



Crema

111 W 17th St between Sixth and Seventh Aves (212-691-4477).

Subway: A, C, E to 14th St; L to Eighth Ave.

Tue, Wed, Sun noon–11pm; Thu–Sat noon–2am.

Average main course: \$22.

This is not the first time that West 17th Street has seen a veteran chef from a respected Mexican restaurant launch her own upscale joint. Sue Torres, formerly of Rocking Horse Café, did it with Sueños a few years back. Now Julieta Ballesteros, of Mexicana Mama, is giving it a whirl inside the space that was previously Snackbar and Sandia. Like Sueños, Crema is a small, colorful eatery (with orange walls) that reworks Mexican cuisine using gourmet ingredients and French technique. What this means is that you get prettier, pricier and tastier food than what you'd find at most burrito beaneries. Ballesteros veers from other Mexican restaurants by keeping the menu mercifully short; there are perhaps a half dozen appetizers and a half dozen entrees. No endless variations of the classics—in fact, you won't see the words burrito or enchilada anywhere on the menu. Instead, you get dishes like tostados en call de hacha (pictured), two minicorn tortillas topped with perfectly cooked scallops, fresh avocado, mango salsa and a nicely spicy chipotle aioli. Ballesteros is keen on mixing sweet and savory: The Chilean sea bass is served on a plantain purée with a pineapple escabeche and the rib-eye steak comes with mole sauce made of pumpkin seeds, nuts, raisins, red chilies and other spices. They are both terrific—assuming you like an abundance of tastes and textures. Sweet cocktails, some made with rum or beer instead of tequila, make for great additions (or alternatives) to dessert.—TONY