



LET'S GET TAKEOUT

With late night tacos, Luchador fights for success on State

By Victoria Davis, Special to the Cap Times Oct 4, 2020

1 of 3



A Mexican wrestling mask greets visitors to Luchador Tequila & Taco Bar, open since August at 558 State St.

VICTORIA DAVIS



The first thing people see as they walk by the front window of the new Luchador Tequila & Taco Bar at 558 State St. is a 4-foot-tall, black and white lucha libre wrestling mask.

Inside, there are paintings of Bucky Badger in a lucha libre suit and cape, a Bucky with a mustache wearing a sombrero, and a Star Wars stormtrooper decked out for Day of the Dead, all lit up in neon.

These Mexican wrestling-meets-Madison illustrations — along with a playlist pumping out everything from Elton John’s “Tiny Dancer” to War and Santana’s “Low Rider” — set the theme of State Street’s newest taco bar.

Lucha libre is a popular style of pro Mexican wrestling, known for its over-the-top drama and colorful costumes; a luchador is a wrestler. Restaurant owner Brano Kruger described the look as “traditional meets modern pop culture.”



Inside Luchador Tequila & Taco Bar there are paintings of Bucky Badger in a lucha libre cape and a Star Wars stormtrooper decked out for Day of the Dead, all lit up in neon.

VICTORIA DAVIS

“Madison has the luxury of having a couple of Mexican restaurants and each one does things a little bit differently,” Kruger said. “You have Los Gemelos which is more of a mom and pop shop. You have BelAir (Cantina), that’s more of a Cali Mex.

“We wanted to try and incorporate more of the fun bar atmosphere into a Mexican restaurant with worldly inspired tacos,” Kruger said. “We want to try and have a little fun and also find a way to bring more people into the Mexican food and taco realm.”

[The Corner Table podcast: At the grill with Heavy Kevy]

Pot roast barbacoa, Caribbean carnitas

Kruger, who was raised in Chicago, said he has family in Mexico and “grew up on Mexican food.” He has service industry roots, too — his grandparents own a bar outside Milwaukee. Kruger was the general manager of Red Rock Saloon in Madison before buying the Madhatter and turning it into Danny’s Pub in 2017.



Luchador's patio is open for seating in the 500 block of State Street. Diners can get one of many margarita variations, including with mezcal, high-end tequila and frozen in lime, strawberry, huckleberry and mango flavors, among others.

VICTORIA DAVIS

“Bars and restaurants, they’re like a second home to me,” Kruger said. “I’ve done every job in the restaurant and bar business, starting with bouncing, bartending, serving and working my way up.”

Kruger had planned to open a taco and tequila bar on State since September 2019, but Luchador didn’t open its doors until this past August. Dane County and downtown Madison are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and related health restrictions, which allow 25% of capacity, about 25 diners, inside the restaurant at a time.

The timing of the restaurant’s opening limited its originally planned menu, but Luchador still offers over 20 types of tacos for dine-in and to order for take-out. These range from traditional chorizo and carnitas to fusion styles, called “Bad Ass Tacos.” Among them are Huevos a la

Mexicana (\$3.50) with scrambled egg and pico de gallo, Hawaiian Pork (\$4.50) with a Hawaiian glaze, and pot roast barbacoa tacos (\$4.50) with potatoes and shredded cheese.

[Crawfish and fried rice find delicious fusion at Ragin Cajun]

One of the specialty tacos, Buffalo chicken (\$4), is made with the homemade Buffalo sauce from Danny's Pub, an Irish-themed bar and grill just two blocks away on West Gorham. Kruger is also the co-owner there.



From left, kitchen manager Ariel Reyes, restaurant manager Charlie Todd and owner Brano Kruger run Luchador Tequila & Taco Bar at 558 State St. Kruger is also the owner of Danny's Pub on West Gorham Avenue.

VICTORIA DAVIS

The variety is “what makes us stand out,” said Luchador’s kitchen manager Ariel Reyes, who hails from Pueblo, Mexico. “Customers have so many taco varieties to choose from on the menu. We don’t just have chicken tacos or pork tacos, there’s Hawaiian or Caribbean pork tacos or Buffalo chicken. It starts traditional, but there are lots of other ways to prepare these tacos.”

Luchador serves margaritas on its patio, starting at \$7 for a house margarita (\$18/32 oz. mini-pitcher, \$35/ 60 oz. full pitcher). There are frozen rainbow margaritas, a blend of lime, strawberry and huckleberry, and variations with mezcal, high-end tequila and watermelon jalapeño. Luchador makes palomas and micheladas as well.

Luchador also offers appetizers, like fried mini chorizo tacos (\$7) and garlic shrimp skewers (\$9) as well as, of course, “Bad Ass Elotes” (\$8): corn on the cob lathered in mayo or butter, cotija cheese, and confettied with Flamin' Hot Cheetos dust.

