PHOTOS BY CAMILA COSSIO

"This is arguably the best taco shop I've ever seen"

ALLEN CHAN

El Califa

Location
Mexico City, Mexico
Firm
Esrawe Studio, Mexico City, Mexico
Team:
Héctor Esrawe with Javier García-Rivera, Aloisio Guerrero, Daniela Pulido, María Santibáñez, Alessandro Sperdutti and Federico Stefanovich

El Califa is a known commodity, with close to a dozen locations across Mexico City. The beloved taquería chain's latest outpost, on busy Avenida de los Insurgentes, takes its cues from the central food item on the menu – the tortilla – and heralds a new era for the business.

Local firm Esrawe Studio used iterations of the flat, naked staple as a harmonizing graphic. First it covered the walls with taco-size ceramic circles, each tile creased one way or another to show the infinite ways people fold and hold their corn rounds – proof that no two tacos are ever the same. Overhead, reflective blue ceramics create an enveloping ambiance almost like being submerged in a pool of water, while indigo-hued terrazzo on the floor is embellished with extra-large circular rings in gold.

Esrawe has upgraded the humble taquería with some sleek moves, but the redesign has also stayed true to the origins of the oldest Hispanic street dish. Menu prices, for instance, aren't through the roof, and bare light bulbs hang from the ceiling, vendor style. Completing this inviting space are custom wooden tables and chairs – butterfly-shaped seats and backrests allow diners to lean back and take in the atmosphere as chefs serve up dishes from the open kitchen – and glazed walls that seamlessly connect the space to the street. ●