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CHRONICLE

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*by Jordan Smith
p.28*

A Refreshing Development

Thank you, Mexico, for family-run fruterías and juguerías

BY CLAUDIA ALARCÓN

Long before the juice and smoothie revolution took hold of the health-conscious collective mind of America, Mexicans had been enjoying fresh-fruit juices, smoothies, *aguas frescas*, and fruit cups from street carts and mom-and-pop neighborhood establishments for generations. In Mexico, produce is relatively cheap, so a big glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice for about \$1 from just outside the subway station has been an affordable alternative to breakfast for years.

For me, nothing invigorates the body and soul better than a Vampiro, a mixture of fresh pressed carrot, celery, and beet juice with a big squeeze of lime. Ahhhhh. A stand I usually visit in Mexico City sells “medicinal” blends, such as pineapple, guava, parsley, and lime to boost your vitamin C intake, or alfalfa, cucumber, and pineapple as a diuretic. Mexicans have been adding spirulina (consumed since Aztec times), aloe vera, and bee pollen to their smoothies way before GMC or Whole Foods were household names. Just ask the folks at Mr. Natural.

On weekends, Mexican families in parks all over the country can snack on cups full of fresh cantaloupe, pine-

apple, cucumber, jícama, papaya, and watermelon spears, as well as mangos on a stick, expertly sliced to resemble huge bright yellow flowers. These treats, with a proper dose of fresh-squeezed lime and a dash of crushed dried chile, are usually sold by entrepreneurs pushing little wooden carts. While some of these treats are now consumed with extreme care due to the lack of adequately clean water to wash the produce, they are nevertheless popular, affordable, and healthy, especially if purchased from a reputable vendor.

In Austin, Mexican immigrants’ *fruterías y juguerías* – fruit and juice shops – have been popping up with more frequency. At the family-run enterprises, prices are slightly higher than in Mexico, but they’re definitely cheaper than those at trendy chains. Although most places offer similar items, some offer unique products or house specialties. Here is a sample of some of the best things that Austin’s *fruterías* have to offer. They’re likely to hit the spot and cool you off when you need that ice-cold fruity fix.



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ing variety of fruit is very fresh and available in cups from small (8oz.) to extra-large (32oz.) at reasonable prices that vary depending on the fruit. One can get a single fruit cup (\$1.50 for an 8oz. cup chock-full of fresh pineapple) or mix-and-match cocktail combinations (\$2.50 for 16 heaping ounces of mango, cucumber, cantaloupe, and pineapple), with optional powdered chile, and lime juice. They also serve traditional strawberries and cream, fruit and yogurt plates, fresh *aguas frescas* (fresh fruit blended with water) and *licuados* (smoothies made with milk) made to order, and freshly pressed fruit and veggie juices. My favorite is the *rusa* (\$3.50), a refreshing drink made with fresh pineapple, orange, fresh limes, ice, and a dash of chile powder, topped with lemon-lime or grapefruit soda. It may sound way strange to American palates, but believe me when I say there’s nothing better for the morning after than an ice-cold *rusa*. The best part: They open at 9am every day, and they’re two blocks from my house.

JUGOS Y FRUTAS LA MORENA

6542 S. Congress, 916-1222

Tucked away at the corner of the shopping center on the corner of South Congress and William Cannon, La Morena is a recent newcomer that deserves attention. The amaz-

F&F FRUIT CUPS

7110-D Cameron, 452-1940

Creamy smoothies, a large selection of *aguas frescas*, and fruit cups in all sizes are available at this tiny, locally owned spot at the corner of St. John and Cameron. Among their fruit cocktail selections, the



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Energético (\$5) is a healthy mixture of various fresh fruits topped with yogurt, granola, flaxseed, and honey. Of course, you can always make your own combination of fresh fruits topped with cream, yogurt, or lime and chile. They also have malts and fresh-pressed juices of your choice. A 16oz. blend of beet, carrot, celery, and cucumber set me back \$3.50 and kept me fueled the whole day. F&F also has corn on the cob and prepared corn cups, plus a homemade frozen treat called a *mangonada* (\$1) made with fresh mango, lime juice, and chile. Their *rusas* (\$3.50) are probably the best in the city of Austin. F&F also provides large containers of prepped fruit in various sizes for all occasions.



