

WHERE LEGENDS ARE MADE

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CONTINUES TO FIND
HIS VOICE WITH
A NEW ALBUM,
NEW MOVIE AND
EFFORTS TO
PROMOTE SOCIAL
CHANGE.

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John Legend
on the rooftop
of The London
West Hollywood,
looking out
over the
Hollywood Hills.



MEX

ANT EGGS IN BOOM TIMES

Delicacies both culinary and commercial are helping to define an updated Mexico City. **BY DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL**

GREEN AS GRASS and white as wax, the disk of ant eggs and avocado stared up at me from its halo of green and black ash, and I stared back at it. So these were *escamoles*. Everyone will tell you that escamoles are the caviar of Mexico, a delicacy for centuries in this part of the world, prized by the Aztecs and white hot in Mexico City's currently very chic restaurant boom.

All of the top restaurants in Mexico City, such as Pujol and Quintonil, have escamoles on the menu—they're a point of pride,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The dining room at Quintonil; Quintonil's take on escamoles; A chef at Pujol; Pujol's green mole.

FERNANDO CARBAJAL (ESCAMOLES); ARACELI PAZ (PUJOL)

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like Périgord truffles in France or beluga caviar in Moscow. But knowing that escamoles are very prized and getting ready for that first forkful of ant eggs to go inside of your mouth are different things.

I took a sip of my smoky chili-ringed cocktail and glanced around the elegant, reserved dining room at Quintonil with the sweet family at a neighboring table passing around a baby decked out in a christening dress with more white ruffles than a sunflower has petals. This was not a scary place. It couldn't create a scary taste, right? Right.

I found my courage and was rewarded with something amazing: a stairstep symphony of related textures and flavors that differed and interacted with one another all along the same sensual axis. The silky avocado, the resilient but popping bubbles of tiny eggs, the crisp sheets of charred greens—all were simultaneously telling a story about texture and also building a harmony of different earthy flavors. No wonder food hunters from around the globe are making their way to Mexico City—this dish by chef Jorge Vallejo wasn't just delicious, it was uniquely eye-opening.

A lot about Mexico City is eye-opening today. It's experiencing an economic boom that's plowing money into life's finer elements—

not just restaurants but also fine arts (do visit Museo Soumaya, the winking steel corset that's a modern art star). And not just food and art but design. I stayed at the boutique Las Alcobas hotel, which offers guests seemingly miles of perfectly creamy pale marble, great views and the friendliest staff.

And what would a boom be without great shopping? The Palacio de Hierro Polanco has to be one of our hemisphere's modern marvels shopping-wise, a nearly 600,000-square-foot temple of good taste that includes a sort of Eataly of Mexico called La Terraza, a Tiffany & Co., a three-level Carolina Herrera with a glass elevator, a Cartier and a beauty department with secret treatment rooms.

What's it like to be a Mexico City beauty maven getting beauty treatments in a secret room? For one thing, it's cheaper than it would be north of the border. As I write this, the peso is 20 to the dollar, meaning that if you're the sort who would like the absolutely newest Fendi bag and Gucci loafers at a seriously steep discount, you'd be silly not to take advantage of the local boom times. I even recommend putting a few of those pesos toward escamoles—that's how you'll always remember you were somewhere absolutely unique, connected to the Aztecs and Cartier. ▾

EDITORS' PICK

The Brando

Those truly looking to get away from it all should pack a bag and head to **The Brando** on the far-flung atoll of Tetiaroa in French Polynesia. Named after actor Marlon Brando, who owned the island for decades, the high-end resort offers a new frontier in ecoluxury. Rooms are cooled by air-conditioning that draws its chill from the ocean depths, restaurant ingredients are harvested from an on-site orchard and vegetable garden and naturalists offer guests bird, reef and island tours. The experience doesn't come cheaply, but the all-inclusive option covers everything from a spacious beachfront villa with a private plunge pool, a daily spa treatment and all meals, including most drinks. thebrando.com

