

Crema

Taking Mexican cooking in the kind of nuanced directions that too few restaurants in New York do, Julieta Ballesteros, formerly of Mexicana Mama, lays chicken on a purée of squash blossoms, puts portobello mushroom atop it and crowns it all with goat cheese. Imaginative flourishes or intricate architecture define many of her dishes, but the kitchen's execution does not always live up to the recipes. The cheerful, orange-tinged setting and fine margaritas are definite compensation, and Ms. Ballesteros is a chef to watch. 111 West 17th Street, Manhattan; (212) 691-4477. Dinner entrees, \$17 to \$26. ★

What the stars mean: (None) Poor to satisfactory; ★ Good; ★★ Very good; ★★★ Excellent; ★★★★★ Extraordinary.