosmetic surgery, LASIK, or other healthcare services? If you had a great experience that you would like to share with our readers,

please email us at info@bajadocs.com
Philip and Eileen Gregory fled the harried and hurried world of Hollywood for slow and sleepy Guadalupe Valley. For this music producer husband and filmmaker wife, a serene hilltop in wine country, with panoramic views of the valley, proved the perfect place to start anew.

They call it La Villa del Valle. And it’s not only a retreat, luxury inn, and restaurant for discerning travelers; it’s also the Gregory’s home and sanctuary. In fact, it has been for the past four years, during which they cared for and cultivated the land, which is set on 70 acres of pristine countryside. Philip and Eileen lovingly planted more than 3,000 lavender bushes, fruit and olive trees, a vineyard, an organic vegetable garden, and numerous species of flora. There is celebration of life in the harvesting of their land; they produce artisan wine and fresh ingredients for their restaurant, as well as olive oil, botanical fragrances, and even candles.
Getting There

Turn right at the Tecate 3/Ruta del Vino sign. Follow the road through the small town of San Antonio de Las Minas. Just after kilometer marker 88 you’ll see signs for Ej. Porvenir, Delegacion and Rancho Sicomoro. Turn left onto the dirt road here and follow the signs for La Villa del Valle for approximately three miles off the main road.

More Information:
Mexico phone
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U.S. phone
(818) 207-7130
www.lavilladelvalle.com

The Gregorys followed their bliss, a journey that has taken them from England to Hollywood to Guadalupe Valley. But do not let them fool you. They are decidedly not in retirement mode. In fact, there is not much time for sitting around, an irony that is not lost on them.

“It’s true, we probably work harder now than ever before,” says Philip over a glass of wine, as the golden sunlight kisses the valley. “Keeping up with it all is more than a full-time job.”

Looming like a Tuscan villa, the Gregorys’ retreat is perched atop a pristine plateau in Valle de Guadalupe. In the foreground, the yoga/exercise room receives the morning light.

A New Perspective

By Adam Behar

Come to our special place
Perched on a grassy hill
Miles from the rat race
Where time stands still

No things-to-do lists
Nothing to tally
Except a glass of red in Guadalupe Valley

The air is something special here
Inhale it and feel alive
Let it move you, change you
Rearrange How you see the world

Escape the city
Savor the light
The flowering fields
The wide open sky

Prepare to travel
Be our guest
Let time unravel
Forget the rest
Nicolas Santos, 35, is tall and articulate, the business guy glued to his laptop. His brother, Agapo Santos, 38 and the oldest of eight children, has a kind, disarming smile. Agapo crafts the menu and directs the kitchen.

Splash, their oceanfront restaurant and bar just south of Puerto Nuevo, is generating serious word of mouth, especially among American expatriates in Rosarito Beach. In all regards – location, food, and atmosphere – the brothers appear to have hit a home run.

“In a short period of time things have really begun to happen,” says Nicolas. “A year ago we had no idea we would enjoy this kind of success.” Agapo adds, “It was beyond our wildest imaginations.” Nicolas credits local real estate maven Diane Gibb for serving the role of both mentor and mother.

We go outside where a few locals share a cold beer. We peer at the sea; you’re so close, you can almost reach out and touch it, sort of like the Marine Room in La Jolla but without the stuffiness. You smell the sea, taste it, can’t help but feel invigorated by it.

I ask the brothers what they attribute their success to. Nicolas, a former real estate agent, smiles. “Location, location, location.”

Splash feels like the last refuge in the world, a place where locals convene at the edge of the earth, where the desert meets the sea. Some customers spend the whole day at Splash; there’s not a more inviting place to pass the time. When you have a location like this, you don’t need much of anything else. If the food were mediocre, Splash would still attract a crowd. Fortunately the culinary offerings are as spectacular as the view. Enjoy them together.
The food is prepared for American taste buds. “I have worked north of the border with many chefs and I know what Americans like,” he says. “The clam chowder is to die for,” says Debra C. Wilson-Wirth who runs www.PuertoNuevo.com. The shrimp burritos or fish tacos, along with a frosty cerveza (there’s a full bar), make for a nice lunch, but the menu is much more extensive. Splash’s rib eye and t-bone steaks are popular, as are the fried oysters and linguini. The clams, cooked with cheese, garlic, and bacon, are something to behold. Their most unique items, Agapo tells me, are the black sea bass and lobster bisque, both of which they’ve perfected over the years. “You’re not going to find them prepared this way anywhere else except at Splash,” says Agapo.

Not everything at Splash is unique. You can find American standards like chicken fried steak. Agapo tells of an American customer who was baffled and equally pleased to find a French dip sandwich in Mexico. Not just any French dip, mind you, but one made from Angus prime rib, he points out.

In June, the brothers completed a new addition to Splash with more seating and a beautiful maple bar. There’s not a bad seat in the house.

Agapo tells me he’s needed in the kitchen and we say our goodbyes. Now that his brother is gone, Nicolas pulls me aside. “You know what the real difference is at Splash? It’s the passion,” he says. “Agapo’s satisfaction comes from a smile on the customer’s face and an empty plate that he takes back to the kitchen.” Said like a true brother.

