



Babita: 99 Essential Restaurants 2011

By [Jonathan Gold](#) Thursday, Nov 10 2011
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In a neighborhood better known for its Vietnamese noodle shops, across street from a Serbian Orthodox church, Babita isn't quite where you would expect a great Mexican restaurant to be, and you could drive by a hundred times without noticing it was there. It is neither a taco shop nor a cheap margarita mill: The prices reflect the cost of the ingredients, and this address has been a destination for commuting Westsiders since it housed a well-known Yucatecan restaurant a decade or two ago. But chef-owner Roberto Berrelleza, who worked as a maître d' at places like the Brown Derby long before he ever picked up a pan, is a devotee of modern Mexican cuisine, especially the coastal cooking of his Sinaloan hometown, Los Mochis, and many of the seemingly classic dishes have been invented by Berrelleza himself: his salmon-stuffed *gueritos* chiles in strawberry salsa, his sautéed salmon with huitlacoche and *quesillo*, and his tequila-sautéed shrimp with a creamy chayote gratin. The oozy, porky version of chiles *en nogada*, a sweet, festive chile relleno lightened with dried fruit and toasted pecans, is probably the best in a chile-mad town — if you're anywhere near the restaurant in the September-January period in which it is served, you really should drop in. *1823 S. San Gabriel Blvd., San Gabriel. (626) 288-7265. Lunch, Tues.-Fri., 11:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.; dinner, Sun., Tues.-Thurs., 5:30-9 p.m.; Fri.-Sat. 5:30-10 p.m. Beer and wine. Street parking. All major CC. Mexican.*