

RESTAURANT UPDATE

BRISA COCINA MEXICANA
5161 San Felipe at Sage Houston 77056 713.993.9899

The minute you see the warm, just-made pair of salsas set before you by the smiling server, you know you are in for a special, personal experience with fresh, hand-made Mexican food. And you truly are. The tortillas are soft and light and velvety, the charro beans are delicately spiced but still make a bold statement on your palate, and the lettuce, guacamole, and pico de gallo all seem to have been sliced five minutes before they were lovingly handed to you. The menu is basic and not too elaborate, but each item is carefully prepared. For Aperitivo, try Chilli con queso, creamy white cheese with poblano rajás; or Guacamole, fresh avocados, diced onions, tomatoes, and roasted jalapeños. Sopas y Ensaladas include Crema de jaiba, with a touch of guajillo sauce; and Cesar salad, baby hearts of romaine with creamy dressing, topped with fresh shaved Cotija cheese and tortilla strips, served on a cheese basket. For your main plate you will be tempted to choose from Enchiladas callejeras, two enchiladas with queso fresco and white onions wrapped in corn tortillas with guajillo chile sauce, topped with cubed potatoes; Tacos de pescado, two fried fish tacos with spicy cole slaw and hand made corn tortilla; Mexico City tacos, two beef or chicken tacos with lettuce, cilantro, fresh onions, and pico de gallo in corn tortillas, served with rice and charro beans; Huachinango a la plancha, whole red snapper pan-seared with roasted garlic butter sauce and roasted peppers, served with cilantro rice; Parrillada Brisa or Parrillada Cancun, mesquite grilled beef, chicken or shrimp, scallops, and red snapper filet in different combinations; Fajitas, beef, chicken, or jalapeno sausage served with rice, charro beans, sour cream, pico de gallo, and your choice of hand made tortillas; Sea Bass al tequila, topped with sweet and spicy tamarind sauce, and served with creamy crab-avocado risotto and fresh vegetables of the day with a touch of poblano butter sauce. Save room for dessert! Kahlua tres leches, Flan, or Cheesecake.

CIAO BELLO
5161 San Felipe at Sage Houston 77056 713.960.0333

No, the same address is not a mistake. These two fine restaurants occupy the same retail development, anchored by a large Randall's Market. Ciao Bello is the latest creation of the legendary Vallone family, best known for Tony's, but also for the original La Griglia and the original Grotto. Jeff Vallone is the major domo at Ciao Bello, and it is off to a roaring start. Hankamer first experienced the original Tony's as a guest of the young Astros third baseman Bob Aspromonte in the mid '60s, when it was located in an old wooden house – also on Sage – just south of Westheimer, where Galleria III now stands! Ciao Bello features the same upscale ambiance as La Griglia, and has already become one of “the” places for a Galleria area power lunch. Primi – first courses – include Oysters barone, Italian style fried oysters with garlic wine sauce; San Daniele prosciutto, melon and fall pear; Mussels Aiello, with herbs, white wine, tomato, and garlic; and Scampi Livornese, olive oil, butter, garlic, and white wine. Selections from Minestre & Insalate may be Escarola, escarole, chicken meatballs, tubetti, and cannelloni beans; Roast pepper salad; and Fennel and artichoke, shaved Parmesan, blood orange, extra virgin olive oil. From the Pasta & Risotto Section: Osso buco ravioli, with porcini and marjoram; Gnocchi Sorrentino, mozzarella, tomatoes, basil; Linguine allo scoglio (shellfish); and Risotto del giorno. Main courses feature Soft shell crab Adriatico, lemon, garlic, mild anchovy; Redfish Pontchartrain, Modo Mio, crabmeat, shrimp, meuniere; and Paillard of tuna, grilled raw, cucumber, dill, blood orange. Signature veal dishes are Scaloppine of veal Francese, artichokes, mushrooms; Veal chop Milanese al porcini, pounded, breaded, sautéed, porcini reduction. A tasty selection of Italian side orders is available, as are delicious desserts including Cannoli Siciliana; Tiramisu; Torta di limone; and Mezzanotte, decadent chocolate cake. A wide selection of wines is of course at your waiter's fingertips.

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Note: By way of qualifications for reviewing restaurants, Hankamer has owned and operated numerous restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, discotheques and banquet halls over the last forty years; he has travelled to over 70 countries and has studied and lived in Europe for over three years; he was co-owner of a home delivery wine of the month club and imported his own wine labels for years. Copyright 2009 Ray Hankamer, Hankamer Commercial/Hankamer & Associates.