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Because there's no surfeit of ambitious Mexican restaurants in New York or hip dining destinations in the theater district, Toloache is a welcome newcomer. It aims to fill both of those gaps. The festive décor of its dashing two-story space conveys a sense of fun. So do the bright cocktails, some of which draw from a list of about 100 tequilas, and the vivid dishes from the kitchen of Julian Medina, who cooked at Maya.

Toloache (pronounced toe-lo-AH-chay), named for a Mexican plant used in love potions, establishes its upscale, idiosyncratic bona fides with its soft taco fillings: not just chicken (\$8) and pork (\$9) but also veal cheeks, veal sweetbreads, foie gras (\$14) and, gulp, grasshoppers. The veal cheeks (\$9) were my favorite, more tender than the disappointing sweetbreads (\$9).

The rest of the overwrought menu—which has three kinds of guacamole, a trendy array of ceviches (\$13 on average), a dutiful lineup of conventional Mexican dishes, and a pro-forma selection of entrees like braised short ribs (\$26)—follows that pattern: a winner, a loser, no way to guess which will arrive.

I got a sense that the menu's length, the restaurant's scale and too much gimmickry were working against consistent cooking. But then I took another sip of my margarita, bit into a brisket taco seasoned with a horseradish cream as well as tomatillo, and thought: there are much worse ways to pass time in this neighborhood.