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Daily Dish

The inside scoop on food in Los Angeles

5 Questions for Roberto Berrelleza

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Chef Roberto Berrelleza is chef-owner of Babita in San Gabriel. Once a manager maitre'd for the Hollywood Brown Derby, Berrelleza had been cooking up basic Mexican food -- tacos, burritos, menudo and posole -- for some time until he answered an internal culinary calling to feed

Angelenos cuisine found in eateries around Mexico City. Leaving former staples behind, he added dishes such as chiles en nogada, mixiote (lamb shank) and chile relleno Oaxaqueno to the menu. On a day off away from the kitchen, you might find him in the Santa Ynez wine country.

What's coming up next on your menu? Zucchini blossoms -- big, bright yellow -- blanched, shocked and made into a sauce with a white wine reduction, capers, onion, tomato and spicy *chiltepin* [pepper]. It's finished with a Spanish roux and goes over Mexican bass with a bed of *huitlacoche en salsa*.

Latest ingredient obsession? Prickly pear and *gúamuchil* [fruit]. I reduce juice from 20 pears down to one cup for a prickly pear crème brulee. As for the *gúamuchil*, I make it into a sauce that I use for venison or for filet mignon of pork, stuffed with *nogada* fruit, Wellington style.

What restaurant do you find yourself going to again and again? I love the shrimp crab omelette at Alcove Cafe on Hillhurst, and I keep going back, again and again, and still order the same thing. It's good and I can't resist.

The one piece of kitchen equipment you can't live without, other than your knives? If you promise not to laugh, I will tell you -- my ring molds. I use them in salads, guacamole, desserts, ceviche....

What's your favorite breakfast? A toss-up between *huevos rancheros*, done the right way, and steak *picado*, with two eggs over easy on top.

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