[Bingeworthy: Get some healthier scares on Netflix and elsewhere this October]

“Flamin' Hot Cheetos are one of those pop culture items that everyone loves,” Kruger said. “Ariel and our other chefs came up with a way to really make a beautiful dish that incorporated that. It looks visually stunning and tastes delicious.”



Bad Ass Elotes at Luchador Tequila & Taco Bar are corn on the cob with mayo or butter, cotija and Flamin' Hot Cheetos dust.

VICTORIA DAVIS

Fight for late night

Charlie Todd, Luchador's restaurant manager, said that even though opening during the COVID-19 pandemic posed certain restrictions, it helped solidify the restaurant as a late night go-to for students looking for tacos past midnight. The restaurant is open from 11 a.m. until "bar time" (2 a.m.). Delivery orders are open until 1 a.m. As both Kruger and Todd put it, "If we're open, so is our full menu."

“Putting a food-first concept here on State Street fills a need that isn’t here, especially now with so many places closing early,” Todd said. “Brano’s and my initial concern was that more people would just want to come here and drink, but it’s been refreshing to see how many people do come and come back for our food. There’s a silver lining to be found in everything.”



The variety of tacos is “what makes us stand out,” said Luchador Tequila & Taco Bar’s kitchen manager Ariel Reyes.

VICTORIA DAVIS

Luchador offers pick-up for take out orders and works with EatStreet for deliveries. The restaurant hopes to expand to more delivery services to reach more areas in Madison. Luchador is also working on seasonal specials, like spiked horchata and Mexican hot chocolate, as well as more vegan and vegetarian menu options.

“We were definitely not allowed to open up with the full scope of what we wanted,” Kruger said. “That being said, it let us really dial in and do things properly with what we did have.

“We’re still adding new dishes every day and taking it one day at a time, making sure that we’re doing things responsibly. But I think being something new affords us a little bit more luxury that people want to try us. It’s a fun concept and we’ve got a strong team here. We’re pushing through everything and making sure we fight to stay open.”

Share your opinion on this topic by sending a letter to the editor to tctvoice@madison.com. Include your full name, hometown and phone number. Your name and town will be published. The phone number is for verification purposes only. Please keep your letter to 250 words or less.

Luchador Tequila & Taco Bar

558 State St.

(608) 416-5283

luchadormadison.com

HOURS

Monday-Sunday 11 a.m. - 2 a.m. (delivery until 1 a.m.)

Tags [Budget Eats](#) [Madison Food](#) [Dining Out](#) [Let's Eat](#)

Sign up for Cap Times newsletters:

Email Address:

Newsletters:

- Morning Update: daily news update**
- Week in Review: weekly recap of top headlines**
- Madison Life: weekly arts and lifestyle update**
- Opinion Roundup: op-eds and columns sent three times a week**
- Campaign Notes: weekly politics update to help navigate this election cycle**

SIGN UP

Stay up-to-date on what's happening

Receive the latest in local entertainment news in your inbox weekly!

Sign up!

* I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and [privacy policy](#).

Related to this story

Crawfish and fried rice find delicious fusion at Ragin Cajun

Updated Sep 28, 2020



Cap Times Idea Fest: The pandemic has turned restaurants upside down. Here's the good news.

Sep 28, 2020



Startup Clock'd plays Cupid for restaurants and staff

Sep 29, 2020



CT Kitchen: Chicken loves rice, fall cake needs apples

53 min ago



More from the Capital Times



With Madison fighting for equality, why are Latino issues being missed?



Madison City Council pursuing investigation into expletive uttered during meeting



State Debate: State GOP gets tongue lashing from bloggers; Lena Taylor remembers Fannie Lou Hamer

Subscribe to our newsletters

* indicates required

Email Address *

First Name

Last Name

Newsletters



Morning Update: top headlines from the Cap Times, delivered every weekday

morning

Opinion Roundup: op-eds, columns and letters to the editor. Sent Monday, Wednesday, and Friday

Madison Life: a weekly email to help you navigate the Madison social scene

Week in Review: a weekly recap of top headlines

[View previous campaigns.](#)

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

[Our Story](#)

[Become a Cap Times member](#)

[Cap Times Events](#)

[Evjue Foundation](#)

[Send a Letter to the Editor](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Sites & Partners

[Madison.com](#)

[Wisconsin State Journal](#)

[Cap Times](#)

[WiscNews](#)

[Capital Newspapers](#)

[AmplifiedWisconsin](#)

[ApplyMadison](#)

[Wingra Printing Group](#)

Services

[Sign up for Cap Times email newsletters](#)

[Get Cap Times by mail](#)

[How to advertise with Cap Times](#)

[Place a classified ad](#)

[Submit a Celebration](#)

[Cap Times weekly e-edition](#)