For a taste of Tijuana’s high society, we dined at Taninos Wine Bar & Bistro in zona Rio. Taninos is the latest creation of Tana Plascencia, a member of Tijuana’s storied family of restaurateurs.

With over 40 years in the restaurant business, Tana’s family are pioneers in Tijuana’s modern culinary movement, which is turning heads and garnering respect from foodies on both sides of the border. Grupo Giuseppis, as the family enterprise is known, reopened Caesars this summer and also operates the popular Romesco Baja Med Bistro north of the border in Bonita. They are also responsible for such well regarded offerings as Casa Plascencia, Saverios, and Giuseppis. Tana’s father organized the first restaurant association in Tijuana back in the 1960s.

Taninos is where Tijuana’s well heeled locals gather for conversation and camaraderie. On any given day at Taninos, you’re likely to find maquiladora managers, film makers, lawyers, writers, politicians, real estate developers, and professors.

The restaurant features a modern design by Lily Alvarez; wine barrels and bottles hang artfully from the ceiling. Tana tells me there are four new wine bars opening throughout the city. It’s a sign of a resurgent Tijuana. However, he emphasizes that Taninos is more than a wine bar.

“A lot of people think we’re just a wine bar, but they don’t know we’re a restaurant,” he says. “We’re much more than tapas and appetizers.” Customer favorites include grilled octopus, salmon, prime rib, and shrimp with mango sauce. “We have new tapas for happy hour and they’re half-price on Tuesdays,” he says. “Every other month we change the menu. We’re constantly experimenting with the menu, tweaking it, keeping it fresh and original.”
Summer and its warm weather inspire even the non fruit eaters to reach for some of this season’s freshest fruits like peaches, strawberries, cherries and watermelon.

As an eating trend, when it is cold outside we want to eat hot and in the warm summer months, we want to eat cold. Gazpacho, a cold tomato based soup featuring an array of colorful raw vegetables, is mainly consumed during summer months because of its refreshing qualities. Through the years, many variations of this traditional cold Spanish soup have evolved, so today Gazpacho is a pretty loose term that you associate with “cold” and not much else.

Last year, we introduced our Summer Fruit Gazpacho that uses no tomatoes but rather the juices of watermelon, strawberry, mango and cranberry. We add chunks of those same fruits along with sweet peppers, red onion, cilantro and avocado for a fiber rich, powerful antioxidant that is as delicious as it is nutritious. To make it “POP,” and to ensure the gazpacho doesn’t get too sweet, we add a touch of chipotle juice. We pair it with a light Sauvignon Blanc, such as Vina Kristel, from our local Guadalupe Valley and it is fabulous.

Inevitably I ask the charming Tana to classify his culinary approach. Is Taninos yet another example of Baja-Med Cuisine, which blends Mediterranean and Mexican flavors? No, he says decidedly. “I encourage the chefs to experiment with new creations and I gather my friends and family and we try things,” he explains. “We’re not Italian or Spanish or Mediterranean. We’re still trying to find out what we are. Maybe we’ll never classify it. We are what we are.”

However you classify Taninos, one thing is clear: They are doing all the right things. The wine list alone includes over 50 labels of wine, all from Valle de Guadalupe, as is their cheese. Tana is impressed with the quality of wine that is coming out of Baja’s wine region in nearby Ensenada, and he likes to support the boutique and larger wineries alike.

It’s a charmed life he leads. “I try to enjoy life as much as I can,” says Tana. “I often close the restaurant late, goes out with friends and family, sleep in and then do my shopping for the restaurants.” Recently he’s been spending more time in Valle de Guadalupe. “I go there three times a week and visit the wine owners,” he says. “I’ve fallen in love with it.”

Nor is Tana ready to slow down. He’s excited about Caesars on Revolution Avenue, the restaurant that Grupo Giuseppis refurbished and reopened this summer at the Caesar Hotel. This is where the Caesar Salad was invented in the 1920s by another restaurateur, Italian-born Caesar Cardini.

“Caesars will be a catalyst for the revitalization and transformation of Revolution Avenue, Tijuana’s most famous tourist area,” he says. “The street will have sushi bars, wine bars, tequila bars, and gourmet restaurants. It’s changing already and soon enough you will not recognize it.”

Tana also has plans to open a “bed and breakfast” in Valle de Guadalupe.

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**Cooking with Susanne**

**Summer Fruit Gazpacho**

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**Fruit Consomme**

- 2 Cups fresh Strawberries
- ¼ Cup Watermelon
- ¼ Cup Mango Juice
- 1 Cup Cranberry Juice
- 1 Tsp Chipotle Juice
- 1 tsp Salt

Combine in blender to make liquid and refrigerate

**Per serving use:**

- 3 OZ Fruit Consomme
- 2 Strawberries, halved
- 2 Tbsp Avocado, cubed
- ¼ Watermelon, cubed
- 1 Sweet Pepper, Julienne cut
- 3 Red or Black Grapes, halved
- 1 Tbsp Cilantro, chopped
- 1 Tbsp Red Onion, Chopped
- Squeeze Juice of 1 Mexican Lime

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**Gettting There**

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