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FRUTAS LOCAS

2410 E. Riverside, 912-1055
9616 N. Lamar, 832-0112

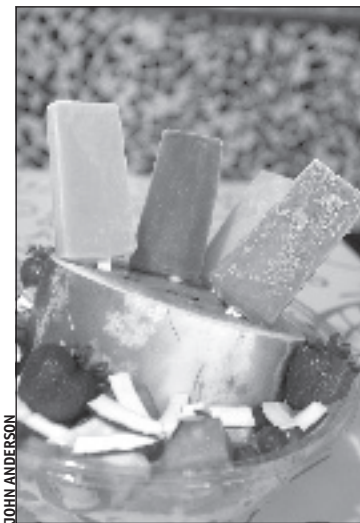
Frutas Locas is a local chain that offers a slightly smaller, less descriptive menu than the other *fruterías*. The good news is that the staff speaks English well and their products are very fresh and tasty. Their small mixed-fruit cup (\$2.99) is available plain or with lime juice and chile, and packs at least 10 kinds of fresh fruit chunks including strawberries, grapes, coconut, jícama, cucumber, pear, and apple. Their signature beverage is the Hurricane (\$4.99), a refreshing blend of freshly squeezed orange juice with mixed fresh fruits. Their made-to-order *aguas frescas* (\$1.89) are only available in pineapple, cantaloupe, and watermelon, but there is also a wide

range of fruit smoothies, slushies, shakes, and malts, as well as commercial ice cream in common flavors. For those craving salty snacks, Frutas Locas also has nachos, popcorn, Frito pie, and corn cups.

LA PALETERA

515 S. Congress, 326-9399
5341-A Cameron, 374-0555
1100 Center Ridge #360, 670-2616

This franchise began in Corpus Christi as a fresh fruit and Popsicle stand that now has branches all over the state and beyond. While their specialty is still their frozen fruit *paletas*, they also carry a wide selection of fruit cups and fruit trays, from the simple to the amazingly elaborate. Their fruit cups and specials feature colorful names. Escamocha is a blend of tropical fruits topped with yogurt, granola, and honey. The Bionico (\$4.59) is similar, but it is topped with a sweetened fresh cream instead. Snow fruit (\$2.29 12oz.) is a mixture of chopped fruits atop snow-cone ice, flavored with either lime and chile or the snow-cone syrup of your choice. Among their drinks you can find *aguas frescas*, *licuados*, and fruity freezes, which are fresh-fruit slushies. La Paleta also carries corn cups, shrimp cocktails, hot dogs, tortas, and other snacks, although they vary at each independent location.



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BOOMERANG'S

3110 Guadalupe #150, 380-0032

Monday-Saturday, 11am-9pm
www.boomerangspies.com

Aussies plead ignorance when they claim they don’t know who made the first Down Under meat pie some 150 years ago. We think it must have been a British sailor skilled in the art of Cornish pasties, meat pies that originated in Cornwall during the 1200s. Originally meant for the upper classes, it became the ideal portable lunch for miners and seamen. Regardless, the meat pie is now an inherent part of Australian culture; they eat 275 million of them a year, and everyone has their favorite vendor.

Jack Fennell, with his wife Emilie, was transferred to Australia while working for Dell. The first meal he had when he got off of the plane was an Aussie meat pie, and before they left, an idea was hatched to present the pie to the old hometown. They couldn’t get any bakers there to share the secrets, so, armed with research, they found consultants here to perfect the reci-

pes. They tested the product by giving them away free at events, if the consumer would only rate the quality of their pies. Now they are open, bringing a bit of authentic Aussie tucker to Austin.

Situated in the former Half Price Books location on Guadalupe, Boomerang’s is sleek, with brushed-metal accents and boomerang icons everywhere. You place your order at the counter, and it comes out of the heated holding case immediately. The pies in question are oval, about 4-inches long, 3-inches wide, and 2-inches deep, enveloped in golden flaky pastry. Amazingly, they can be eaten out of hand, with little chance of a contents-blowout.

The fillings run the gamut from the Traditional (\$4.75, minced beef and onions in seasoned gravy with Worcestershire; rich and delicious, and one of our faves) to the Chicken and Mushroom (\$4.50, chunks of juicy chicken, and loaded with mushrooms and onion). There are 11 different variations of chicken and beef, pizza, and vegetarian, all between \$4.25 and \$4.75 apiece.

The Steak and Mushroom (\$4.75) is crammed full with strips of tender steak, mushrooms, and onion in a thyme-kissed sauce. The Mediterranean Veggie (\$4.50) is a *mélange* of sautéed

vegetables and tofu with basil and balsamic vinaigrette in a wheat crust. It’s the only one that needed a bit more seasoning. The Southwest Adobe Chicken (\$4.50) is excellent: filled with a mix of chicken, peppers, corn, black beans, and pico de gallo; spicy; and the individual ingredients remain distinct in taste. The Supreme Pizza (\$4.75) has pepperoni and Italian sausage, mushrooms, garlic, peppers, olives, and mozzarella.

For sides, there are kettle chips (thick, nongreasy, homemade potato chips), homemade soups and salads, tortilla chips and queso or salsa. We had a superlative draft Maine Root root beer (\$1.25), and they offer a full range of coffee drinks, beer, and wine. You can even get the pies frozen, to-go, for reheating later: \$4 each, or four for \$15.

All said and done, Boomerang’s is a welcome addition to Austin’s growing pantheon of international culinary delights. Jack and Emilie got it right. When winter rolls around again, there’s one dish we want to see on the menu: the Pie Floater, a specialty of our sister city Adelaide: a luscious meat pie afloat in a pool of pea soup. Yummmmmmm.

– Mick Vann